We arrived yesterday with no problems. Customs was fine and the large suitcases really seemed to work. In total, we had nine suitcases, each weighing 50 lbs. unfortunately, when we arrived at the hotel, the Internet was down and we could not communicate. Today, we sorted supplies for our day trip to Elizabeth and Joel’s house. With about 24 children, we did a candle art activity, which was a big hit. Elizabeth said she would light them all next week and line them on the window. We left her kitchen leaving a trail of tissue, glitter, and glue behind us. Afterword, we went to Joel’s church service, which was joyous with lots of singing and interpretive dancing. When we entered the church, it was beautifully decorated with blue and white drapes and garnishes. They made a point of thanking us for everything we do for them during the service. Currently, they are working on making an outside worship space to expand their church as the previous room is getting quite crowed, with about 50 people coming to each service. Joel and Elizabeth are always such gracious hosts and made everyone feel welcome! On our way home, we stopped at the store to buy food for tomorrow’s trip to Hoyo Clara. We bought food for five families including cabbage, salami, eggs, beans, rice, olive oil, vinegar, etc. We are looking forward to riding in the back of a truck and some donkeys. Have a nice night!

Day 2

Hola! Our day started very early, getting up and out by 7:30 a.m. Wilson took us to Joel’s house where we met a man who told us about the beginning of the construction for Joel’s outside church. We were so excited last night to see how many members Joel’s church had; it is so wonderful to see a church grow! They said that the total cost of the construction for the new church would come to $1200 and that they work would have to be delayed. We saw that financially helping is a great way to support Joel’s ministry and we donated $800 and are excited the church could be completed by possible Friday. It is completely amazing that you can start the week worshiping in one inadequate place and end the week worshiping in a new one! We will hopefully be able to share pictures of this new building on Friday! Then, we piled into Pablo’s (church member) small pickup truck to start our journey to Hoyo Clara. In total, we had 17 people in the truck along with about 100 lbs of groceries. Caroline and Kelsey decided to go the adventurous route and rode in the flatbed with 10 other people and the supplies. The trip went smoothly, that was until we left the highway and followed the rough dirt road. After seven miles of bumps and laughs, we made it to the end of the road where we then had to hike up to the village on treacherous limestone. They were so excited to see us! We gathered in an open area with homemade benches and distributed supplies, clothing, medicine, and food to each family. We also met Elmando Brron, a 53 year old man with a severely ulcerated leg caused by his diabetes. The open wound spanned from his ankle to his knee. We were able to provide transportation to Santa Domingo and medical care for him next week. In the meantime, we will pick up his diabetes medication when we go to Higuey. Our prayers go with him and we think there may be a major surgery soon. After the supplies were dispersed, we played games with the children, teaching them how to play Duck, Duck, Goose, Patty Cake, and Volleyball. All the people were such gracious hosts and provided us with a lunch of potatoes and scrambled eggs. Looking at their houses, we were glad to have brought mosquito netting to cover their beds. Sue and Corey had much fun teaching the kids how to make FrootLoop necklaces and it is funny to see how children everywhere love arts and crafts. We ended our time in Hoyo Clara with a very spiritual service that many people participated in. They laid hands on Elmando and Moses (we were surprised that Moses had survived as we had heard that he was very sick and had possibly died) and prayed for God’s healing hand. Travelling back to Joel’s house, we had a minute to really admire how beautiful the area is. At Joel’s house, we saw how construction was already progressing. We were back at the hotel by 3:30 p.m. and are beginning to sort our supplies for tomorrow’s trip to Higuey.

Day 3

Buenos Dias! We started our day by meeting Wilson at 9:30 a.m. and drove to Higuey. Our first stop was the Wal-Mart of the Dominican Republic, Iberia. There, we went to the pharmacy, grocery store, and clothing departments to buy the medicine for Elmando Brron with the ulcerated leg and prenatal vitamins for Esperanza, our hostess who is expecting her third set of twins. We also bought her clothes and diapers. At the grocery store, we picked up food for tomorrow’s visit to the Haitian family and Elvis’ family. We got back in the car and went to Wilson’s village and were greeted by many children and a delicious meal of French fries, fried chicken, and fried plantains (and salad). Afterwards, we taught the children how to make God’s Eyes and FrootLoop/ beaded necklaces. We handed out Easter eggs, school supplies, and toothbrushes, which they enjoyed very much. Kelsey and Caroline taught some of the kids to play American football, and they taught them their version of basketball, soccer, and volleyball. We got to walk around the village and see the different houses. The Pastor’s wife who lives across the street from Wilson recently had a hysterectomy and has unfortunately contracted an infection. Her doctor called in the prescription for her antibiotic and we were able to pick it up at another pharmacy. We were very surprised that the medication would have to be administered through an IV, and are hoping that Amaryllis will be able to help her with it tonight. Then, we went to Joel’s for a quick visit to see the progression of the new church. So far, the frame is mostly done and we are still hoping that the church will be done by Friday so we can be the first ones to worship there. We also dropped off the extra supplies and medication for Hoyo Clara. Home by dinner, another long day, but we are looking forward to the mountain school and the clinic tomorrow.

Day 4

Today, we went off with more supplies to Peñón de los Reyes, or what we like to call the Mountain Village. We stopped first at the Haitian family’s house and were greeted by smiles, hugs, and outstretched hands. We brought the family food, shoes, and invited them to join us at the school where we would hand out other supplies. At the school, we gave the children paper, pens, pencils, toothbrushes, Spanish reading books, notebooks, and crayons. We also bought pineapple icees from a local woman. There were about thirty children at the school, and we encouraged them to go to school everyday until our return in August. The water is still working at the school, which was exciting to see. It also looked like the kids have used the basketball court often. Then we stopped at the local clinic and met the new doctor, Juan Paul, who just moved in yesterday. He gave us a list of supplies needed for the clinic, which we will give him tomorrow. We also talked to him about immunizations and tetanus shots for all the children. Then we went to see Elvis and his family. They recently moved to a new ranch that is very isolated, leaving Elvis and his siblings with no friends and unable to go to school. The father is still taking care of his cattle and they looked happy. Elvis’ boot had obviously been worn, which is good, but is now too small. We arranged for a new boot and a doctor’s appointment for Monday. Looking at the foot, it is much better than before, but he has not done physical therapy, making his foot stiff. We are hoping that he will learn some exercise to help his foot. We bought him and his mother a bus ticket to Higuey where Wilson will pick him up and bring him to the doctors for the new boot and physical therapy. Wilson said he would update us of Elvis’ progress on Facebook. Yesterday, we mentioned the Pastor’s wife in Wilson’s village with the infection after her hysterectomy. She was able to get her first injection of medication, but it was done at the clinic. We have been praying about her problem with not having a bathroom. No one seemed excited about our solution of a joint compound bucket and a toilet seat. We think now the problem is that there is no privacy and they need a small room built. We were happy to get back at a reasonable time and are off to eat at the Mexican Restaurant. Buenos Noches!

Day 5

Hello from the warm and sunny Dominican Republic! Today, Wilson picked us up and hiding in the back was his son Alberto, who stayed the entire day with us. We also were happy to discover that Sue can use her debit card. We went to Higuey to pick up additional supplies, including more medicine for the pharmacy and snacks for the pre-school. We decided on small cups and FrootLoops, which came in handy later on. Then, we picked up a phone for Elvis’ father so that he could communicate with Wilson about appointments. As we drove to Higuey and then to the clinic, Alberto, Kelsey, and Caroline entertained themselves by drawing tropical pictures; Alberto was a great drawer. We went to the clinic to drop off the medicine and found that the doctor was at a meeting in Higuey. But, we were able to get into the clinic and leave all of the supplies (photo to come). After, we went to the pre-school and were greeting by tons of smiling faces. We gave the teacher school supplies, to which she handed out to the students. The FrootLoops went over very well and they were very excited. Kelsey and Caroline taught the kids how to use stamps and ink pads and Corey, Sue, and Bobbie helped the children make beaded necklaces. Maybe in August we will paint the inside of the pre-school, but the new roof we put on in August looks great! We took lots of photos. At 3:00, we left the pre-school and headed to the Macaw beach where we had a wonderful fresh fish dinner. Back to the hotel at 5:30, we are excited to see the completion of Joel and Elizabeth’s worship area tomorrow. Buenos Noches!

Day 6

Hola! Today was another beautiful day! We left early and went to the clinic to discuss with the doctor the children’s immunization records. We were surprised to find out that the office has world health booklets that the family keeps at their homes. On the topic of immunizations, we learned that the clinic is not authorized to administer the immunizations due to the lack of electricity and poor refrigeration. We learned, however, that the children can take their books to another clinic to get their immunizations. He explained to us that tetanus is not a problem in the Dominican, which is surprising because of the glass, metal, etc. objects on the ground. We told the doctor we would keep in contact with him through Facebook and we wished him luck on his new position. After, we met a very nice lady name Cathy from Niagara, Ontario who owns a ranch in the Dominican. We were able to go zip lining or horseback riding and shared an excellent chicken dinner. Alexander, who had been a jockey in the United States, was kind enough to show us how they grow and make cocoa and coffee. It was very interesting to see how they use the old mortar and pestle as well as a meat grinder. The ranch was beautiful and the people were very accommodating. We then went to see Elizabeth and Joel and to see the progress of their worship space. Along the way, Wilson stopped on the road to get us sugar cane. We were all a little surprised that he had a machete under his front seat. It was a very nice gesture but it is not something we would go out of our way to eat again. Elizabeth was very happy to see us and showed us the new space. It was almost done, except for some portions of the floor, and we were happy to share her excitement of worshiping in this new space on Sunday. She explained to us how important our ministry is in Hoyo Clara and how much they appreciate everything we do. We are hoping that when we return in August, they will have replanted their bean fields and had a productive harvest. Another long day, but we are sad to be leaving tomorrow. Hopefully, we will be returning to Hartford by midnight. Keep us in your prayers. Buenos Noches.