

**CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY'S
OPERATION STARFISH® NEWSLETTER
JANUARY, 2007**

Dear Friends of **Operation Starfish®**:

A recent prayer service at Food For The Poor's headquarters began with a reading from the Second Letter of James:

What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But some one will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. Jas.2:14-18

This reading summarized for me, a meditation that began during Nativity Parish's September 2006 pilgrimage to Haiti. The journey brought home for me the incredible scope of "works" that have supplemented our prayers for the poor. The parishioners and friends of Church of the Nativity have certainly responded to the call of James with unwavering faith and substantial works. And the staff of Food For The Poor, working with Fr. Jean Printemps in Port-au-Prince, and with Fr. Duken Augustin in Cap-Haitien, have done an incredible job of project management to produce so much progress in such a short time.

Therefore, our opening prayer this month is one of gratefulness...

We thank God the Father for the opportunity He has given us to work together to serve His chosen ones – the poor.

We thank Jesus Christ, His Son, for the example He has set for us to be servants to each other.

And we thank God the Holy Spirit for awakening the beauty and the power within us to make a difference in the lives of those less fortunate.

Jim McDaniel

OUR PILGRIMAGE – FAITH IN ACTION

In September, 2006, Nativity parishioners traveled once again to Haiti with their pastor, Fr. Richard Martin, who began Operation Starfish in 1998. This was Fr. Martin's 9th

journey to Haiti. "I go as a humble witness," he said. "I go to see with my own eyes the work we have done, and I go to experience the strength, the faith, and the love of the Haitian people." Those who accompanied him brought encouragement across the sea to Haiti, and returned spiritually enriched.

Haiti – Day One

After a day of prayer and meetings at Food For The Poor's headquarters in Florida, the group took a 90-minute flight to Port-au-Prince. They were met at the airport by Angel Aloma, Executive Director of Food For The Poor, Delane Bailey, FFTP's Eastern Caribbean Project Director, and Fr. Jean Printemps, pastor of Ste. Marie Madeleine parish in Port-au-Prince. Because of the unstable conditions in Haiti's capital, they only stayed long enough to visit the FFTP feeding center and warehouse, where they were briefed by Mrs. Raymonde Pun. Fr. Printemps announced that the new primary school was open and work has begun on the vocational training center. He expressed his hope that Nativity parishioners could return when it is safer and they can spend some time at Nativity Village. He said the people there are very grateful for the continuing work and really want to see us and express their appreciation in person. Fr. Martin committed to doing everything possible to get there as soon as conditions permit.

Traveling behind a U.N. armored convoy, the group made their way to the domestic area of the Port-au-Prince airport and took a small plane to the north coast city of Cap-Haitien, where they were met by Fr. Duken Augustin. Just before landing, Delane pointed out the Nativity Village Housing Project at Prolongé. What was a tidal swamp during Fr. Martin's last visit in spring, 2006, now was a village with dry roads and nearly 100 colorful new houses.

Riding through downtown Cap-Haitien, the group was assaulted with the sights, sounds and smells of third world poverty:

- a dark and muddy marketplace teeming with hundreds of stalls displaying anything and everything for sale;
- fruit, vegetables, sugar cane, and cooked food, laid out on mats on the street, awaiting buyers;
- a woman carrying 7 layers of fresh eggs on her head;
- men building wooden coffins on the roof of a store;
- voices raised in song, in argument, in prayer;
- air thick with the odor of garbage, sewage and smoke;
- the constant presence of our armed security escorts.

The first stop was the Nativity Village Tilapia Farm, a project funded through Nativity's 2006 Lenten Starfish Campaign. The entire community had turned out to welcome the group with banners and balloons. School children sang welcome songs in Creole and in English and Fr. Martin cut a ribbon officially opening the project. The children presented Fr. Martin with fresh flowers – a rarity in Haiti. He graciously accepted the gift, then proceeded to pluck flowers from the bouquet and hand them to each of the children. One little boy was observed eating his flower.

This self-sustainable project is being developed by Food For The Poor in conjunction with the International Cooperation and Development Fund of Taiwan, who are providing technical expertise. There are three ponds, each capable of holding 7,000 fish. The farm will provide a source of food for the people of the area and a business and vocational training opportunity for the community.

Following the blessing of the ponds, and the feeding of the fish, everyone settled down to a wonderful dinner prepared by the villagers. Later that evening, the group met for prayer and reflection. Most remarked that, while the problem of poverty in Haiti is huge in scope, we can and are making a difference, one family at a time. Fr. Martin commented "Today we have seen hope realized."

Haiti – Day Two

The next day, the group traveled to Prolongé, site of the Nativity Village Housing Project. Last Spring, Fr. Martin and Robin Mahfood, President of FFTP, met with Fr. Duken and saw people living in horrendous conditions. There were hundreds of families trying to live in a tidal marsh. Their shacks were built on little piles of rubbish which kept them barely above the tide line. The space between houses flooded with the high tide twice a day. There was no clean drinking water and no sanitation. Both Fr. Martin and Mr. Mahfood committed to moving these people onto higher ground. The result is the Nativity Village Housing Project, with nearly 100 houses completed and more underway. Wells have been dug for drinking water and each house has a latrine-type toilet.

As the group arrived, the entire village erupted in song and dance. The drums were beating loudly, the people were dressed in their best outfits, and balloons and banners were once again in the air. One Nativity parishioner said "I feel like a rock star!" The entire day was filled with excitement and interaction. The Archbishop of Cap-Haitien led a parade through the village as he blessed the new houses and the families living in them. The villagers presented a program of song, dance and speeches. FFTP Exec. Dir. Angel Aloma gave his remarks in Haitian Creole, a feat which elicited a round of cheers from the villagers.

A truckload of food was brought in and Nativity parishioners fed the village families. Men, women and children were organized into groups – discussions for the adults, and crafts for the kids. The women and men asked pointed questions about family life, relationships and other issues. They wanted our advice – our point of view. The children made bracelets, blew bubbles and used crayons for the first time. Someone remarked "I never thought I'd see a child so excited over a #2 pencil!"

Tears of sadness and tears of joy flowed freely that day. There are 10,000 families who desperately need safe housing in this area. 100 families now have dry floors under their feet and roofs over their heads. But more than that, they now have hope – hope that will inspire them and others to strive for the education, training, and jobs that will make their lives more livable.

And as for the Nativity parishioners, we know what we can do. We have built 500 houses in the first Nativity Village. We have built schools, clinics, water and sanitation projects and vocational centers. We have started small businesses and co-op's. But more importantly, we have a partner in Food For The Poor who can and is leveraging the Starfish idea with churches, schools and organizations across the country. FFTP is currently in contact with over 1,700 churches, talking about Starfish projects for Lent, 2007. Imagine what can be accomplished if each one of these churches does a Starfish project this year. Imagine the number of people who can be helped.

That evening, Archbishop Hubert Constant invited the entire Nativity group to dinner at his residence. Roast goat, Haitian style was the main menu item. The Archbishop's hospitality was outstanding and his warm welcome deeply affirmed our commitment to the poor.

Tired, but filled with hope, the Nativity pilgrims slept well that night.

Haiti – Day Three

Next morning, the group headed out to Petit-Anse, a small village on the shore across the harbor from Cap-Haitien. Here, with funding from Nativity Church, FFTP is developing the first of a series of fishing village co-operatives along the north coast of Haiti. Fifteen families will be involved with the business of deep water fishing beyond the reef off Cap-Haitien. Equipment, training, and small business management classes will be provided. The co-op will be required to return a portion of the catch to those who cannot feed themselves, and will also re-invest a percentage of the revenue in maintenance and operation of the fleet. The fishing village concept was developed by FFTP in Jamaica. There, fishing co-op's have been successful in improving the economic condition of dozens of communities.

In Petit-Anse, fishing is now confined to the shallow water in the harbor, where stocks have been depleted and the catch is meager. With motorized boats and electronics, fishermen can get out beyond the reefs into deeper water where snapper and other types of fish are plentiful. FFTP has done ocean mapping offshore and can direct the fishermen to areas where there are fish.

This first fishing village project is anxiously awaited by the Petit-Anse residents. Two additional sites near Cap-Haitien have been identified for fishing villages. FFTP President Robin Mahfood says "We want to ring the coast of Haiti with fishing villages and begin to solve the problem of hunger and malnutrition in that country." Fr. Martin responded by saying "Nativity is pleased to be funding the first fishing village in Haiti and we commit to helping make Robin's dream a reality."

While at Petit-Anse, the group watched one fisherman come in on his dilapidated rowboat with about a pound of little fish in a plastic bag. Dr. Bill Morrissey asked how long it took to catch so few fish. The man responded, "I have been out on the water all day." Delane Bailey then bought his fish for a generous price and handed the bag to Fr.

Duken. Fr. Duken found a woman whose children hadn't eaten in some time and gave her the fish. She thanked him profusely.

Standing on the shore, Fr. Martin pointed to the deep water and said, "Out there is hope – hope for an entire village, and that hope will soon be realized." At this writing, five boats have been built and the motors have been ordered. The gear shed is almost completed, and the fishing village project should be dedicated in March or April.

The group spent some time that afternoon visiting with the Missionaries of the Poor, who run an orphanage for children and home for homeless and ill elderly people. The palsy, hydrocephalus, and other infirmities were heart-rending, but the care and compassion of the staff was lavish. There were many moments of personal spiritual poignancy as patients and visitors spoke to each other in the most powerful language – the language of love. The touching, the hugging, the time spent head to head, all must have been pleasing to God...

Haiti – Day Four

As we made the long journey home on the last day of our trip, flying across the mountains of Haiti, then across the ocean to Miami, and up the coast to Washington, we had much time to reflect.

During this trip, there were many moments and experiences that enriched us, as individuals, and as a community with a common purpose. There were tears of anguish; there was frustration; there was fear. But there was also laughter, amazement and pride. There were material moments, as we wiped out the entire collection of wooden vases from an art vendor whose only English words were "Blue Light Special!" And there were spiritual moments as we were baptized by rain and blessed with a rainbow during the dedication of the tilapia farm.

It was tiring, it was energizing. It was depressing, it was inspiring. It was too long, it was too short. It was real, it was a dream. It was faith in action, and we will do it again, soon...

OUR PILGRIMAGE – IN OUR OWN WORDS...

Dear Fr. Martin,

Thank you for everything. My life is profoundly changed. Every day is now a new beginning and at the end of each one I'll ask myself ... what have I done to bring Christ to others?

*Your Friend,
Patrick*

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The pilgrimage was very successful. I think it was a home run. It was very moving and not a bit like what I encountered before. Food For The Poor did a very nice job.
Hollis
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Thanks so much for ... getting us all there and -- most importantly -- all back. I think I have recovered but I keep playing over the "tapes" of our experience and trying to put it all into perspective. I even got an e-mail today from Ezequias, the 16-year old boy at Prolonge who spoke very good English. The internet has wrought wonders.
Phil
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I feel so honored to have gone to Haiti. I have so much to share with friends and family and so many ideas for future endeavors. I keep looking at the photos and get drawn back into the situation and keep wondering what those children are doing now. That orphanage keeps haunting me. Wait until you see the photo of one of the boys from there that I took. It makes me cry every time I look at it!
Jen :-)
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"We are painting Cap-Haitien with hope."
Fr. Martin
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Dear Precious Pilgrims,
Just a quick note to say thanks for caring and sharing your time, love and compassion with the people of Haiti. Our recent travel to Haiti was really Joyous and it was beautiful as you painted hope not only in Cap Haitien but in the hearts of Haiti's precious ones.

Thanks So Much.

Love and Appreciation
Ms. Delane Bailey

OUR PILGRIMAGE – A FOOTNOTE

If you would like to see a 15-minute DVD presentation of the September, 2006 Nativity Pilgrimage to Haiti, there are copies available for loan in the church office. If you are not local, just email or call Jim McDaniel (seastar2004@msn.com) 703-455-2400, and we will get a copy to you.

Nativity Church's 2006 Lenten Starfish program raised \$225,000. With these funds, Food For The Poor has:

- provided water and sanitation, and furnished a secondary school at Nativity Village I in Port-au-Prince;
- completed development of the Nativity Village Tilapia Farm in Cap-Haitian;
- completed Phase I of the Nativity Village Housing Project in Prolongé;
- nearly completed the Nativity Fishing Village in Petit-Anse.

Work on vocational training, child feeding, chicken farm development, sewing co-op and other projects at Nativity Village I in Port-au-Prince continues with previously provided funding. Between 1998 and 2006, Nativity Parishioners and friends have raised over \$1.3 million with their Starfish program.

Nativity Parish will conduct its 10th annual Starfish Campaign during Lent, 2007. The development projects to be funded with the 2007 Starfish program will be announced soon.

OPERATION STARFISH CONFERENCE HELD IN NOVEMBER

Pastors and church leaders came together November 1-3, 2006 in Deerfield Beach, Florida to share their experiences with Operation Starfish® and help guide the future of this simple fundraising concept for the benefit of the poor. At the suggestion of Fr. Richard Martin, who began the "Starfish" idea at Nativity Catholic Church in 1998, Food For The Poor, Inc. hosted this gathering near its headquarters in Deerfield Beach.

An interdenominational planning committee worked on the agenda and logistics for the meeting, which will take place at the *Hampton Inn Boca Raton-Deerfield Beach*. Participants came from Connecticut, Wisconsin, Colorado, Indiana, Georgia, Virginia, Florida, Vermont, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Rhode Island.

The conference included an interdenominational prayer service and tour of Food For The Poor's headquarters operation; discussions on individual experiences with Operation Starfish; the blessings that come to congregations as a result of ministering to the poor; travel opportunities on pilgrimages to third world countries; project opportunities; and future prospects for expanding the Starfish concept.

Some significant recommendations were made, including building stronger relationships with schools, from elementary through college. In addition, the networking and fellowship served to encourage and inspire the participants to do more within their communities.

If you would like more information on the conference feel free to contact:
Barbara Fazekas, barbf@foodforthe poor.com, 954-427-2222 x6258, or
Jim McDaniel, jamesm@foodforthe poor.com, 954-415-7723

SEPTEMBER PRAYER REQUESTS

Our readers have submitted the following prayer requests for this month:

- † For Fr. Martin and all those who traveled to Haiti with him last September, that they be moved by the Holy Spirit to internalize the experience and bring forth some good from it;
- † For continuing healing and comfort for the family of Mr. John B. Martin;
- † For the family of John McConnell, that they be comforted in their loss;
- † For the Fischl family;
- † For Fr. Daniel Ache and those he serves in Cameroon, that God bless him and his people with encouragement;
- † For Mr. & Mrs. Gus Montecalvo of Rhode Island;
- † For Jeannie Rose, that she regain good health quickly and that her recent Haiti experience lead to stronger faith and more good works;
- † For Terry Moore, that God's loving kindness continues to bless him and his family;
- † For Theresa Coursey, that she be comfortable, safe and well-cared-for;
- † For Normand Gariepy, that he gain strength and healing with each passing day;
- † For Sr. Francis, that her health be quickly improved;
- † For individuals who are hurting, families that are divided, and nations at war, may the peace of Christ be felt by all those who struggle;

† For all our friends at Food For The Poor, and for all those who work here and abroad to alleviate suffering;

† For the people of Haiti, who struggle against all odds to get back on their feet and to bring their land back to life;

For these and all our intentions, hear us, Oh Lord...

HAITIAN WISDOM

Malgre nou manke yon rad
Pou ale legliz,
Nou manke manje lakay nou,
E nou gen sèlman disk ob nan pòch nou,
Gras Jezi sifi.

Ak gras sa a, nou rich.

Although we lack a dress
To wear to church,
Lack food at home,
And have only two cents in our pockets,
the grace of Jesus is enough.

With this grace, we are rich.

---Courtesy of Baptist Haiti Mission

VISIT US ON THE WEB

Please visit us at www.operation-starfish.org . We would appreciate your comments and suggestions. Feel free to contact us at info@operation-starfish.org.

For information on Food For The Poor's programs in Haiti, contact Barbara Fazekas at 954-427-2222 x6258; barbf@foodforthe poor.com. Web: www.foodforthe poor.org.

CLOSING THOUGHT...

Those we love don't go away
They walk beside us every day
Unseen, unheard but always near
Still loved, still missed, still very dear.

-- from a tombstone in a graveyard in Ireland

NEW SUBSCRIPTION? If you have a friend who would like to receive this newsletter, go to www.operation-starfish.org to sign up, or send a note to Operation Starfish, Church of the Nativity, 6400 Nativity Lane, Burke, VA 22015.

CANCEL YOUR SUBSCRIPTION? If you no longer wish to receive OPERATION STARFISH NEWSLETTER, send an email to info@operation-starfish.org or send a note to the address above.

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Edited this month by Jim McDaniel (info@operation-starfish.org)

OPERATION STARFISH: MAKING A DIFFERENCE, ONE PERSON AT A TIME

As a young boy walked the beach at dawn, he noticed an old man ahead of him picking up starfish and tossing them into the sea. Catching up with the man, the boy asked why he was doing this. The old man explained to the boy that the stranded starfish would die if left in the morning sun.

“But the beach goes on for miles and there are millions of starfish,” exclaimed the boy. “How can your effort make any difference?”

*The old man looked at the starfish in his hand and then threw it safely into the waves. He turned to the boy and said, “**It made a difference to that one.**”*

--Based on the writing of Loren Eiseley