

Haiti Immersion Report

In keeping with their Corporate Witness Statement to connect with the people of Haiti, the Sisters of the Humility of Mary conducted the first of a series of immersion experiences to Haiti.

The trip was open to HM Sisters, associates, volunteer alumni, former members and ministry partners. The Haiti Committee selected four women from the applicants to participate in the trip, which took place Dec. 1-7, 2012. They were Wendy Sikora, Jackie Stringer, Lynn Rollins and Stacy Dever.

Sr. Mary Pat Cook took part in the trip and facilitated arrangements and meetings leading up to the trip. Meetings included prayer, reflection on scripture, contemplative time and faith sharing. Sr. Toby Lardie educated the group on cultural awareness and understanding, and Sisters Susan Schorsten and Ruthmary Powers shared the history of the HM connection with Haiti as well as their own trip experiences.



Sr. Judy Dohner, our HM Sister in Haiti, arranged and led all activities for the group and served as translator of the Creole language.

“The purpose of the trip was not to do, but to be with and get to know part of Haiti and some of her people,” said Sr. Mary Pat.

Following are the reflections from the group’s time in Haiti, an experience that enabled them to see the hand of God in even the most devastating conditions.

We were drawn to the Haiti immersion trip for many different reasons and very

similar reasons. We knew this wasn’t a service trip and we weren’t called to help “per se,” but we believed that just maybe we could make a difference.

To prepare us for our firsthand experience, we learned all we could about the Haitian people, their culture, their faith and their struggles. We read, we met, we talked, we learned and we prepared. But nothing could have really prepared us for Haiti.

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*Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos (NPH), Spanish for “Our Little Brothers and Sisters,” was started in 1954 to care for homeless children. Over 17,900 children have grown up in the NPH family, which now operates homes in Honduras, Haiti, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Peru and Bolivia. Today, over 3,300 children are being cared for in the loving, secure environment of NPH.



Left: The school then. Right: The school now.

Arriving late on a Saturday night, we were whisked through lots of people, traffic and dust to our lodgings, a new volunteer center established for visitors to NPH* facilities in the area.

Our eyes were opened and hearts began to break during our initial trip through Port-au-Prince. We knew the clean-up since the earthquake, now over three years ago, was ongoing, but in some places there were still areas of tent/shack cities as far as the eye could see with piles of garbage being foraged by dogs, pigs and goats. We saw men, women and children spill out of these deplorable areas, ready to begin their day.

The extremes of Haiti were everywhere. Mothers with sick children lined up early outside St. Damien Pediatric Hospital. Most babies were suffering from malnutrition because the mother's milk did not provide sufficient sustenance. The sickest would enter the hospital while others were treated and sent home. Because of the lack of running water and sanitation, cholera has taken its toll on the country, rebounding whenever heavy rains occur.

At the end of each day, we met to talk about what we saw, what we learned and (the most difficult question) where we saw God. We saw so much poverty, sickness, hunger and death that we sometimes asked in tears, "Where is God in Haiti?"

Each experience was more emotional than the next, but when all was said and done, we did find God in Haiti.

God is in Sr. Judy's passion for the people of Haiti, for opening them, their country and their culture to others and to us. Her plan for the whole immersion experience was a blessing.

God is in the goodness of Ferel Bruno, who has committed himself to giving back to the community of Fond des Blancs, where he was raised. Ferel has created jobs by underwriting businesses

for the people in the village. He knows that to help the people, they need an opportunity to help themselves. This has been done through the building of a health clinic, an elementary school, a bakery to make bread for the immediate area, a concrete block business, hat-making, t-shirts and a gardening business. God can also be seen in the water system that was supported by the Sisters of the Humility of Mary through the Haiti Fund that you've read about in these *Haiti Updates*.

God is in the faith of Fr. Rick Frechette, who officially oversees St. Damien Pediatric Hospital, St. Luke Foundation and NPH orphanages, and unofficially brings the face of God to the most forsaken, destitute people in the world. His respect for the lives of the least of us is beyond compare. We were blessed to attend a liturgy that included funeral rites for 11 people, of whom a number were infants. Each was covered with a brightly colored blanket/pall and a small bouquet



Top left: Sr. Simone and Sr. Claudette, members of Haiti's Sisters of St. Antoine with Dr. Sabine Barlatt and Dr. Crispin Barlatt during their February visit to Villa Maria.



Top right: As part of their February time at Villa Maria, Sr. Simone (seated) and Sr. Claudette met Joanna Forbes, director of human resources, and her son Jude, whose name was inspired by a Haitian orphan, who died in the earthquake.



Bottom right: Celebrating the visit of the Haitian Sisters were (from left) Jackie Stringer, Lynn Rollins, Sr. Anne Victory, Sr. Claudette, Sr. Gay Rowzie, Sr. Mary Pat Cook, Sr. Simone, Stacy Dever, Sr. Josie Chrosniak and Wendy Sikora.

A NOTE FROM SR. SUSAN SCHORSTEN

Dear Friends:

It has been over a year since our last *Haiti Update*. Even though we have not provided an update of our involvement in Haiti, we have continued our commitment.

The Haiti Committee continues to meet on a regular basis and provides the direction for the disbursement of the funds so many of you have generously contributed.

We have purchased a second vehicle for the Sisters of St. Antoine, providing transportation for the sisters in formation who are living in the “temporary permanent houses” in Trouin, which were constructed in 2011.

Ferel Bruno and the communities in the Fond des Blancs continue to receive our support. Sr. Toby Lardie and I visited in August 2012, and we visited many of the projects Ferel is developing in this area. When Sr. Kathleen King and I visited just a few weeks ago, it was so encouraging to see the wonderful progress being made.

The school is now complete and there are over 200 students enrolled. The first class graduated in July of this year. In August the people had to walk through the river to get to the fresh, clean water supply, now a walking bridge has been built so that the people do not have to walk through the river.

Where once we had to drive through a large river to get to Fond des Blanc there is now a one lane bridge to drive over the river...the progress is wonderful and I know that the local residents of these communities are most appreciative.

On October 13, 2012, we hosted the first annual Haiti fundraiser Help for Haiti: An Evening of Inspiration. Fr. Rick Frechette and our own Sr. Judy Dohner shared their experiences and provided for a deeper understanding of the needs of our Haitian brothers and sisters. Please hold Sunday, **October 13, 2013**, for our second annual fundraiser for Haiti. Ferel Bruno will be with us to share his personal story and his hopes for his Haitian brothers and sisters.

In December 2012, a group of women accompanied Sr. Mary Pat Cook to Haiti for an immersion experience. Some of her reflections are in this *Update*.

In February 2013, Sisters Simone and Claudette visited with us at the Villa and also spent some time with the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God. The Franciscan Sisters shared with Srs. Simone and Claudette various aspects of spirituality and formation in the Franciscan tradition.

The time with our Haitian sisters and brothers and the trips to Haiti have been graced events. We share our experiences with you as you are a critical part of our ministry to, and with, the people of Haiti. We have been blessed by their stories, their experiences and their journeys. Thank you for “journeying” with us through your generous support and prayers.

Peace and God's Blessing,

Susan Schorsten, Am

Sister Susan Schorsten
Pastoral Leader



Left: The walking bridge then. Left: The walking bridge now.

of flowers. Fr. Rick knelt before each one and acknowledged and blessed each by name, commending them to our heavenly Father.

God is in the Sisters of St. Antoine, who work with minimal resources to educate the children of Fondwa, run an orphanage and encourage young women of Haiti to join their congregation. This rugged, mountainous area was hard hit by the earthquake, and the sisters tirelessly continue the process of rebuilding.

God is in the Haitians, who work to make their country a better place. Highlights of our trip were conversations with four Haitian professionals in leadership roles at St. Damien, who shared their background and opinions on issues they and their families have faced.

They spoke of the history and structure of the government and how, long before the earthquakes, the people of Haiti experienced the worst violence in the world, citing bribery, corruption, poverty and hunger as being everywhere.

The people of Haiti need the ability to make a living. Training takes money, but the money given to Haiti often gets waylaid and does not reach those who

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need it most. We were advised to tell our friends that money for Haiti should be given only to people they know on the ground in Haiti to ensure it goes to help those in need.

The future of Haiti will depend on the children, many of whom are malnourished and lacking in education. So getting food and education for the children of Haiti is critical. God is in all the people we met who take care of the thousands of orphans, sick and dying children who need help. Whether they be workers, sisters or volunteers, there are so many people who have devoted their time and lives to helping the children of Haiti, many of whom have no one. These are the children we cry and pray for.

We will always pray for all those in Haiti and hope you will too. We will continue to search for ways to make a difference.



Ferel Bruno's health clinic.

SAVE THE DATE!

Second Annual Help for Haiti: MOVING FORWARD

11 a.m.
Sunday, October 13, 2013
Villa Maria Community Center,
Villa Maria, Pa.

The event will begin with liturgy followed by lunch and a presentation by Ferel Bruno, a Haitian native with a passion to help all those in need and give hope to the hopeless. Ferel has been instrumental in bringing more abundant life to the people of Haiti by leading efforts to build clinics, water purification systems, bakeries, roads and bridges.

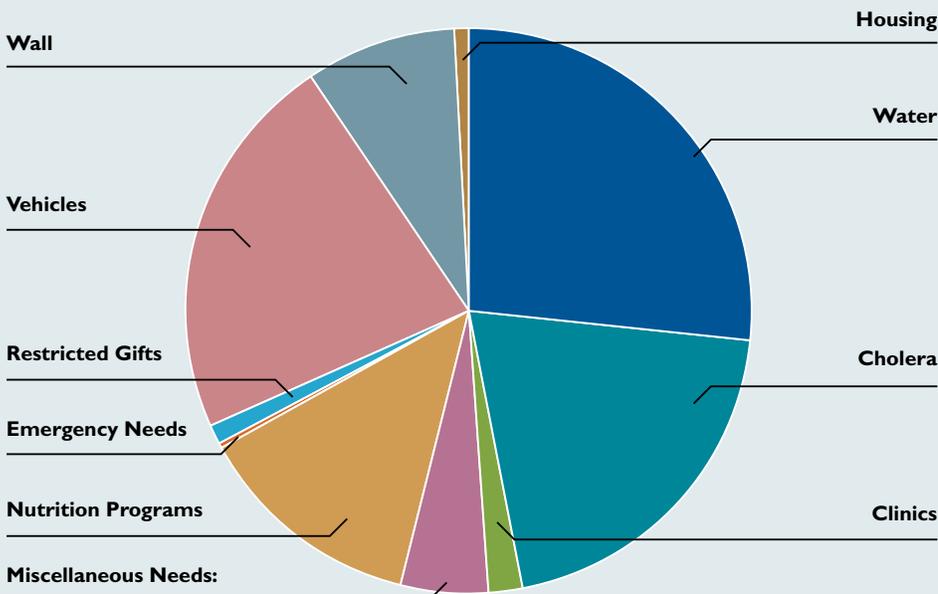
For more information, email hmdevelopment@humilityofmary.org

Invitations to follow.



Ferel Bruno and Sr. Kathleen King with some of the children he has made a life's work of helping.

Use of Contributions Distributed



Contributions Received: \$590,897
Grants Distributed: \$550,028 (93%)
Funds Remaining: \$40,869