



Saint Catherine of Siena Church

Dominican Republic Adult Trip



St. Catherine of Siena Church invites you on a wonderful exchange program with the Portal de Belén in Monte Plata, Dominican Republic.

January 5 – 13, 2018

2018 Adult Trip

St. Catherine's and the Missionary Sisters of Jesus/Portal de Belén community have been working together for many years. Our relationship is one of mutual caring, learning, and cooperation. Since the beginning of this relationship, St. Catherine's has sent groups of youth and their adult leaders over to Monte Plata for visits. In 2015, we initiated a biannual Adult Trip. We hope to continue to send groups of youth (odd years) and adult (even years) for many years to strengthen our relationship and broaden our understanding of each other.

Focus of the Trip

This trip is intended to be for adults and young adults. We plan on taking approximately 15 people on the trip, as this is the amount of people that the Sisters can reasonably feed and host at any one time.

The focus of our visit is on the people of Monte Plata and our purpose is to renew the bonds of friendship and cooperation between our communities. Although it is possible that there are ways that we can be helpful during the trip, it isn't intended as a service trip. Instead, it is intended as an opportunity to witness the work that is happening within the community, to get to know the children at the Portal de Belén and their families, and to build a stronger relationship with the Sisters. As a representative of St. Catherine's, you are assured of a warm welcome.

Our Hosts and Guides

Sister Iris, Sister Teresa, Sister Nilda, Sister Isabel, and the other Sisters are our hosts and guides while we are there. We will have people on the trip with us who speak Spanish and can help with translation. However, much of the communication that we will do with people will happen through smiles, hugs, and nonverbal communication.

We will most likely be hosted in the homes of longstanding members of the community. Many of these hosts are teachers at the Portal de Belén and have been hosting our youth and adults for many years. Most do not speak English, but our travelers have always found ways to communicate and enjoy the hospitality that is offered.

Meals are eaten together at the Portal.

Itinerary and Activities

You will have a week full of activities and visits within Monte Plata and to outlying communities. We don't have a daily schedule of activities because our hosts sort this out closer to our arrival, depending on what and who is available on any particular day.

Here is a list of some places we will probably visit:

- Portal de Belén Day Care and School: This is the main reason for our visit, and we will spend at least two days at the school, visiting with the children, getting to know the daily schedule, learning about how the school operates, helping to feed the babies/children, and enjoying a show that is always created for our benefit. We may also find a way that we can be particularly helpful at the school; e.g., in 2015 we helped to set up the computer lab.
- Clinic: The Missionary Sisters run a clinic within Monte Plata to serve the poor of the community. We will spend time with Sr. Nilda, learning how the Sisters are engaging in the health care options of their community.
- Home Visits: We'll visit some of the homes where the children of the Portal de Belén live. We will be intentional about trying to visit the families who were helped through the 200 Club.
- Day in Santo Domingo: We will accompany Sister Iris on her weekly shopping trip to Santo Domingo where she purchases everything needed for the Portal for the week. This is often one of the more fascinating parts of the experience – to see how Sr. Iris finds the best deals and works with specific people for specific products. Time for sightseeing is also included in this day.
- Visits with the Lay Missionaries of Jesus Community: There is a large community of men and women who work with the Sisters in Monte Plata to extend the Sisters' mission and minister to the community. We will spend time with this community – learning about each other and praying with each other.
- College Residential Center: If possible, we will head to Nagua to see the College Dorm that houses the young women who are attending the University in Nagua. Sr. Teresa oversees this project.

Travel

We will leave on Friday, January 5, late afternoon, to travel by bus to Newark, then stay overnight at the hotel near the airport. Our flight will leave early on Saturday, arriving in Santo Domingo around 2 p.m. Our return flight will leave in the early afternoon on the following Saturday, arriving in Philadelphia around 6 p.m. Bus transportation will return us to Ithaca on the same evening, weather permitting, arriving around midnight.

What to Expect While There

Accommodations: You will be staying with a local family--with a relative, with a friend, or possibly alone. The homes where we stay are primarily the homes of lay members of the Missionary Sisters of Jesus. Homes are modest but clean. You will share a bathroom with the rest of the household, which will most likely involve a bucket shower. There tends to be limited electricity in Monte Plata.

Food: All of your food will be prepared safely and lovingly for you at the Portal--breakfast, lunch, and dinner. When we travel outside of the Portal, the Sisters make arrangements for food from very trustworthy vendors. The food is not spicy and is nutritious. Bottled water is always available, and soda and coffee are served. Food should not be eaten in your host family's house (which can sometimes be difficult to decline).

Transport: We will use vehicles provided by the Sisters in Monte Plata, including the new bus that was recently purchased by our St. Catherine's community.

Fitness & Health: The trip is not strenuous, and anyone who is reasonably fit and healthy will be able to participate. The places we will be staying are generally clean and safe, but there are a few precautions to take before and during the trip. We will send you details when you enroll, and you'll need to consult with your own physician or travel clinic about the medicines and vaccines that you will need.

Language: Little English is used or understood. If you are not a Spanish speaker, we suggest that you do some things to prepare for your trip. Minimally, download Google translator or something similar to help you communicate with your host family. You might also consider taking some Spanish language classes. However, throughout the trip, there will be translation into English by our hosts and guides, and you can survive without knowing Spanish.

Weather: Our trip is planned for winter, a nice time to leave the cold north and head south. The Dominican Republic is warm during this time, but not hot or uncomfortable. And since we're inland, it's not as humid as the coast.

What is Expected of You

Prior to going...

1. We will have three preparation meetings prior to leaving on the trip.
 - a. October 29 at 4 p.m.--An initial meeting for community building, learning more about the trip, planning for fundraising, etc.
 - b. November 19 at 4 p.m.--A cultural meeting to help us better understand the culture of the Dominican Republic. This will include information about the history of the area, agriculture, topography, etc.
 - c. December 3 at 1 p.m.--A meeting to discuss the situations that we will encounter in the D.R., with the goal of understanding some of the injustices built into the society and how the Missionary Sisters are working to build up the community.
2. We will meet prior to the trip to pack suitcases of donated items, review our agenda for the week, and make final preparations--TBD.
3. Participate in fundraising activities.
4. Participate in planning meetings for fundraising activities.
5. Participate in a blessing from community on Sunday, December 31.
6. Submit an essay (250–500 words) detailing why you want to go on the trip to the D.R. This will be used to help the parish know more about our travelers through the bulletin, website, and a bulletin board in the Parish Center. If you are not a writer, other creative options are available to you.

Upon returning

One of the primary reasons for the parish to host this trip, besides the important work of building relationships between our two communities, is so that the parishioners of St. Catherine's can gain a better sense of this relationship through the stories you will tell and the information you will bring back with you. This pilgrimage cannot end with our return to Ithaca. That is just the beginning.

There are many ways that you might choose to respond to your experience:

1. Provide leadership for the Dominican Republic Development Committee (DRDC). This is the group that looks at ways to strengthen the relationship between the Portal de Belén and St. Catherine's and to raise awareness of this relationship here in Ithaca.
2. Provide leadership for the 200 Club. This is a fundraising group that selects a specific focus each year for projects in the Dominican Republic. This group annually raises over \$12,000.

3. Share your experience at a Life and Faith Session on Sunday, January 28, from 10:15–11:15 a.m., through the bulletin, Facebook, and website, or other opportunities.
4. Start a new project/focus for St. Catherine's. You may find that the best way you can help is directly connected to your education, background, professional experience, etc. We are hopeful that you will find a specific way that you can help St. Catherine's to be a greater support to the community of Monte Plata and/or to help us better share this relationship with our parish community.

Code of Conduct

Although this is an adult-focused trip, it is still a trip intended as a communal experience and a pilgrimage. To ensure a good experience for everyone, the following rules are important for the good of all and for the safety of participants.

1. You must stay with the group at all times unless you have received specific permission from the trip leader. This includes meals, day trips, etc.
2. Meals are a communal experience at the Portal de Belén. All are expected to participate.
3. Appropriate dress is expected throughout the trip. Since we are traveling from our parish to another Catholic community, special attention should be paid to making sure that clothing is not revealing, does not contain inappropriate slogans / advertisements, etc.
4. Alcohol is permitted, with limits. It is not appropriate to drink in excess or to make it the center of any experience. Care should be taken when children/youth are present.

Costs

Total Cost: \$900-\$1,000

This will cover your airfare, bus transport to Newark, and hotel in Newark.

Additional Costs:

1. Just prior to the trip, an additional \$60 (cash) will be collected to cover your tourist card, food at the Portal, and a tip for the bus driver.
2. You will be expected to purchase a gift for your host family (about \$20) and might also wish to purchase small toys and candy for the children.
3. You will want a small amount of money to spend in the D.R. Most participants find that less than \$30 is spent, not counting gifts and souvenirs. Additional monies are spend on our travel days for food.
4. If you don't have a valid passport, one will be needed.
5. Your health care provider should be consulted about what shots/pills you will need or could take. What you need depends on what inoculations you currently have and what your insurance will cover. Estimated cost varies on where you go for the vaccinations and your insurance. Information about vaccines and medicines is available on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/dominican-republic>.

Fundraising

St. Catherine's does not have any scholarship money available for this trip. However, we are aware the individuals and families may need help in paying for the trip. If needed, fundraising can be arranged. If so, we would ask all trip participants to help with the fundraising, even if you do not need the proceeds from the fundraiser for your expenses.