

Reflections on our First Five Years at Institution Univers

By: Pam Mann



In February 2005, my husband Dave and I first came to Unvers as part of a one-week mission team. The next year, we came for a seven-week stay to learn Creole and discern what God wanted our Columbus, Ohio congregation to do in Ouanaminthe. During that time, it seemed God wanted our congregation to give us up for full-time service at Institution Unvers. Our home church has never let us go. They provide instead our full support and an average of 3-4 mission teams annually.

Since June 2006, when we definitively moved to Ouanaminthe, many friends have made reference to the story of saving starfish one at a time by throwing beached ones back into the sea. That's what Dave and I do, they tell us: rebuild Haiti one life at a time. As powerful as that metaphor may be for some, it does not touch what I feel most profoundly working in Haiti. God is doing more than rescuing the poor at Unvers. Those that would see themselves as rescuers are themselves being transformed. Whether it's a one-week visitor on a mission team or a congregation hosting a university student, everyone is affected, Haitian and American alike. No one remains unchanged.

It is the nature of our work that we see many people whom we may not see again: mission team members, patients at the clinic, students who graduate, people sitting next to us in a church pew or fellow pedestrians on the streets of Ouanaminthe. In those passing relationships, the cross-cultural interface often creates friction: disagreements about priorities and the implementation of programs. Both interpersonal tension and personal challenges provide a creative platform where God can redeem us. We just need to be available clay in the Potter's hands.

Dave and I look forward to IU grads returning to Unvers after their university studies to serve at the school, the health center, or the agriculture projects. We see ourselves being replaced by our former students. It doesn't get much more gratifying than that for an educator. In the meantime, we're counting on God's redemption, looking forward to His mighty hand picking us up and hurling us into a sea of more adventure.