

## History of the Dominica Service-Learning Project

- Academic year 2001-02 saw the second learning community at Le Moyne. Students were offered the possibility of doing a domestic alternative break in conjunction with Campus Ministry or an international one organized by Don Maldari.
  - Through contacts from my time in Haiti I explored possible sites in Haiti, Jamaica and Dominica.
    - Haiti proved too dangerous and had the disadvantage that students could not speak the language
    - My contacts in Jamaica never replied
    - Dominica seemed like a good choice:
      - safe
      - need and good work opportunities
      - the national language is English
      - cooperative contacts in Dominica
  - Ten students and three chaperons (Anne Herron, Jeanne Darby and I) participated
    - We lived in the “Youth Centre,” a rustic dormitory with kitchen and meeting room. We stayed in Roseau, the capital city.
    - Students work sites:
      - school for handicapped
      - juvenile delinquent center
      - a number of elementary schools
      - nursing home for the indigent
    - For future learned which sites were most profitable and decided to expand to northern town of Portsmouth.
    - I decided that a more formal reflection component was necessary. We prayed together but that seemed insufficient.
- Academic year 2002-2003 saw more learning communities. The Dominica project was open to people whom I didn’t know well.
  - We split in two groups: one to Roseau and the other to Portsmouth
  - In Portsmouth we lived in a rectory; I replaced the parish priest.
  - Work sites in Portsmouth: the parish elementary school, a juvenile vocational school, daycare center, women’s center.
  - The students were offered the possibility of taking a 3-credit course in anthropology taught by an adjunct anthropology professor who came on the trip and who studied Dominica. Mixed results, mostly because of the instructor. No longer at Le Moyne.
- Academic year 2003-2004. “The year from hell.”
  - We split our time between Roseau and Portsmouth
  - Patty Schmidt taught a 3-credit course in cultural diversity
  - Half the students were not committed to the project but saw it more as an opportunity for a free Caribbean vacation.
- Academic year 2004-2005. A much better experience.
  - The application process and orientation became more strict

- Patty Schmidt again taught a cultural diversity course
- Pam Ethington and her husband joined us at their own expense. Both had recently done the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola.
- Academic year 2006-2007. I was on sabbatical 2005-2006 so there was no trip.
  - Difficult to recruit students.
  - Activities the same as 2005
- Academic year 2008-2009
  - Decided to go every other year so as to provide a larger pool of students from which to choose participants.
  - Patty Schmidt could no longer go to Dominica; Joe Marina and I taught the 1-credit course REL 100: “Catholic Theological Reflection on Service”
  - The group was large so we split between Portsmouth and Roseau as in 2002-2003
- Academic year 2010-2011
  - Our contacts in Portsmouth left Dominica and a new pastor in the parish was not cooperative so we decided not to return to Portsmouth
  - The Youth Centre in Roseau was undergoing repairs so we stayed in a small village about 20 minutes by bus from Roseau
  - Nancy Ring and I co-taught REL 100
- Academic year 2012-13
  - I’m in conversation with Karel Blakely about collaborating with theater students to develop intercultural theater events in Dominica.

## **Evaluation**

The evolution of the project has been felicitous. The last two trips went exceedingly well. In particular:

- We have established good relations with people in Roseau, including
  - the Catholic bishop who receives the group every year.
  - people in the farmers market who greet us like family each time we go
  - the people in the sites where the students work
- The group has been challenged to reflection on
  - the relation between people from first and third world countries
    - beware of poverty-tourism
  - differences in culture
  - issues of social justice
  - the promotion of communion among peoples
  - consumerism
  - ethnocentrism
  - prejudices, including the foods they refuse to eat....
- A good balance among
  - service
  - academics
  - fun and community building. Dominica is one of the most beautiful places on earth.

## **Why Dominica**

Dominica was the last island in the Caribbean to be colonized by Europeans. There is still a small Carib Indian population, the only one in the Caribbean. The island changed hands between England and France a number of times. The island, therefore, has a mixture of West African, French, English and Carib cultures. The country is among the poorest in the Caribbean because of the lack of natural resources, especially beaches for tourists. The population is not, however, destitute as in Haiti. The country has a very low crime rate, is free from diseases such as malaria, has plenty of potable water, and students can communicate in English.