



**Haiti
A Reflection**



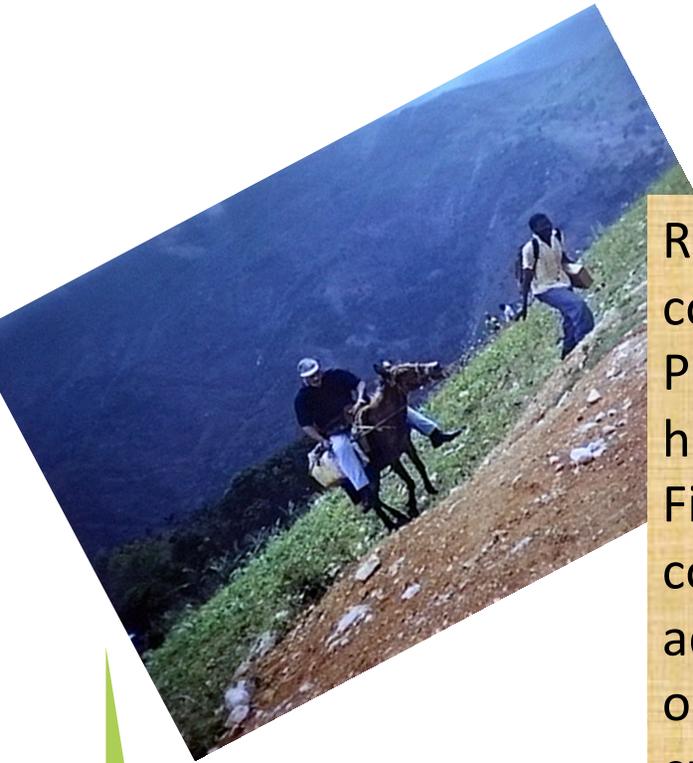
One Sunday in 1999 I was having coffee with Roger Matthews, a fellow parishioner at St. David's Episcopal Church. He was telling me about his recent trip with his wife, Dominique Monde-Matthews M.D. to her home country of Haiti. He described the poverty and need for healthcare in the country - the poorest nation in the western hemisphere. I casually told him that I was a nurse and I had always wanted the opportunity to do some type of medical missionary work somewhere in the world.



Six months later, much to the dismay and concern of my family and friends, I found myself part of a group of 13 from St. David's Episcopal Church joining with 11 others from several other churches on a plane bound for Haiti. Thus began my love for and my commitment to the people of Haiti.



It has been 18 years since that first trip and knowing that the 2018 trip would be my last, I have spent some time reflecting on the changes I have seen. Change in Haiti can be painfully slow and often difficult to see but there have been changes that even I, a visitor for one week a year, have been able to see.



Roger made sure that we knew that travel could be hard and difficult. Arriving in Port-Au-Prince we were faced with long waits in hot, humid lines until we cleared immigration. Finding our luggage, large plastic bins containing our medicines and supplies was an adventure. We never knew for sure that all of our supplies would arrive and make it through customs. The airport was rebuilt following the tragic devastation of the 2010 earthquake. We now disembark into an airconditioned modern Caribbean airport.



While we never needed to travel by donkey, the 60 km (37 miles) trip from the airport to Mirebalais took 4 ½ hours - over dirt roads that were filled with potholes, wash outs and strewn with boulders. The road up the 'mountain' to the central plateau had no lane markings and the steep drop offs had no guard rails. Many of us spent the 4 ½ hours trying to keep our eyes closed!

In recent years the EU (European Union) has overseen the construction of a 2 lane paved road – complete with guard rails. Now, once we clear the congestion of the airport and Port-Au-Prince, the trip only takes about an hour and a half!





Local transportation in Haiti is mostly by Tap-tap. These are brightly painted vehicles that people hop on and off – livestock is welcome. Today Tap-taps are still seen in abundance but now we also see motorbikes.



In Mirebalais there are hundreds of motorbikes being used as taxis. Frequently you can see a motorbike carrying the driver plus a family of four - livestock is welcome.

Many young men now have transportation and the opportunity to be an entrepreneur.



In Mirebalais the old dirt roads which were filled with pot holes, deep ruts and rocks are gone.

The main roads in town are now paved and have street signs.

There are even roundabouts as you enter the town!





In 2000 getting a message to someone across town meant sending a messenger or spreading the message person to person. In church the announcements were usually longer than the service. While the priests had a phone in their rectory we were often unable to get a phone line to America to assure those back at home that we were ok.



Today, thanks to Digicel, everyone seems to have a cell phone. Haitians, young and old are as obsessed with their phones as we are in the U.S. We are now able to use most of our cell phone providers to keep us in constant contact with home, posting updates on social media as soon as they occur.

Most homes have
no electrical
power.



St. Pierre Episcopal Church, once without electricity, now has electrical outlets along the sanctuary walls. Parishioners pass their phones and charging cords back and forth to be plugged into the power outlets to be charged.

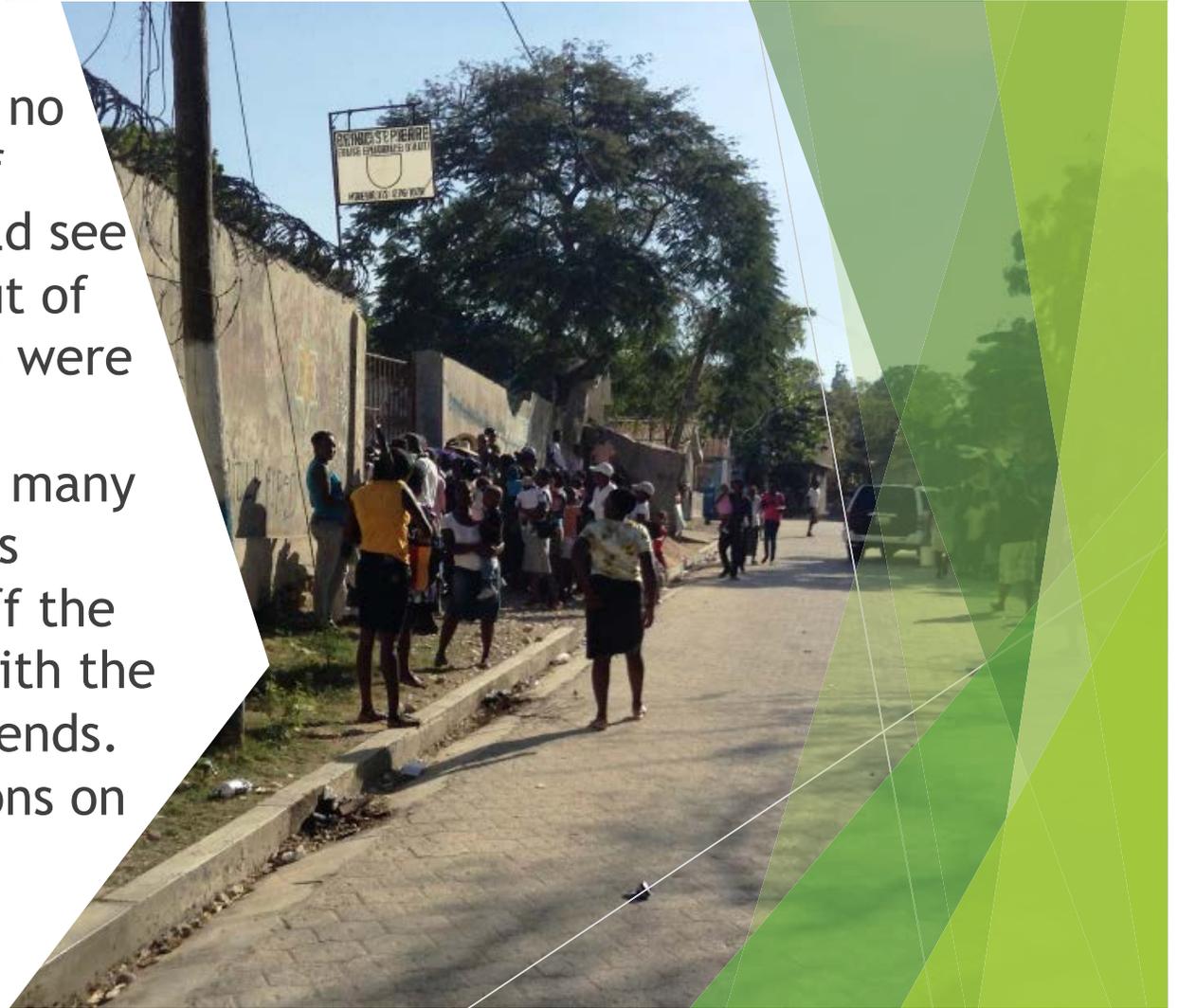
Our first year of seeing patients in what would later become St. Pierre Clinic was one of discovery. In the partially constructed cinder block building we discovered that: we had no electricity; no facilities for examining patients; no running water; a roof with large holes and not enough medicines or supplies. Our only source of light was through a couple of windows and the holes in the tin roof!



There was no pharmacy but we dispensed medications from a narrow ledge on the wall and the large plastic bins in which we had transported the supplies.



The first year we had no idea of the number of patients that we would see and we quickly ran out of the sandwich bags we were using to dispense medications. We had many boxes of rubber gloves donated, so we cut off the fingers, filled them with the pills and knotted the ends. We wrote the directions on the outside!



Today the clinic is open year round. It is staffed by Haitian personnel: physician, dentist, nurse, laboratory technician and other ancillary personnel.

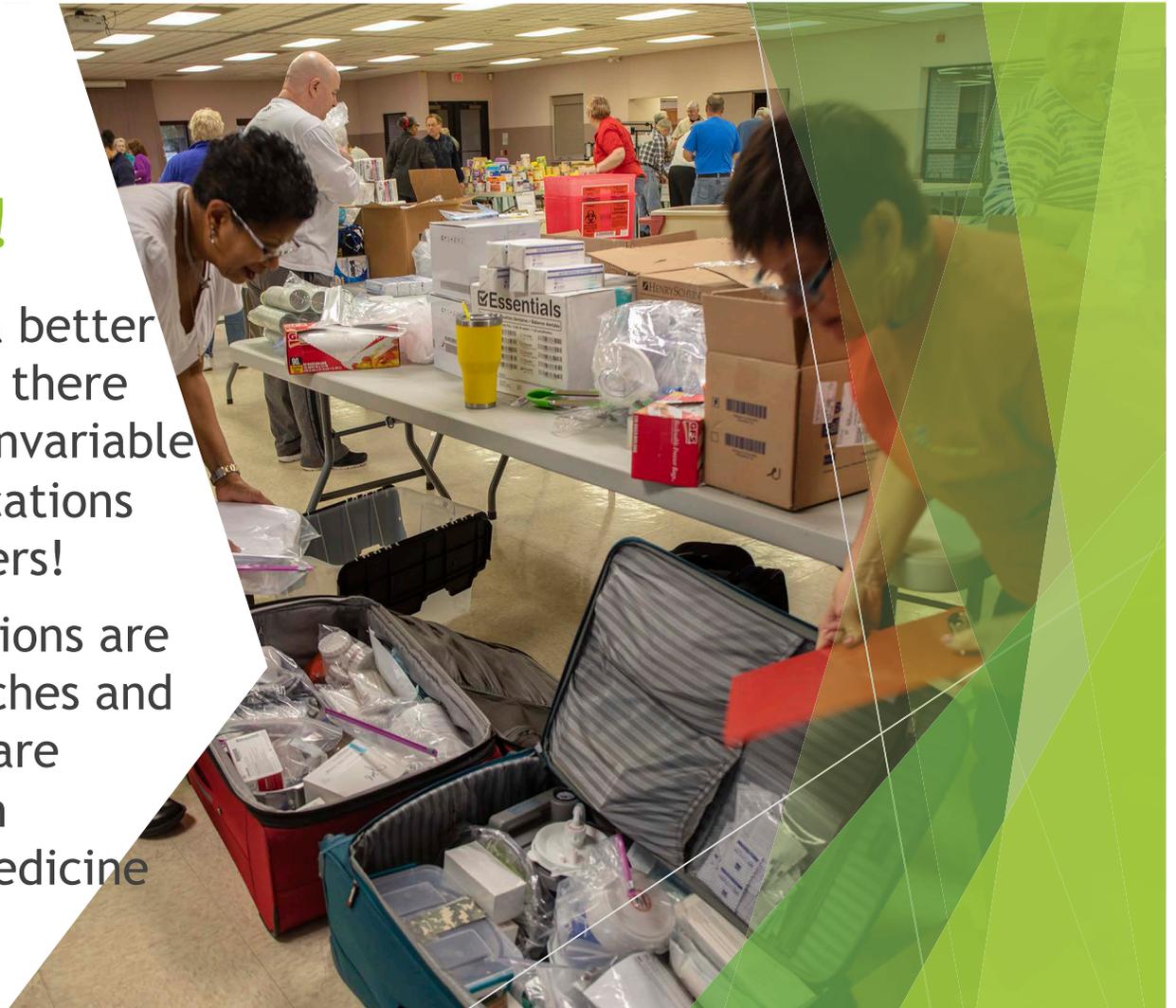
The employees are paid by Haiti Outreach Mission (H.O.M.) with money raised from fundraisers held by our participating member churches.



Packing: Organized Chaos!

Past experiences give us a better idea of what to bring but there are always surprises and invariable we run out of some medications and have a surplus of others!

Over the counter medications are donated by member churches and prescription medications are purchased by H.O.M. from Blessings International: Medicine for Missions.



Today the clinic is clean and organized. There is a pharmacy filled with the medicines we bring. There is seating in the waiting area and the exam rooms. The Lab has its own room.





The number of patients waiting for us at the clinic each morning has decreased due to the presence of a full time physician.

We are now able to schedule a couple of mobile clinics in towns that do not have access to medical or dental care.

The Fluoride and Dental Teams also go mobile!



The clinic now has the beginning of a laboratory that allows the physician access to some basic blood and urine analysis. This lab system was purchased with H.O.M. funds from International Aid, an organization that assists faith based medical missions working throughout the world.



The L.I.S. (Laboratory in a Suitcase) can be solar powered and it can be brought to a remote location, set up and functioning in minutes!





Fluoride treatments have been a consistent and important part of our mission. Treatments are given to the school children at St. Pierre Episcopal School and St. Louis Catholic School in Mirebalais and also in our supported schools in the villages of Desvarrieux and Trianon as well as the children who show up at our mobile clinic locations.

We try to give each child a toothbrush and toothpaste.



This year a young lady presented at the dental clinic for a 'check up'. She proudly showed us her beautiful teeth. She told us she had been getting the fluoride treatments at school every year and she also diligently practiced the oral hygiene taught during the treatments. She came to thank us!

Dental Suite

► Originally our dental suite consisted of a broken dental chair and a spittoon fashioned out of half of a plastic jug and held in place with duct tape.

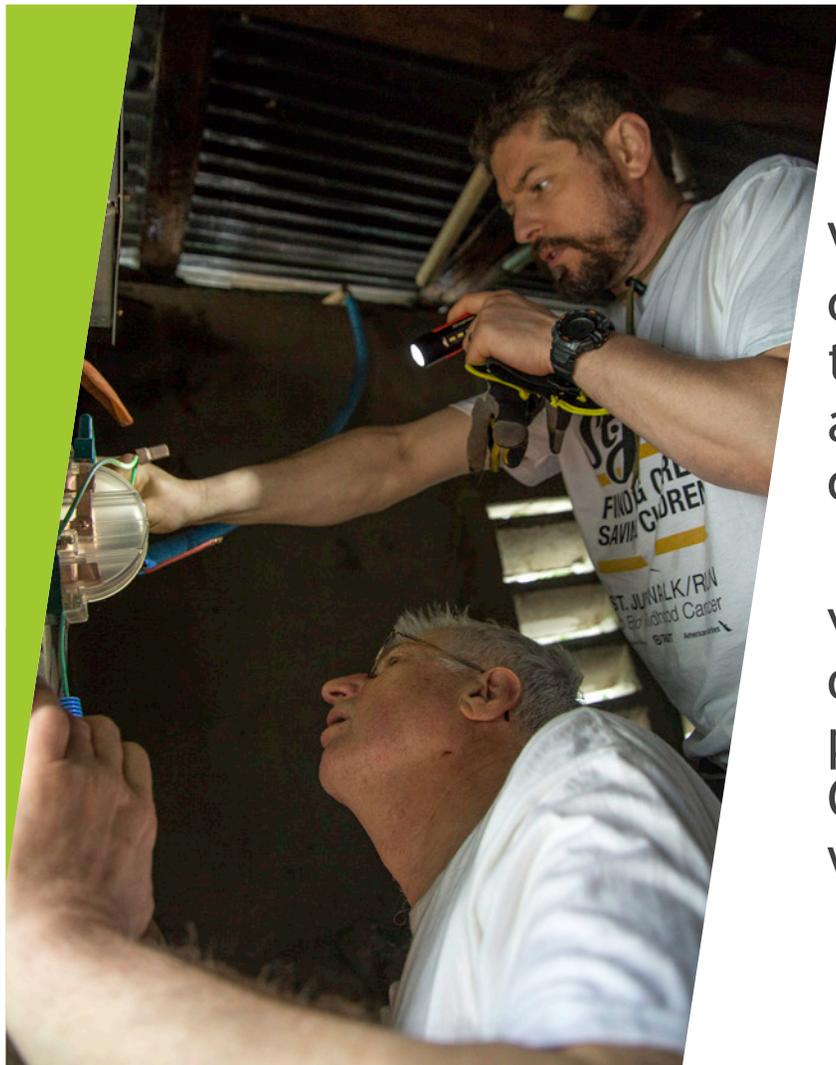
► Extractions were the only service the dentists who came with us could offer. Her services were greatly appreciated by patients suffering with dental pain with no treatment options available.



Today the dental area is comprised of two working dental chairs, equipment that allows for fillings as well as extractions and a sterilizer for the hand tools.

Dental services are dependent on city supplied electricity which is often unreliable or the H.O.M. provided generator which also has its share of mechanical issues.





Volunteers coming with us for construction are a vital asset to the success of our trip and also the functioning of the clinic year round.

The construction crew varies in size each year based on the projects that the priests of the Episcopal and Catholic parishes say they would like help with.

They have brought electricity into the building and installed ceiling fans with lights. We welcome the light and the ceiling fans provide a bit of relief in the hot humid weather.



Our team has worked with men from the community to put an addition onto St. Pierre school which enables girls to continue school past the age of 12.



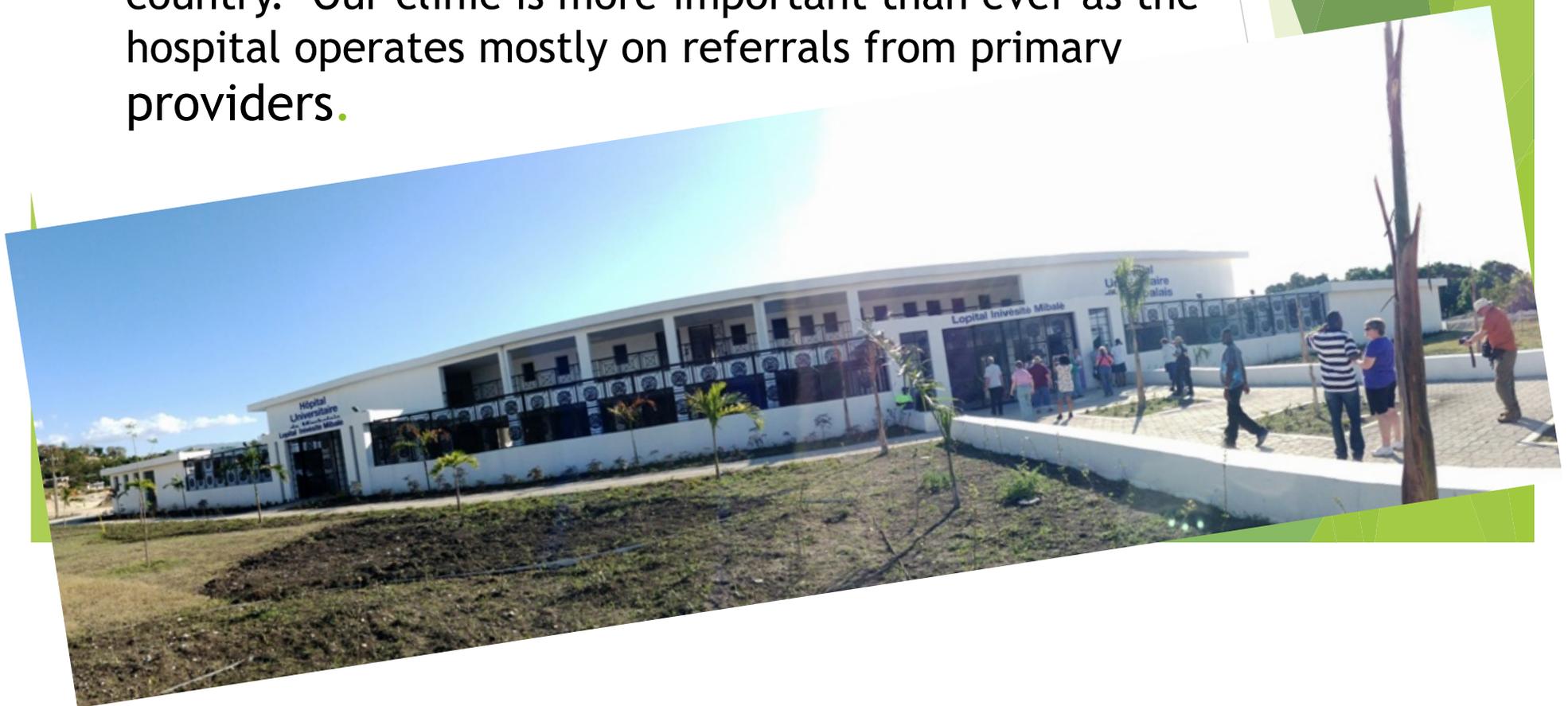
They have helped
construct a building
to house the St. Blasé
Orphanage - now a
college prep school.



They have installed a water purification project that saved many from contracting cholera during the recent epidemic.

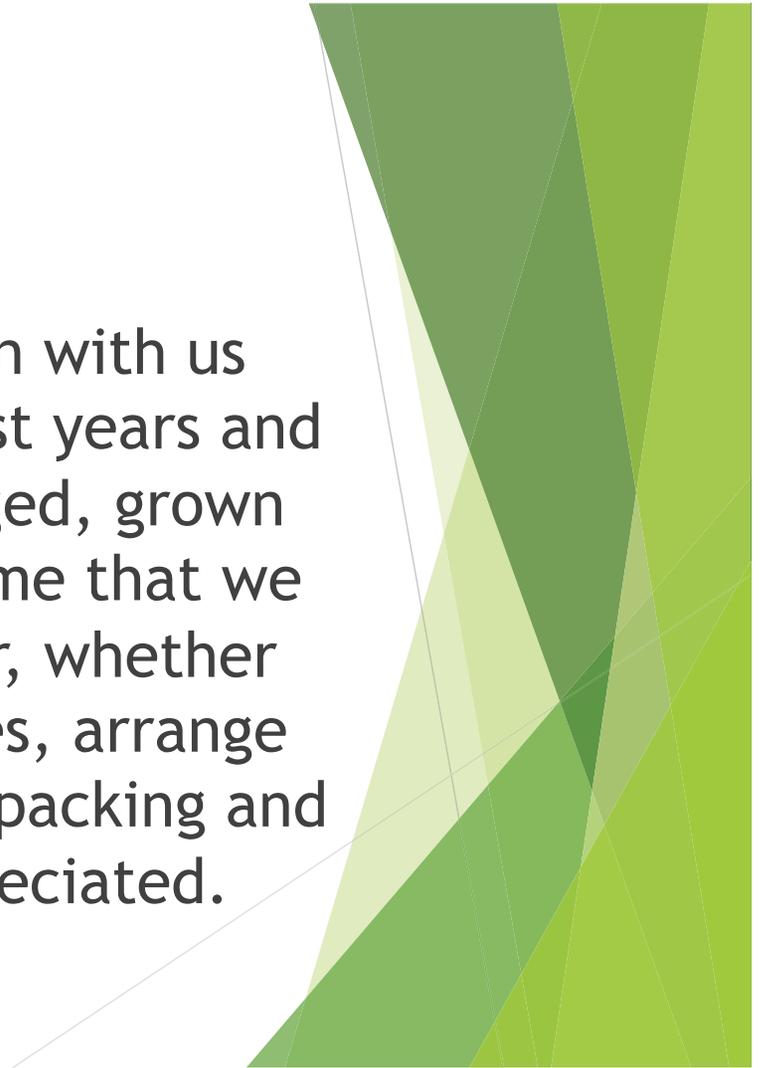


Following the 2010 earthquake that destroyed the national hospital in Port-au-Prince a new state of the art hospital has been built in Mirebalais. The Hopital Universitaire de Mirebalais is able to provide excellent services in many specialty areas that were never before available in the country. Our clinic is more important than ever as the hospital operates mostly on referrals from primary providers.



People

- ▶ Some of our missionaries have been with us from the first trip, some come most years and some come only once. We have aged, grown greyer and 'bigger'. We mourn some that we have lost to death. Each volunteer, whether they travel with us, donate supplies, arrange or attend fundraisers or help with packing and logistics is valued and greatly appreciated.





People have changed.....



**But what has
changed the
most is me!**



I have become:

- ▶ More grateful
- ▶ More humble
- ▶ More aware of the blessings I have merely because of the color of my skin and where I was born
- ▶ More aware of the suffering of others
- ▶ Aware of how few 'things' it takes to be happy
- ▶ Moved by the dignity and faithfulness of the Haitian people

And finally,

I have learned to be more patient with road construction as I have visited Haiti when there was none!