

Betsy Christiansen's Update
March 19, 2008
Trinidad - A Student's Perspective

Hello supporting friends and family,

If you have time, please take a few minutes to read the attached summary of our Dec/Jan Student Team to serve with the McGees in Trinidad.

Andrew is a 4th-year PharmD student at UGA and lives in Albany, GA. He modestly failed to say that he led our morning and evening worship each day, sharing his gift of voice and guitar with us, with our missionary friends and our Trinidadian siblings-in-Christ. Our times of private and corporate devotions and worship are foundational to the safety and ministry of any team, and we were all grateful for his servant leadership.

A humorous note: because we have so much to carry in our checked bags for mobile-clinic set-up, Andrew took the strings off his guitar and packed meds within the instrument! Then re-strung the guitar when he arrived! Bless him with me - he is a young man with a heart after God and a huge testimony already to the Lord's grace and mercy!

Andrew has given me permission to pass this on ...his "only hope" in writing it is that "it spoke of Christ and salvation through Him."

Easter blessings...

Gratefully in His grip,
Betsy

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Mission to the World (MTW)
go...connect...engage

March 1, 2008

Dear Friends,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. God has told us that one day we will behold our eternal home and be part of 'a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' Revelation 7:9,10' This day will come and all the adopted children of God will be removed from their families, their homes, their lands, their countries and will be ushered into the country of God. There, we will be with a family, many of whose members we have never seen or known. There we will abide in a home that no labor of our hands could build; that no amount of money could buy. There we will see a land whose ground will no longer be cursed for our sake and bring forth thorns and thistles, but instead the land will be blessed for the sake of Christ our Savior and bring forth milk and honey. In this place the family of God will no longer be separated by vast expanses of the water or by many miles of desert or by insurmountable mountains or by seemingly depthless valleys. So we wait for these days when the clouds will no longer obstruct the sun; when we no longer know this cold, hard earth.

Several weeks ago, God took me to the country of Trinidad, the easternmost land of the West Indies. It was there that I was with my Christian family, and was laboring with brothers and sisters from America and with brothers and sisters native to Trinidad. All of us were laboring 'to give knowledge of salvation to His people, by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. Luke 2: 77-79' It is the intent of this letter to give you an account of those things that took place during the time of our stay in Trinidad.

The journey to Trinidad began December 29,2007 with a journey with my mother to the Atlanta airport. Uncertain of the traffic, we left at 4:00am from my sister's house in Athens, Ga. and arrived in Atlanta at 5:15am. The team flying from Atlanta was scheduled to meet at the airport at 6:30am. Betsy, Amber, Cyndia, and Aaron arrived at 6:30am. With haste we checked in the bags and prayed together that the medicines we were taking would pass through customs in Trinidad. (The April 2007 team's medicines were not permitted to pass through customs.) I said goodbye to mom, and we walked to our gate. At the gate, we sat down for the wait and became acquainted with one another.

Betsy Christiansen is a retired RN who is involved with Mission to the World in the Caribbean/Latin America front and was co-leading the team. Amber Brown is an RN who works in Augusta and is in a nursing research PhD program at the Medical College of Georgia. Aaron Adams is a pre-med/chemistry major who attends college at Georgia State College and University. Cindy Belenchia, or 'Moma C', is a nurse practitioner student at North Georgia Military College.

Our plane was scheduled to leave Atlanta at 8:35am but due to a front window being damaged we left at 11:30am to connect with a plane in Houston, TX. We arrived in Houston, TX around 12:45pm and met Cal, Linda, and Brenda.

Cal and Linda Dykstra are a couple from Michigan. Cal is an oncologist and Linda is a psychologist. Humor knows them well. Brenda Myett is a nursing student from Maryland. Unlike the five hours we were in the Atlanta airport, we were maybe twenty minutes in the Houston airport.

At 1:05pm we were on our way to Trinidad. The flight was eventful. I sat next to Shawn, a Trinidadian by birth, who had read much about God and at a time considered himself to be a follower of Christ. Upon listening to him for four hours or so, I learned that he believed the Word of God was unable to provide him with fulfillment and what he considered to be a satisfactory salvation. He now believed that man must save man and that man must save himself. Shawn showed me a book he was writing about the horrors of the world and how he considered it impossible for a God of love to allow so much hatred and violence in the world. He did not appear open to a dialogue, so much of the time it was a monologue. He talked and I listened.

When we were 2 hours from Trinidad, an elderly Afro-Trinidadian (Afro- meaning a descendant of the African slave trade which took many West Africans to the West Indies) man began to experience chest pain. Cal, Betsy, and Brenda assisted him until we arrived in Trinidad. He had a history of a stent placement and one or two heart attacks. There he was placed on an ambulance and rushed to the hospital.

Having arrived in Trinidad we went to the customs line, where we would be for the roughly the next four hours. There we met our team coming from Maryland and New Jersey: Karen and Steve McClure, Carola and Ben Prinz, and Corrie Pruitt.

Karen is a Nurse Practitioner and our team leader. Steve is Karen's husband and assisted Steve McGee with the proclamation of the Gospel during worship services and Bible study. Carola is a medical doctor and Ben is her son. Ben directed the children's activities at the medical clinics. Corrie is a nursing student with whom I was blessed to guide our team in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

While in line we met an Indo-Trinidadian (Indo- meaning a descendant of the indentured servants which the Europeans brought over from East India) named Gora. She was coming from her home in New York to Trinidad to visit her sons. Gora spoke to us of missionaries who came to her village many years ago when she lived in Trinidad. It was through the testimony of these missionaries about the person of Jesus Christ that she came to salvation. Gora was very excited about more missionaries coming to Trinidad. She informed us that her sons whom she was visiting were not followers of Christ. Betsy prayed with her and for her meeting with her sons.

After the customs officers stamped our passports, when ventured on to find our baggage and then to the last check of customs. It was the will of God that the customs officers allowed us to enter their country with the medicines. As was mentioned before, the team that preceded us had their medicines confiscated by customs. We then met Steve McGee, his son Josh, and Steve Jadoo.

Steve McGee is Mission to the World's contact and one of the Christians with whom we labored. Steve Jadoo is a resident of an impoverished area known as Carlsen field, attends the church where Steve McGee is the assistant pastor, and was our bus driver. From there, Steve Jadoo drove us to the Morton Guest House of the Aramalaya Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) in Tunapuna, Trinidad where we would find our lodging. We quickly unpacked, discussed what the next day may hold, prayed and praised God for His good hand that guided us to Trinidad, and went to sleep around 2:00am.

Sunday morning, December 30, 2007, we awoke at 6:15am to the sound of roosters crowing, dogs barking, and the smell of breakfast that had been prepared by our caretaker Angie. At breakfast, we met Erin Behling and Tom and Jessica Beachkosky who had arrived some days before us.

Erin is an RN who lives near the Canadian border of Minnesota and was excited about leaving the snow behind for several days. Tom and Jessica are in the Air Force and in their fourth year of medical school.

Worship that Lord's Day began at 7:30am with our Christian family at the Aramalaya Presbyterian Church. After the service at Aramalaya, Steve Jadoo arrived and we piled in his bus and were off to worship with our Christian family at the Covenant Reformed Evangelical Church. Covenant Reformed meets in Chagunas, Trinidad in the first level of a rented two-story house. Its congregation is a mixture of Afro and Indo-Trinidadians, including children from Carlsen field. It is the duty of our bus driver, Steve, to pick up these children every Sunday and transport them to the church. The pastor, Ricky Gosyne, is a native of Trinidad who had moved to the States but was instructed by God to move back to his native land to serve

the poor and neglected. He is assisted by Steve McGee, who had been pastoring a church in Michigan before he was called by God to go to the West Indies.

Steve McGee preached that Lord's Day from Exodus 14: 1-30. In this passage, the Israelites are shown landlocked between Pi Hahiroth, a point where the mouth of two rivers combine at the point of entry into the Red sea; Migdol, an elevated land mass between the two river beds rising to about 300 meters; Baal-Zephon, a prominent landmark at the Red Sea which is translated 'lord of the north side; and the seemingly impassable Red Sea. At this place, the Israelites lifted up their eyes and saw Pharaoh and his men marching after them. They then discuss the futility of this exodus, as they are certain that they have been led to this place to be cut by the sword of Pharaoh and his men and to be buried in that accursed place. Overcome by fear the Israelites cry out to Moses. Moses responds, 'Do not afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace' Exodus 14:13,14. Fight the Lord did. After He created a divide in the Red Sea and a passageway of dry land, the people hastily walked through to the other side. Pharaoh, drunk with hate, ushered his men to the passageway and commanded them to pursue the Israelites. His men obeyed and went in pursuit but not to the death of the Israelites by their swords, but to their own death by drowning in the waters of the Red Sea.

Satan, the foe of our God and our former master, is indeed mighty. May God give us a portion of His strength to 'hold our peace'. For 'who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, peril, or sword? 'For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers, nor things present or things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Romans 8:35, 38-39

Once church ended, we spoke with the people, and learned of the many ethnic and spiritual roots of Trinidad. Many of the people of Trinidad are East Indian, African, and South American descent and there are many Hindus, Muslims, and Christians (Catholic and Protestants).

We then went to the McGee's home. Adanna, Steve's wife, provided us with a meal. After eating, we did what people do in the West Indies, we 'limed' or relaxed with Steve, Adanna, and their three children, Hannah, Geneva, and Josh.

That afternoon we went to Carlsen field, where Pastors McGee and Gosyne conduct Sunday school for the children of that area. The meeting place is a shelter with a metal roof, no walls, and a concrete floor that backs up to the small trailer

of a man named Weezil. We sang 'Jesus Loves Me' and 'He's Got the Whole World In His Hands' and then Ben conducted the Sunday school lesson. Ben spoke to the children of how that man and God were once at peace with one another. This peace was dealt a fatal blow by man's desire to be a god unto himself having knowledge of good and evil. He then told them how God promised man that one day the enmity between God and man will be removed, that God's Son, Jesus Christ, would crush the head of Satan, that the children of God will be forgiven and redeemed on behalf of Jesus, and that the children of God will return to that land from which they were dismissed and be at peace with God again. It is the fulfillment of this promise, which the children of God and all creation await.

We then piled back in Steve Jadoo's van and went to the Morton House. We ate, discussed the events of the day, and went to sleep.

Monday, December 31, began as the rest of the days would for that week. We ate breakfast, a member of our team testified of the work of Christ among us, and we prepared for the medical clinic. The clinic that day was to be held at the house of the McGee's neighbors, Zaid and Sherry Ann. Zaid and Sherry Ann, a Muslim couple, have a store, which the people of that neighborhood frequently visit. Many of the residents of this neighborhood were regularly seeing doctors. Typical problems of the residents were chronic and developed from a sedentary lifestyle in tandem with poor eating habits. Diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol with their associated problems (renal failure, heart attacks, etc.) plagued the residents. The residents talked with us at length and many opportunities were available to dialogue about spiritual things.

After clinic, we went to a community center where Covenant Reformed was having a New Year's Eve service. It was a time of singing songs of thanksgiving to God and proclaiming His love and mercy. A man named Roger spoke of how God had shone the light of Christ upon him while he dwelt in the darkness of the Muslim faith. He spoke of his new life in Christ and the hope he now has. He spoke of how his family and friends forsook him after this transformation and how in spite of this God had remained faithful to him and had given him a new family in the body of Christ. Steve Jadoo's wife, Nunda, spoke of a painful ovarian cyst she had and how she longed that God would bring healing for her in the New Year. Pastor Gosyne spoke of God's working through Covenant Reformed to take the Gospel to the people of Carlsen field; He spoke with joy of how he had witnessed God unifying the church and how the many different parts of the body were caring for one another. Reflecting on the word given to Pastor Gosyne brings this to mind from Paul, 'But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if

one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it' I Corinthians 12:24-26. Tears fell from Pastor Gosyne's eyes as he spoke and the congregation understood the sincerity of their pastor and the love he has for them.

Tuesday, January 1, marked the first day of the New Year. We were allowed to wake up a little later and then went to the McGee's for the day. Dr. Beharry, a Trinidadian pediatrician, and his family joined us. Gabbie Beharry and Geneva McGee introduced our team to the steel drum, which is native to Trinidad. Cheryl, Dr. Beharry's wife, told us of how missionaries came when her mother was young. Her mother was Hindu, and welcomed the freedom from Hindu customs that Christ brought. The missionaries taught them many songs, some of which Cheryl sang for us. The rest of the day was a day of singing, conversation, and eating.

Wednesday and Thursday, January 2,3, we went to Steve Jadoo's house at Carlsen field for a medical clinic. The medical clinic consisted of a triage team, nurses performing various parts of a physical examination, various healthcare workers providing education on healthy living, an eyeglass station, a pharmacy, and doctors who decided what would done to physically assist the people. Some patients talked to Linda, our psychologist, about different types of abuse they had experienced. While the patients moved through the clinic the team prayed with patients, told them about the Gospel, and introduced them to Pastors Gosyne or McGee. These medical clinics were an awesome way for the people to meet Christians, both locally and from abroad, and to establish a relationship with the Pastors Gosyne and McGee and the people of Covenant Reformed. After the clinic on Wednesday, we went to the church to participate in a discussion the church was holding about the abuse many of the children of Trinidad face. Linda told the congregation of the signs of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse and a local lawyer informed them of the legal courses of action the church could take to assist these children. The church plans to start an after school-tutoring program for the children. They also discussed the possibility of developing a safe house for abused children.

Friday, January 4, we held a medical clinic at a community center in Caroni village. This was the first time a medical clinic had been held there and Rita, a local social worker, was very excited that God had brought us to her community. Rita assisted us with registering and hopes that many more teams will come. As a result of the clinic, the community leaders invited Pastor McGee to begin an afternoon Bible study at the community center. It is hoped that one day a church plant will begin at Caroni village.

Saturday, January 5, we went with the McGees, Jadoos, and Beharrys to Maracas beach. We limed, ate baked shark, and

debriefed. That evening we packed for our departure the following morning.

Sunday, January 6, we took one last ride in Steve Jadoo's bus and headed off to the airport. I had some complications with my ticket but praise God Betsy was there to speak on my behalf. At the airport our team members said goodbye to one another and off we went back to the U.S.

I praise God for your prayers while we were in Trinidad. It is our hope that many more teams will come and support the work of Jesus Christ at Covenant Reformed Evangelical Church.

In Christ,

Andrew White