

## Ground Zero for Haitian Migrant Children

My name is Shelley Koehler and I am a devoted CLC'er with the Pilgrims on the Journey group in Guelph, Ontario. I have always felt a call to go and work with the less fortunate. By design my husband and I organized a sabbatical year this school year. As a teacher, I was able to plan more easily my volunteer experience in the Dominican Republic working with Haitian migrant children. With the patient assistance of Fr. JP Horrigan and many of the CLC'ers in Guelph, a mountain of emails and incessant praying I was able to solidify my plans to travel to the DR. Following a connection between CLC Central and Fr. Mario Serrano, a Jesuit priest who works on the front lines in the Dominican, plans have been evolving. On Oct. 13th, I arrived to the heat and humidity of the Island of Hispaniola.

It has been a few days into my two month volunteering visit. Though it has been quite a cultural adjustment to contend with, I am moving forward because of my commitment and desire to fulfil this long awaited dream of giving of my time and treasure. I am living with a woman and her son, arranged by Fr. Mario in a small city called Dajabon, which is a border city with Haiti. With God's hand, I have just started to help with feeding Haitian migrant youth three meals a day. Fr. Mario, a man with vision, has devised a four step plan: 1) to provide love and food, 2) to find a shelter for these young boys as they live on the street, 3) to give them clean clothes and the ability to wash themselves and 4) to educate them.

The social systems don't easily provide protection for the child here and essentially are non-existent for a migrant Haitian child that has no voice. I am praying that with Fr. Mario's vision we can give these young boys love and dignity as Jesus would expect of all of us. In Christ's name, Shelley Koehler

