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Dear Dr. Culbertson,

¡Dios les bendiga! God bless you all! I am back from the Caribbean and God truly blessed my time there. I learned a lot of Spanish, a lot about myself and a lot about God and the way He is working in my life.

My team (3 other students at Nazarene institutions) and I and the missionary (Evelyn Ovando) had 45 days of ministry on the islands of Puerto Rico (2 weeks) and the Dominican Republic (4 1/2 weeks). In these 45 days we accomplished many things. We worked in:

- 36 different churches
- 7 districts.
- We conducted 25 seminars
- 24 children's rallies
- 6 Bible quizzing tournaments.
- We attended 8 beaches
- 3 rivers.

Evelyn requested our team to introduce Bible Quizzing to the two islands. Along with the Bible Quizzing seminars we also gave seminars over the new NYI Charter that was formed last summer at the General Assembly in Indianapolis as well as seminars about impact teams in the local church with an emphasis on service. We generally gave these seminars in the evenings. In the morning we conducted the children's rallies (basically a one-day Vacation Bible School) for a few hours and in the afternoon we would have an activity with the young people from the local church. During this time we would play basketball, baseball, or go to the beach with them. We traveled to a new town almost every day. It became a luxury to spend one or two nights in the same bed, although we were glad to move on from locations that were thick with mosquitos!

One lesson that God taught me was about depending on Him and allowing Him to work beyond my strengths and my talents. We were giving our testimonies one Sunday night in the Alma Rosa church in Santo Domingo. I was going along fine with my Spanish, that is, I was speaking well enough to be understood. And then I came to a point at which I could no longer think of what to say. I had many words to say in English, but could not think of anymore words in Spanish. I finally told the congregation that *"No tengo muchas palabras en el español, pero mi corazon esta lleno de Dios."* "I don't have many words in Spanish, but my heart is full of God." I really could not think of anything else to say in Spanish. I was at the end of my capabilities. I was silent. It was in this silence that God began to move. It was in this silence that the people in the congregation said, *"¡Aleluya!"* and *"¡Gloria a Dios!"* It was only when I was at the end of my resources that God came and worked among His people, myself included. As I reflect on this special moment I realize that this is the way God always works. He comes in and has His perfect way in our moments of inability and weakness. I want to live in such a way that I constantly allow God to work through my inadequacy.


I have so many stories and lessons from my weeks on the islands, but I will just share one more of my favorites with you. (Thanks for listening!)

We were on the East District in Santo Domingo. Many of the churches on this district are in *bateys*. A *batey* is a community made up of people who work the sugar cane plantations. The people are mostly Haitian refugees and their children. These are very poor communities. The pastor was leading us through a particular *batey* and a few of the children came along with us. Two of the kids, a boy and a girl, were holding on to me. First they were just holding my hands and then they began to hold my elbows and then they wrapped my arms around their shoulders. For some reason (I was probably just tired, this was one of our last days on the islands) it annoyed me and I was thinking, "Why are they so close to me? Why are they clinging to me?" In the very moment that I thought these things Jesus reminded me that He, Himself had said, "Let the little children come unto Me," even when the disciples said to take the children away. For the rest of the time the three of us chattered along through the village. They showed me their houses and asked me a million questions and got as close to me as they could. It was wonderful to have them alongside me! I realized during that hour that loving His children is what God has called each of us to do and that when we forget what He has taught us, He *will* remind us!

"Then little children were brought to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." When He had placed His hands on them, He went on from there."

Matthew 19:13-15 NIV

Throughout the summer I enjoyed good times and encountered situations and circumstances that were hard to accept. During the weeks on the islands I always knew that God was right there by my side, helping me and encouraging me. I know this is because of your prayers. Thank you. I also want to again say thank you for your financial contributions. Thank you for being willing to be used of God in this ministry.

In Christ, 
Jessica

→ The church at Punta de Via Meya, DR



↑ Full house at Bible Quiz meet in Azua, DR

↓ Basketball court at Batey Las Cejas, DR



↑ Caribbean Sea: Santo Domingo, DR

→ YIM team: Aaron, Alma, Heather, me in LA, CA

