

Dear Friends,

I am sure that most of you have been involved in conversations about what you would do if you ever “won the lottery”. I suspect that many of you said at some point in that conversation that you would use some of your winnings to do something for someone in need.

Maybe you would make a huge donation to a family, a school, a hospital in need. Maybe you said that you would make a huge contribution to a cause that you support. I am sure that you promised that if you ever won the lottery you would do something charitable as a sign of your gratitude. Maybe the conversation ended with you jokingly saying: “Of course, if I ever hope to win the lottery, I suppose I need to buy a ticket.”

When I was in Haiti I discovered that even though I have not bought a ticket in nearly 20 years, I have won the lottery. Through no effort on my part, I have been blessed to be born into a life more comfortable than most in the world can even imagine. I have an overabundance of life’s comforts: food, clothing, shelter, transportation, access to health care. I do not need statistics to tell me that I live more comfortably than at least 90% of the people in the world. In the lottery of life’s pleasures and comforts, I was given a winning ticket.

I cannot possibly describe the poverty that is in Haiti. We drove through streets in the country that passed along rivers of garbage. People lived in shacks that were made with rusty wasted metal. The stench of the squalor was overpowering. What I will remember most from my time in Haiti however is not the poverty, but the hope. The schools, orphanages, fishing villages, and homes sponsored and supported by Food for the Poor improve the lives of tens of thousands of people throughout the Central and Latin America: children are taught, the elderly are cared for, the outcast are welcome, the hungry are fed, people are employed, the Gospel is lived. I come back from our pilgrimage to Haiti impressed by the work done by Food for the Poor.

Many of you have contributed in the past to this ministry. Many of you have received their mailings and publications. I want to tell you that Food for the Poor lives up to its press. They walk their talk.

In the weeks to come Christian Baron (who also took part in the pilgrimage) and I will continue to share our reflections on the experience of the pilgrimage. We will also explore ways for you to learn more about Food for the Poor. We hope to find ways for others from the congregation to take part in a pilgrimage in the coming year. We invite your questions.

To learn more about the ministry of Food for the Poor, go to their website: www.foodforthe poor.org.

One morning during our time in Haiti we visited a clinic that is located in one of the poor neighborhoods of Port au Prince. The doctors who volunteer their time at the clinic spoke to us of the many challenges they face in the clinic. Among those challenges is the vast number of people in Haiti who are infected with HIV/AIDS. In the midst of the conversation one of the doctors mentioned that he has himself tested for HIV every six weeks. I was stunned by this.

Here is a man, blessed with the opportunities opened to him by his education, and he puts himself at risk to help heal the sick. In many ways, this doctor has won the lottery. In his work at the clinic he has found a way to share his “winnings”. What would I do if I ever won the lottery? By God’s grace, I have won. I have been abundantly blessed in so many ways. How can I possibly show my gratitude? One way will be to continue to support the ministry of Food for the Poor. Another way is to invite you to support them as well.

Gracious God, help me to live in a way that honors and respects those who suffer and die today for the Gospel. Help me to live in a way that shows my gratitude for all the blessings of my life. Amen.

In God’s Peace,

Mike