

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

Dear Friends of *Operation Starfish®*.

We begin with a prayer ...

A Future Not Our Own

*This is what we are all about.
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water the seeds already planted, knowing
that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need
further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects
far beyond our capabilities.
We cannot do everything, and there is
a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something,
and do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,
a step along the way, an opportunity
for the Lord's grace to enter
and do the rest.
We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference
between the master builder
and the worker.*

*We are workers, not master builders;
ministers, not Messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.*

- Archbishop Oscar Romero

NATIVITY VILLAGE III ANNOUNCED

“Following the successful development of Nativity Village I in Port-au-Prince, and Nativity Village II in Cap-Haitien, we will take on another destitute Haitian community in 2007,” said Fr. Richard Martin, pastor of Nativity Catholic Church in Burke, Virginia. “Our parish continues to bring hope for a better future to the poorest of the poor through Operation Starfish.”

Nativity Church will sponsor the development of a third “Nativity Village” project in Haiti this year, working through Food For The Poor, America’s third largest international charity. Food For The Poor project manager Delane Bailey has located a “lost village” deep in the mountainous frontier on the border with the Dominican Republic. Here some 300 families are living without decent housing, sanitation or safe drinking water.

Nativity will start building houses, water wells and sanitation facilities then begin development of a fruit tree orchard. This new development, in an area known as “La Linea,” will follow the successful model of the first 2 “Nativity Villages.” This development model begins with immediate aid to improve health and living conditions, then moves into sustainable small business development to generate jobs and a revenue stream.

At Nativity Village I, 500 families are in new houses, drinking water and sanitation has been provided, an elementary school has been built, a vocational training center is under construction, a feeding program is being developed, and small businesses are following. At Nativity Village II, 250 houses are being built, with sanitation and clean water, a fresh water tilapia farm has had its first harvest, and a deep water fishing village is under development. Nativity Village III will see the commitment of Nativity parish extend to a new geographical area of Haiti.

So far, Nativity parishioners and friends have donated more than \$1.3 million for humanitarian work in Haiti. In a recent letter to Fr. Martin, Food For The Poor president Robin Mahfood said “I am deeply grateful for all your parish has done since beginning Operation Starfish in 1998. The Church of the Nativity is showing the world what collective Christian charity can accomplish.”

FIRST TILAPIA HARVEST A SUCCESS

Several thousand one to two pound red tilapia were harvested from the Nativity Village Tilapia Farm in Cap-Haitien, Haiti, during the first week of February. The first harvest from the 3 new ponds was a resounding success according to Fr. Duken Augustin, the local parish priest, and Mr. Peter Liu, representing the International Cooperation and Development Fund of Taiwan. Constructed by Food For The Poor, with funding from

Nativity's Operation Starfish, the tilapia farm was managed by Fr. Duken, with technical assistance from Mr. Liu.

Nativity parishioners were present for the blessing of the tilapia farm in September, 2006 by Fr. Georget Vincent, Vicar General of the Diocese of Cap-Haitien. The opening ceremony began under a bright, sunny sky, as Fr. Martin cut the ribbon to dedicate the project. School children in bright blue plaid uniforms sang "When the Saints Come Marching In," as Nativity parishioners entered the farm pond area. Flowers were presented, speeches given, and food served. The flags of Haiti, the United States and Taiwan were raised.

Near the end of the program, the skies opened with a tropical downpour. One of the villagers, speaking in Creole, said "We have been blessed by the priest, now we are baptized by God."

As the tilapia farm continues to develop, fish will be harvested every 4-6 months. A portion will go to feed the hungry, a portion to the families of the village, and a portion to be sold, with revenue reinvested into the operation and maintenance of the farm. Food For The Poor's Church and School Division reports that several American churches and schools have committed to develop additional tilapia farms in Haiti through their individual Operation Starfish® projects in 2007.

THE FLEET IS IN – FIRST BOATS ARRIVE AT CAP-HAITIEN

The first 4 boats in the "Martin Fishing Fleet" have arrived at the Port of Cap-Haitien. Manufactured in Columbia, these 25-foot fishing boats will be capable of sailing beyond the reef into deep water off the north coast of Haiti. A fifth boat is enroute from Jamaica, where it was built to different specifications. It will be used as a pilot and training craft to locate fishing grounds and train fishermen. The five boats together were funded by Nativity Church's 2006 Operation Starfish®. They are named for members of Fr. Martin's family in honor of the 40th anniversary of his ordination, celebrated this past year.

Motors for these boats have been ordered, and a gear shed has been built. As soon as the motors arrive, the Nativity Fishing Village at Petit-Anse will be dedicated and deep sea fishing will begin. In a co-op type arrangement, similar to the tilapia farm project, the fishing village will involve 3 families per boat. They will give a portion of the catch to those who cannot feed themselves, keep a portion as income, and reinvest a portion of the sales revenue.

Two additional fishing villages are currently being developed in the area by Food For The Poor. Eventually, the ocean fishing and fresh water tilapia farming will support a fish market in Cap-Haitien, bringing additional revenue and jobs to the people there.

ONE PENNY AT A TIME, YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

How often do you go to Google or Yahoo! to do an internet search? Do you realize that these search engines generate billions of dollars in advertising revenue? Well now there is a way to direct a small amount from every search toward your favorite charity. Powered by Yahoo!, the new search engine www.GoodSearch.com will split 50% of its ad revenue with non-profits. This works out to about one penny per search.

We have listed Nativity's Operation Starfish as a benefiting charity. All you have to do is go to www.GoodSearch.com; find the "Who Do You GoodSearch For?" Box; type "Operation Starfish"; and start searching. After you do this the first time, *Operation Starfish* will automatically become your default charity. It's easy to change, however, if you prefer that another good cause receive your search pennies. For example, our friends at **Food For The Poor** are also listed.

If you have any questions, please let us know. Meanwhile, good searching!!!

HAITI – THE TERROR AND THE HOPE

A visit Remembered... By Rev. Gerry Creedon

While waiting for a connecting flight from Port au Prince to Les Cayes on the morning of Jan 6, 2007, I met Fr. Rick Flechette, a Passionist priest from Connecticut. He has served in Haiti for 20 years working with Friends of the Orphans and children in need in the poorest communities. He showed me their new hospital for 200 children a kilometer from the airport. Half of them suffer infections, many from AIDS. How can these sick children smile at me? This question sums up my Haiti trip.

Fr Rick whisked me off in his truck to shop at the market of Gros Sal, Beautiful Dirt, a place where slaves once sold. Food was cheaper there for the thousand plus children that the hospital, orphanage and school would feed daily. His Haiti helpers would not allow me to shoulder the rice bags like Fr Rick, because my sports shirt looked too clean. I watched the water carriers instead, beautifully erect Haitian women who carried 5gallon silver tanks on their heads with a jug floating on top, holding a silver tray with 6 silver goblets. In one beautiful feat of coordination they tended to thirsty customers. A water carrier would lift her right hand, grasp the floating jug, dip it over her head into the tank, fill a goblet, hand it to the client, receive the payment into a pocket in her apron and return the correct change. It was graceful and athletic multi-tasking in a place of squalor.

Back in the truck with a full load, Fr Rick was on his cell phone, listening to the Chancellor of the Diocese describe the situation of his 3 year old kidnapped niece. He would toss the phone to the young Haitian driver to negotiate between the family and

gang –leaders from the poor neighborhoods where Fr Rick served. 7, 000 dollars were agreed on. Sr. Lauren would serve as intermediary. The Chancellor believed he had a representative who would deliver the money.

Three days later at the airport, I accidentally ran in to Fr Rick again. The kidnapers had taken the money without delivering the child. He had a call where he was offered her head. He would renegotiate again personally. Later I learned that he had achieved another rescue. He wished he could get out of this work. His staff said he was against dealing with terrorists and asked not to be rescued if he were taken.

At Les Cayes, Fr. Dieuvelome and Fr. Wilkens were waiting for me at the airport, where we ran into Jocelyn. He joined us for supper at Cavaillon. Jocelyn now pastors at Chantale 15 minutes south of Les Cayes and wishes he had a sister parish in the U.S.

Before supper I reviewed the concerns of our St Charles Haiti Committee. They will update scholarship lists, dates of birth and photos. They will indicate if the 15 year olds and above are still in school. Dieuvelome says his graduates attend high school in Cavaillon. Public school texts are unavailable as a resource.

Since the Haitian dollar has lost its value, going from 4 to 7.5 Haitian dollars to one US dollar, many of the families are having a very tough time with basic needs and more absenteeism is evident, especially among students who do not have sponsors.

On Sunday I was spared the 5 am mass at Cavaillon, though not the 4 am bell! We celebrated the 9 at Berrette. Full participation by a crowded church evidenced the vitality of faith in this community. The choir was led by a makeshift colorful base. Kindergarten does not have a food program! They have a class in church and want to add a classroom. Amazon the Director was enthusiastic about the 90% achievement rate in state exams. Pere Francois, Vicar to Cavaillon accompanied us on this visit. He works part –time in the diocese.

We had lunch at Gros Marin. Pere Dieuvelome had completed his training of a large group of community leaders, Animateurs.

Mirlande, the director of the school appreciated the support of St Charles and indicated that Dieuvelome teaches both Spanish and English as a second language. We visited the church, school and clinic. The clinic has been completed and provides medications bought from public health with a staff of five; a nurse a, a lab technician, a doctor once a week and a security guard for the pharmacy and the attached teachers' quarters.

Fr. Wilkens drove us on the rockiest road I have seen for what seemed to my discs to be hours to Le Sudre. Pere Noemi Anroise is out of communications and does not drive, so we were fortunate to find him enjoying a game of cards with some of his flock. He stepped to attention, banished the card table and took us on a tour of his rectory and school, a lean- to shack. He wants to add two rooms urgently. He sees a clinic as a goal for two years from now since he considers the local hospital as too far away.

Next we visited Flamand, where Antonine served as our guide. The school is three quarters complete. I was impressed with Basilee the enthusiastic school director. She wants to see an extra classroom added.

Back at Cavaillon I met with some young men who were expert in computers who showed me the communications room at the rectory. Wilkens has plans for their use in the high school and in the community. I also met Fito, Antonine's brother in law, the Director of Centre de La Jeunesse. He outlined ambitious plans for a new cultural center. Wilkens sought our assistance as we considered sources for the substantial funding required.

The director of micro enterprise for Cavaillon described a network she has developed in Cavaillon. Rosette, a neighborhood adjacent to Tete Source, where a successful program operates with 15 families, has had training for another 15 families. The need for micro enterprise is more urgent. They would like to associate the project with school families to deal with the problem of income and absenteeism at the same time. The Mill is in full operation.

My return tickets on Caribintair were relegated to stand by and the flight left without me. It was a blessing in disguise as Wilkens led me to Tortugair, a better and cheaper service at a later hour. This gave me the chance to go to the Chancery where I met Pere Kensy Beauvoir. He would like to extend our program of support to advanced students at Beaulieu.

During the visit I had the opportunity to consider the role of the church and Haiti. Our parish now enjoys the service of 5 priests, an indication of the strength of the church and the abundance of vocations. They see the church as a great sign of hope and life. The Ti Eglise movement that put Aristide in power has died on the vine because of its militarization. Fr. Rick spoke of a rectory at Leogane that was stacked with guns. Although liberation in its aggressive form has been excluded from seminary training, there continues to be a strong focus on social justice and empowerment of lay leaders through the chapelles. Fr. Rick lamented with me the return to a vertical theology in the northern churches and recalled the theology of engaged spirituality that flowed from Vatican 2.

Pere Wilkens and Fr. Rick shared a similar analysis of the surge of evangelical churches. They have coincided in Latin America with the emergence of the theology of Medellin. As the Catholic Church criticized neo-liberal economics and corporate sin, funding from the north supported the development of splintering evangelical groups without cohesion and an other-worldly theology that removed a threat to the practices of greed and domination. The vitality of the Catholic Church is attested by the growing number of priestly vocations. Among the many checks I delivered was support for Laverno, a seminarian from Tete Source, whose beautifully crafted letters indicate that the priesthood in some places is still attracting the best and the brightest.

--- Fr. Gerry Creedon is Pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Church in Arlington, Virginia. He has served as a mission pastor in the Dominican Republic and is active in Social Justice Ministries. For more information go to www.stcharleschurch.org .

MARCH PRAYER REQUESTS

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

† For Margaret Anton, that she be granted a full measure of the healing power of God, and for her family;

† For Fr. Daniel Gee and Fr. Chris Murphy, and those they serve in the Dominican Republic, that God grant them strength, courage and the resources they need to continue their mission work;

† For continuing healing and peace for the family of Mr. John B. Martin;

† For Kathy Davis, her dear husband Bob, and their family, that they feel the full extent of God's love and compassion;

† For the Fisher family, in North Carolina, that God grant them a measure of comfort;

† 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 the family of Cosimo Minucci, of Adelaide, South Australia, on the 6-month anniversary of his passing;

† 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 Annice, that the coming Easter season bring her much improved health;

† 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 the success of this year's Operation Starfish® program at churches and schools across the country, and for the Church and School Development staff at Food For The Poor, who are working hard to turn hearts toward the poor;

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

HAITIAN WISDOM

Senyè

Nou remake ke pawòl ou
Tankou yon tèt chou.

Chak fèy nou kase,
Nou pi prè kè a.

Tout tan nou pri prè kè a
Li pi dous.

Lord,

We find your work like a cabbage.

As we pull down the leaves,
We get closer to the heart.

And as we get closer to the heart,
It is sweeter.

---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...

Silence
By Emma George

There's noise, then we plunge into quietness,
Almost nothingness, emptiness, soundlessness

We mute our lives as if turned off.
It breaks with a voice, a snuffle, a cough,
For a pause, for a snooze, for a breath,
For a moment of quiet rest.

Silence is the refuge where we can hide,
A place for us to come home and abide.

It's quiet, then we come back.
You know, sometimes in life it's silence we lack.

---Emma is the 11-year-old granddaughter of Deacon Jim Bayne.

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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