

CHAMPION CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

A program of the Christian Family & Children's Center

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Dear supporters and friends of the CCS mission trip to the Dominican Republic,

Thank you from the Champion Christian High School Mission Team! We would like to thank everyone who helped make our trip to Santiago, Dominican Republic possible. It was an amazing and life changing experience. We had a great team made up of 13 high school students and 8 adults. While there, we were involved in three main types of ministry: construction, visitation while installing water filters, and programs in a school and church. The various perspectives of the mission team members have been combined in the following letter to give you a glimpse into the trip and the many different activities in which we participated.

After arriving in the city of **Santiago** we spent the night in the homes of the Fishers and Hartsfields, missionaries who work in the Palo Alto area. After a superb breakfast we headed up into the mountains to Palo Alto, a rural community of about 300 families. ***Immediately the paved roads of the city gave way to washed-out dirt roads that are passable only on motorcycles or four-wheel-drive trucks.*** Most homes are much smaller, made of wood rather than cement blocks, and are often without running water, phones or much electricity, if at all.

However, as one student noted, ***"In Palo Alto the community was like a big family.*** I felt like part of the family all week. The food we ate in Palo Alto was very good. We had a home-cooked meal three times a day every day. We had plantains, beans and rice about every day just like the Dominicans do," (along with wonderful meats, salads, fruits and an excellent local blend of coffee and cacao.) Most food was cooked over the fire on the wood stove in the rickety pavilion where we ate.



We stayed in Palo Alto at Pines of Heaven retreat center, which is run by a local pastor and his family. Pastor Amado and Ramona Gracesqui are loving and hospitable people who impact everyone that they meet. ***They are dedicated to growing the church and improving the lives of the people in Palo Alto. They partner with Santiago Christian School,*** the local public school and missionaries like the Fishers and Hartsfields to minister to as many people as possible. They also do an amazing job of taking care of short-term teams like ours.

On Sunday we were blessed to be a part of the service at the Palo Alto Body of Christ church. After worship together, church members shared songs and poems and then our team shared our "God of Wonders" song in

Spanish as well. While Dr. Skinner, our school director, shared during the sermon, most of the rest of the team shared puppets, songs and a Bible story with the children in their service. That evening we got a real taste of rural Dominican life as we ate dinner by flashlight and firelight with rain coming through the holes in the old tin roof. After slipping and sliding through the mud we gratefully crawled into our warm sleeping bags in our dormitory rooms.



Monday through Wednesday were packed full of activity. Each day the team was divided into three separate ministry groups. The first group worked with the contractors on the construction of a road between the main driveway at the Gracesqui's house and the main building of the retreat center where we stayed. As mentioned above, the rain had made the road a sea of mud. As some of our boys said, "The work we had to do was really hard at times. We moved a lot of dirt and mud. The mud was awful for some, but fun for others." After the dirt was cleared, the road was graded so that water would drain well. Our team then worked to mix and lay cement by hand, one section at a time, to make the road.

Another group from our team went to the local public school twice a day. **One teammate said, "There are no busses there so most kids walk, some as far as 8 or 9 miles.** Because of this the kids would jump into the beds of pickup trucks with us on the way to and from the school. While we were at the school we taught Bible lessons, made crafts, sang songs and presented puppet shows. In the morning we had middle school students and in the afternoon we had the elementary and a few high school kids. We had a lot of fun at the school." We also helped the Hartsfields and Fishers with their English teaching at the school. We praise God for the chance to get to know many of the students and staff at the Teodoro Parra school in Palo Alto.

In addition, each day a part of our team went with the missionaries and Pastor **Amado to visit local families and install water filters for them.** The water filters allow the pastor and missionaries to build relationships and to share about Christ, the Living Water. They will also periodically visit the families who have received water filters to help maintain them.

On Thursday, we took a day off from our work to enjoy Sosúa Beach on the northern coast of the D. R. We really enjoyed the food, snorkeling, shopping and the time to relax. That evening, after being treated to a wonderful dinner in Santiago at Dr. Seth Cohen, the SCS Director's home, we stayed at the school in an area near their gym.



On our last day in the DR we had the opportunity to work on a family's home that had been destroyed by recent flooding. As some of our students stated, ***"We moved over 600 cement blocks by making an assembly line of people. We found spiders and lizards and so on.*** We worked hard and we got it done. The blocks were heavy to carry, but it was fun." That evening after shopping and pizza we enjoyed seeing the view of downtown Santiago from a large monument.

We want you to hear some testimonies that the students shared about the trip:

"Our trip was an amazing life-changing experience that changed my perspective forever. One of the most remarkable parts was how close the team grew, first with each other and then with the Dominican people."

"I will look back on this mission trip during my whole life. I will hold in my heart all of the amazing relations and connections that I made in the Dominican Republic."

"I feel that the biggest lesson that I learned from this trip is to be grateful. In America, clean water, electricity and food are all easy to access. It is so easy to take those things for granted when you do not see the fact that not everyone is as fortunate."

"I was a little apprehensive to go on this trip, but now I would not trade my experience for anything. I made new friends, did new things and grew stronger in my faith. I thank God every day for the opportunity. Our God is an awesome God."

If you would like to learn more about our trip you can watch the video on the Christian Family and Children's Center channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1U735k8UI&feature=youtu.be>

Thank you again to everyone who helped us to take this trip to the Dominican Republic and who gave donations for the water filters, school supplies, etc. that we took to the people there. Please pray for our brothers and sisters that continue to grow the church in the Dominican Republic.

Many blessings in Christ,

The CCHS DR Mission Team

P.S. To date, ***we still have not raised enough to cover the costs of the mission trip.*** We are about \$3000 short. If you, like all of us, have a desire to see missions continue as a core experience for Champion Christian School, would you consider an extra gift to help.

P.S.S. ***We are putting together a community mission team to go to the Dominican Republic from July 25-August 1, 2017.*** If interested, please contact Melissa Wolfgang at melissa_wolfgang@champion.org as soon as possible.