

Day 1 – Tuesday, June 19

On June 19th at four in the morning, 25 people gathered with 45 checked bags plus their carry-ons at the Dane County Regional Airport. The 2018 Dominican Republic Hands of Hope mission team was ready to go. After confirming bags were under weight and handing them to the friendly Delta agents, the team members grabbed their travel buddies and headed through security. Everyone had time to eat some breakfast and fill up their water bottles before embarking on the first of two plane rides of the day.



A short flight to Atlanta and a brisk walk through the airport brought us to flight number two, which would take us all the way to the Dominican Republic. Team members rested on the flight to prep for the day ahead. We arrived in Santo Domingo, the capital of the country, at around 1:30PM. We were greeted by a familiar face - Almonte, one of the Hands of Hope missionaries in the DR, as well as some new faces who would be helping the team this year.

We managed to load ourselves plus all 60+ suitcases onto the bus (using some aisle space), and set off for the day. First stop: Dominican pizza. We had to assure our hosts that we did not want to go to Pizza Hut or Dominoes (American pizza), but preferred to eat the local cuisine – in which we were not disappointed. Most pizzas get covered with a layer of sweet corn (what I now call Dominican style), and the team tasted its unique deliciousness.



The next stop was the hotel. We had some time to get into our rooms and drop off the luggage, but shortly after arriving we returned to the bus to head to the community for a Welcoming Ceremony. We always try to prepare the new team members for what they are about to experience, though it seems we can never do it justice. The excitement of the kids leads them to run along the bus, tapping on windows when we park - trying to get the attention of the whole team. As people get off the bus, they are greeted by numerous children - who want to hold hands, get a hug, or simply see a smile. The children then led us to our seats for the show.



Many of the sponsored children for Hands of Hope had been preparing for months to perform for us. They formed in lines in front of our seats as they began. Chanting/songs, marching formations, and a "stomp" routine were all part of the act. After the performance, each of the kids brought a piece of art they had painted to one

of the team members. We were then ushered into the library where we received some delicious ice cream and apple juice. One of our team members, Paul, recounted the scene at that evening's devotion time, calling out how much grace was included in the welcome. Certainly, a lesson for us to learn in how to greet others with hospitality.

We said our daily goodbyes, boarded the bus, and headed back to the hotel. We had dinner and a meeting to plan for the next day's activities, then headed to bed to rest up for the next day.

