

Greg

WR 13100

Professor Clauss

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An Experience That Will Never be Forgotten

Situation: As someone who is dedicated to service, I am writing this essay to convince my 17-year old brother, Steve, and his friend Jimmy to go on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic next summer. I had an opportunity to go on the same type of trip over the summer before my senior year of high school. The trip was one of the greatest experiences of my life, and since my brother and his friend are still undecided on whether or not they want to go, I hope to convince them that it is well worth the time and effort to go on the trip.

Dear Steve and Jimmy,

Both of you remember when I left for two weeks to go on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic with our church. When I returned from the trip, you heard me talk about the great experiences. Now, you both are arriving at the time when I made the commitment to go to the Dominican Republic, the beginning of junior year. I know you both have doubts about whether or not you should go on the trip. I had similar doubts, but I am glad that I decided to go as it was one of the best experiences of my life. I would like to share with you why I feel that you should go on the Dominican Republic mission trip next summer.

Although I have told both of you about the trip before, I am going to briefly mention what actually happens over the course of the two weeks that you are in the Dominican Republic. According to Education Across Borders, the non-profit organization that puts together these mission trips, the trips are designed to promote “personal and societal change rooted in a vision of the common good...we work in partnership with communities to co-create lasting solutions to extreme poverty.” During your first week in the Dominican Republic, your group will stay in a coffee farming village called Franco Bido, in the central mountain range of the country. While

there, you will have the opportunity to live with a Dominican family, help build homes in their community and learn about their way of life. Living with the family is an aspect of the experience that is life changing. You will have the opportunity to interact on a personal level with a family from a culture completely different from our own. In particular, the interactions with the children in your host family are awesome. When I went on the trip, I always enjoyed coming back from a long day of building to see the two children in my host family, Oscar and Erika. They loved to have me carry them around on my shoulders. Sometimes, they would even walk with me to the worksite in the mornings. The work you will do while in Franco Bido is physically demanding, but still quite fun. Most days would consist of mixing cement, digging a foundation, or helping to build the walls of a home, in a climate that was usually 80+ degrees and very humid. The work is frequently exhausting, but the look on the faces of the homeowners is well worth the physical hardship. At the end of the week, you will take your leave of Franco Bido and move on to the second portion of the mission trip.

For the second week, you will travel to a retreat center near the coast and take day trips to a small community of Haitian migrant workers just outside the city of Santiago. You will learn about the history of the village, interact with the people there, and once again, work on several homes. One aspect of the town I will not forget is that it is a town of migrant workers. Almost all of the people there had moved from Haiti to work in the Dominican Republic. I remember one of the people living there saying that the situation in Haiti is so bad that the Dominican Republic is considered a land of hope, that if they can get into the country, their lives will be better. Despite this, most of the homes are made of sheets of tin and are held together with iron spikes and bottle caps. Garbage is everywhere, and they have little to no running water. Although the homes that

you will work on are only made of cement blocks, the improvement in quality of life is drastic. After working in this village for a week, you will return home to the United States.

The two week Dominican Republic experience may seem like a long commitment, but one reason why I think that you two should make the commitment to this experience is that it helps you live out your Catholic values. According to Catholic Social Teaching, a series of teachings on morality and positive living compiled by the Catholic Church, “we are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers wherever they may be.” The trip allows you to actively practice some of the aspects of our Roman Catholic faith. Living out my faith was a major positive aspect to this mission trip. Since both of you haven’t had many opportunities yet to participate in helping others outside the United States, the Dominican Republic trip provides an excellent chance to help the less fortunate in another country, and should not be dismissed lightly. The fact that you are able to experience your Catholic faith in a personal way is a major factor supporting why I feel that you should make the Dominican Republic mission trip.

In addition to being able to practice your faith out in the world, the time in the Dominican Republic allows you to experience a lifestyle completely different than the life you are used to experiencing back in Seattle. You will meet people who have never watched TV, who don’t have cell phones, and who live off almost nothing. For example, I will never forget the story a Haitian migrant worker told me about his life experience. He explained that he made roughly 35 pesos, or \$7 a day, which he had to use to feed his entire family. I was shocked as I realized that the amount of money that goes into one of my Chipotle burritos is what some people have to use as an entire daily wage. This is just one isolated example, but it is eye opening to meet people who come from and have life experiences vastly different than many people have back in the United

States. I found this to be one of the best facets of the trip. The opportunity to travel and meet people who appear to have almost nothing in common with you, live with them in an environment that allows you to interact on a personal level, and then find out that you have more in common than you think. For example, I particularly treasured the time I spent playing with the children of my host family. Although we didn't speak the same language, or come from the same culture, we really got along well. Additionally, the happiness you can bring to the families whose homes you work on is an aspect that really made me enjoy the trip. For these reasons, it is my belief that both of you should make the decision to go on the trip to the Dominican Republic.

Another aspect of the trip that will be helpful to two high school juniors is that it is an excellent experience to draw upon for college applications. For one, it is an excellent indicator of your commitment to helping others that can stand out in your applications. A vital portion of the college application, having just gone through the process last year, is having a wide variety of activities that are unique. This is definitely something that will jump out to someone reading your application. Not many students take two week trips over the summer before their senior year to a foreign country to do service. Additionally, experiences like this trip provide a wealth of topics and ideas to draw on when it comes time to write the dreaded college application essays. All the interactions you have with the people, especially those you live with for a week are perfect to draw upon when writing your essays. Since both of you want to attend the best possible colleges, this trip would be a highly beneficial supplement to your application, which is another reason I encourage both of you to go to the Dominican Republic next summer.

Although the benefits of this mission trip are significant, I'm sure you have some doubts or worries too. I would like to address these concerns because in actuality, many of them should not be a problem for either of you. The biggest aspect I worried about was that I spoke no

Spanish whatsoever, and the Dominican Republic is a Spanish speaking country. I worried about living with a Spanish speaking family for a whole week, and how I would communicate with them. However, this turned out to be a minor problem as I was able to communicate with hand gestures and a little broken Spanish. Additionally, for the both of you, this should not be a problem because you have taken Spanish for 3 years in high school.

Another common worry of those thinking about going is the assumption that you will get seriously ill. This is a valid concern because it would not make sense to travel all the way to the Dominican Republic to just get sick and not be able to benefit from the full experience. However, from my experience, the trekkers do not get seriously sick in a way that negatively impacts their experience. The trip organizers do a very good job of educating you beforehand about how to prepare, and are very helpful during the trip in helping you avoid eating or drinking something that would likely cause you to get sick. With the proper preparation, the chance of getting sick is actually very small.

A third concern for some participants is that the trip lasts for two full weeks, which can be significant portion of the summer to miss, making it difficult to find the time for this commitment, especially if you are looking to get a job over the summer as well. However, from my experience, the trip did not negatively impact the rest of my summer. For example, I talked with my football coach beforehand and put together a workout that I could do while in the Dominican Republic. Additionally, in the past, both of you have used yard work as your main form of employment. It would be relatively easy to just not schedule any jobs over those two weeks. While these may seem like significant concerns, the benefits of the trip will far outweigh any potential negatives that you may experience.

For me, the decision to go on the mission trip was a tough one, because I had to give up two weeks of conditioning and lifting for my senior season of high school football, and I was unable to get a consistent job that summer. However, I do not regret the decision at all. Being able to meet all those new people and practice my Catholic faith, as well as getting ideas for my own college applications, helped make this trip one of the greatest experiences of my life. Steve and Jimmy, I hope that, as you both continue your junior years, you decide to make a quality decision to go on the mission trip to the Dominican Republic.

Sincerely,

Greg

Works Cited

About Education Across Borders. Education Across Borders. Web. 1 Nov. 2010

Themes of Catholic Social Teaching. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005. Web.
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