

Ann O'Shaughnessy reflects on her experience of Build it Week 2011

Before going to Haiti I felt excited at the prospect of being involved in a project that would make a real difference in the lives of many families. I also felt apprehensive about my ability to meet this challenge. Now that the trip is over I realize it was a real privilege to be part of such a venture and I hope to return on the next Build It Week in Octoberfunds permitting!

For the week in Haiti I was one of the 10 people on the 'front of house catering' team. We got up at 4.10 am each day and prepared the canteen for the 'Dawn Breakfast', consisting of orange juice, yogurt and cornflakes. The other teams of blocklayers, plasterers, painters, carpenters, water delivery people, administration, and security filed in for breakfast at 5 am and were on the building site at 6 am. Preparation and clean up in the dining room happened four times each day. My favourite activity was ensuring that each person on the site washed and sanitized their hands before they went in for Dawn Breakfast at 5 am, The Full Irish at 9.30 am, Lunch at 1 pm and Dinner at 6 pm. It was an opportunity to have a brief chat with each one asking how they were doing, if they were tired and how their blistered hands were holding up. We shared lots of jokes and funny comments at this time and by the end of the week I knew many of the volunteers by name, even when they weren't wearing their name tags.

I thought of Catherine McAuley many times during the week and how she responded to the needs of her day. In some ways it's easy to respond when the need is so obvious. The energy and drive of the volunteers reminded me of the early companions of Catherine McAuley. In Haiti particular tasks needed to be finished by the end of the week and the volunteers were prepared to go many extra miles to finish the houses, latrines, community centre, soccer pitch and playground. There was no need here to spend hours in discernment, endeavouring to read the signs of the times. The signs were all too obvious, as indeed they were in Catherine McAuley's time.

The crying need now is for the families who will live in these houses to be educated. Most of these children do not go to school because they do not have the money to pay for uniform, transport and lunch. The hope is that under the direction of Haven teachers will be funded for the next five years to work with the children on our site and the nearby site completed last year. This will be evaluated and further plans will be put in place. Oh! If only I was younger...this would be a great ministry.

In general Build It Week in Haiti was an unforgettable experience, despite the blistering heat. The energy and positivity of the group of volunteers was inspiring. All one needed to survive was lots of stamina and energy and a willingness to be involved.

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