This page was exported from - King Weekly Sentinel
Export date: Sat Oct 31 2:16:10 2026 / +0000 GMT

Students open their hearts during mission trip

By Mark Pavilons

The looks on their faces says it all.

Residents of a remote area of the Dominican Republic, as well as migrant workers, praised God for the donations they received.

While God may have something to do with it, the messengers were a dedicated group of Peel high school students.

Several students from St. Michael Catholic Secondary?School in Bolton participated in the annual mission trip to El Seibo, Dominican Republic. The group assisted native Dominicans as well as the Haitian community there, staying at a missionary centre run by the Daughters of Mary (les Filles de Marie). Also joining them were students and staff from Father Michael Goetz secondary school in Mississauga.

They rolled up their sleeves, filled and handed out President's Choice reusable grocery bags stuffed with donations to make the lives of others a bit easier. The bags were used to hold roughly one week's worth of food, such as rice, flour and cornmeal.

Once again this year, John's No Frills of Nobleton donated 300 bags to the cause. For John Ciarallo, all you have to do is ask.

?My donation reflects my desire to support the kids and provide them with this life experience opportunity and a genuine wish to give back and support a good cause,? said Ciarallo.

Bolton's Lexie Hesketh-Pavilons stressed the importance of those reusable grocery bags.?Before No Frills came to their aid, they used plastic bags which broke easily.

?The PC?bags have been a lifesaver,??she said, adding the families are able to reuse them. ?To them it may be a necessity or a wonderful gift of hope and help.?

The mission team members collected items and filled two suitcases each with donations. All of this, including their own personal luggage, was left behind for the betterment of their hosts. Those suitcases become valuable pieces for families to use for storage, cupboards, etc.

The team's efforts were concentrated on helping the Haitian community the area near Consuelo, the majority of who are sugar cane workers living in bateys. A batey is a company town consisting of makeshift barracks, located close to cane fields so that groups of workers can live near the site of their labor. Conditions are often what we consider deplorable.

The situation on the island nation of Hispaniola is unique. It's a case of the poor (Dominicans)?oppressing an even poorer neighbour (Haitians). While the Dominican Republic enjoys certain economic and tourism income, Haiti remains impoverished (rated as the poorest country in the Americas). Conditions there were exacerbated by the massive 7.0 magnitude earthquake in 2010 that left more than 300,000 dead and 1.6 million homeless. The country has yet to recover from this disaster.

Many Haitians have moved to the Dominican in search of a better life, yet it's all within a developing nation, and there are limitations on Haitian immigration.

Though long known for sugar production, the DR's economy is now dominated by services. Unemployment, government corruption, and interruptions in electricity remain major Dominican problems. The country also has noticeable income inequality. International migration affects the Dominican Republic as it receives and sends large flows of migrants. Haitian immigration and the integration of Dominicans of Haitian descent are major issues.

The students visited several bateys during their week-long stay to meet the poorest of the poor.

For Hesketh-Pavilons, meeting a certain person was the highlight of her trip. In 2014, she gave an elderly Haitian man a crucifix to wear around his neck. When she returned this year, she found him, still wearing that very same pendant, albeit tarnished. He had never taken it off. ?God will save me,??he told her.

?All I could think of was how such a small gift became so symbolic and made a huge difference in his life,??she said.

This was her third year in a row on this mission trip and each one is special in its own way.

Hesketh-Pavilons has realized she may not be able solve world hunger or poverty, ?but my efforts didn't go unnoticed or unappreciated.?

She handed a young Dominican girl one of her own bracelets and the girl returned the next day, presenting Lexie with a craft she made at home.

From handing out donations to desperate families to making seniors laugh in nursing home, the mission was filled with priceless moments.

It was also a journey of self-discovery for the local teenagers.

Hesketh-Pavilons will be making her fourth trip in 2016 because ?nothing else brings me more peace and joy.

?I learn something new every time. All of the experiences help define me.?