

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

Dear Friends of *Operation Starfish®*.

We begin with a meditation ...

Jesus was himself the carrier of the message; he was at the same time the Supreme Intelligence, capable of devising the best way of making himself understood, and of carrying out the divine plans.

Well, what did he do? He did not open hospitals or found orphanages. He became flesh, lived among people and he embodied the Gospel message in its entirety. He began to act.

He lived his message before he spoke of it. He preached it by his life before explaining it in words. This was Jesus' method and we too easily forget it.

In many cases catechesis is reduced to words rather than to "life," to discussions rather than to the pursuit of Christian living.

- From Letters From The Desert by Carlo Carretto

"AND WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?" Luke 10:29

By: Jim McDaniel

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

It was a long day of travel. I left home at 4 o'clock in the morning to make a 6 a.m. flight to Miami and a connecting flight to Santo Domingo. I couldn't believe there would be a long line at security at 5 a.m., but I just barely made the flight. It was packed.

At Miami Airport I met Delane Bailey-Herd, Food For The Poor's Haiti Project Manager, and we shared a prayer and breakfast before learning our flight would be delayed. We ultimately made it to the Dominican Republic 3 hours late. We were met by Raymond and Elias, who had been waiting to drive us 4 hours into the mountains after we landed. Finally, after 17 hours of travel, we arrived at Hotel El Líbano in San Juan de la

Maguana. There we joined others from Food For The Poor, including Alice Marino, Dr. Lynne Nasrallah, Liony Batista, Ben Rusnak and a group from St. James Cathedral in Orlando, Florida, led by Fr. John McCormick, Rector.

The next morning, after passing through the Thursday market in Bánica, we drove until the road ran out. Then we piled into the back of a truck for the trek across the border into Haiti. Military checkpoints are common in this border area.

While the track was rough, the geography was green and lush, like a romantic landscape painting. It was a quiet, pastoral scene, with the Artibonite River flowing between the two countries.

BRUTAL MEMORIES

But there is a violent history behind the calmness of today.

In October 1937, Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo ordered the massacre of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic. Trujillo had made his intentions for the Haitian community clear in a short speech given at a dance held in his honor on October 2, 1937 in Dajabón, stating:

“For some months, I have traveled and traversed the frontier in every sense of the word. I have seen, investigated, and inquired about the needs of the population. To the Dominicans who were complaining of the depredations by Haitians living among them, thefts of cattle, provisions, fruits, etc., and were thus prevented from enjoying in peace the products of their labor, I have responded, ‘I will fix this.’ And we have already begun to remedy the situation. Three hundred Haitians are now dead in Bánica. This remedy will continue.” (Richard Lee Turtis, “A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed: The 1937 Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82, no. 3 (2002): 613.)

For five days, from October 2, 1937 through October 8, 1937, between 20,000 and 30,000 Haitians were cut down with machetes, clubs and knives by Dominican troops and civilians, even while trying to flee to Haiti by crossing the Rio Artibonito. Dominican military personnel directly misled fleeing Haitians by telling them they were being deported, however, after being taken to a secluded location the Haitians were murdered. (Turtis, 606) To further bolster the death toll, the main bridge between the Dominican Republic and Haiti was closed, thus prohibiting Haitians from fleeing the country.

It is said the river ran red with Haitian blood. It was renamed the Massacre River.

It was into this land that we traveled to encounter the Haitians living in the shadow of this history. One of the few area signs I saw read “*El Corte*,” (translated – “*The Cutting*,”), a reminder of the brutal history of this land.

As we followed the river, with the Dominican Republic on our right, and Haiti on our left, we were in the area known as “La Linea,” – “The Line” – where crossing the border means wading a shallow stream. Three things immediately struck me about this place:

THE LOOK OF THE PLACE

The scene was lush and green, verdant and idyllic. The dwellings were spread out over the hills and ravines. But when we looked closer we saw deteriorated shacks, mud and stick huts with dirt floors, and people bathing and watering animals in the same stream that provided their only drinking water.



THE SILENCE OF THE PLACE

At first, the quietness was rather pleasant. It was a contemplative scene. But on further thought, I realized that the people had nothing to distract them from their misery. There was no noise, no crowded streets, no action, like I have seen in Haitian cities. The silence was oppressive, a reminder of their intense isolation.

THE PEOPLE OF THE PLACE

And then I asked, "Who is my neighbor in this place?" I asked this question because no one came to welcome us. In Port-au-Prince and in Cap-Haitien, wherever we went, crowds came forward, children sang, smiles and open arms greeted us. Here, in La Linea, we arrived to an empty scene. Slowly, one at a time, the people began to approach. They were afraid of us. Was there some innate memory of the events of 1937 that made them cautious of strangers?

Once they saw that we had food, they began to materialize in greater numbers. But the looks on their faces remained wary, hesitant, hardened by survival. We passed out bread and supplies from the back of the truck, and several of us went off into the countryside with bags of bread to distribute house to house. Many people remained afraid to come forward, but welcomed the food brought to their doors.

THE CYCLE OF LIFE

During this visit, we witnessed the cycle of life, from birth to death, in a single day.

A young woman named Jennifer welcomed us into her hut where she was holding tightly to her newborn baby, Edlynne. Jennifer had given birth, prematurely, just a day or two earlier. Edlynne was very frail. With Jennifer's permission, Fr. McCormick gave her and her baby a blessing. I watched as Jennifer beamed with pride while the women in our group made a fuss over the baby. The look on her face was one that only a new mom could have when other women make a big deal over her new child. I hope Edlynne survives, but I know that 1 out of 5 newborns doesn't make it in this country.



Crossing a ravine, I noticed movement near a hut in the distance. As I got closer I saw a young girl, about 8 years old, holding tightly to her baby sister. She peeked at me with a mixture of fear and curiosity from behind a corner of the hut. I began speaking to her in Kreyól, asking if she was hungry. At her doorway, I got down on one knee and spoke softly, while she clung to her naked sister. In her

torn and tattered dress, she looked wary and exhausted, a little girl with no dreams. I gave her all the bread I had left and finally coaxed a smile from her before I left. How proud she must have been to put bread on the table for her mother.

Later in the day, we visited the village of Los Cacaos, where Food For The Poor has started installing wells and building safe, decent houses. The work is being done in partnership with Mi Casa Su Casa. Arturo Castro, a native Dominican, is heading up the project.

Here at Los Cacaos, I noticed an old man fall to the ground in a violent seizure. His tremors were frightening, and when they subsided, he lay in the dirt, exhausted, all skin and bones. His breathing was very shallow, his heartbeat faint. Delane, Fr. McCormick and I kneeled by his side. We held his hands and said, "Papa, you're not alone. We are here with you. God is with you." While Fr. McCormick gave him a final blessing, I translated and stroked his paper-thin skin. It's not likely that he made it, but for a moment, his eyes reflected the presence of God and we were spiritually one with him, neighbors in the community of Christ.

WHAT NEXT?

As I reflect back on this trip to "The Line," I am energized by the sure knowledge that Food For The Poor and Nativity Parish are about to make a big difference in the lives of the border people. Operation Starfish will once more save lives, one at a time. And with the partnership of Arturo Castro and Mi Casa Su Casa, the third "Nativity Village" development will begin to take shape and bring the promise of a better life to hundreds more needy children of God.

AND WHO ARE THEIR NEIGHBORS NOW?...

You, me, and our partners are their neighbors now.
We will bring them water to drink.
We will bring them shelter from the storm.
We will bring them hope for a better future.

We are their neighbors now.

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NOTE: Nativity Parish's Operation Starfish, working through Food For The Poor and Mi Casa Su Casa, has begun its third major humanitarian development in Haiti. Nativity Village at La Linea joins Nativity Village at Cap-Haitian and Nativity Village at Merger as the latest effort to make a difference, one at a time, in the lives of the poor. Since 1998, Nativity parishioners have raised over \$1.6 million for their work in Haiti, while also supporting a wide range of outreach programs at home and around the world.

HEARING GOD'S CALL... AND RESPONDING

By Ronald S. Riggins

God calls. We respond. This is the pattern of the believer's life throughout salvation history. God called his chosen people up out of Egyptian slavery and gave them the law to live by. Later, God called prophets to proclaim the penalty for those who abandoned the law. Jesus called his Apostles away from fishing and tax collecting to send them forth to baptize and proclaim the Gospel. The Lord called Saul away from persecuting Christians and equipped him to effectively preach the Word. God has been calling his people for thousands of years – some respond and come to know joy through doing His will. Many do not (or are not willing to) hear God's call, or respond to His will. Count me among the non-responders for most of my life.

Despite hearing His invitation 35 years ago, I chose a secular, materialistic way of life as I headed off to college. There were many "reasons" I cited that "justified" my abandonment of a faith-filled life doing God's will in favor of doing things my way. I was raised in a church-going family, and our family's social life revolved around the Presbyterian Church. After "giving my life to Christ" at a summer conference during high school, I allowed subsequent hypocrisy and scandal within our church to be the source of disillusionment.

I was blessed that my college sweetheart Terry (now my wife for 27 years) was a cradle Catholic – she gently nurtured my faith and provided catechesis during these years of darkness. Rejecting my own faith, it was an easy decision to allow our three children to be raised Catholic.

Much of my focus over the years was on building my bank consulting practice to national prominence and accumulating material wealth. About seven years ago I began to experience a gnawing emptiness in my career and financial achievement and a feeling of mortality began to take hold. Faintly hearing God's whisperings, I began to regularly attend Mass with the family.

Today I have to laugh at God's humor in the years leading up to this point, as I was subliminally being conditioned to receive Him. With two sons in Catholic school, I was put into the position of assisting in religion homework – which promoted my own education. Over this same period, my young daughter insisted daily that I read the Bible to her as her bedtime story – we read a good portion of the Bible over a several year period.

This backdrop set the stage for my conversion. Life suddenly changed as I stared in horror from my 22nd floor office in Rosslyn, Virginia, at the black smoke billowing above the Pentagon on the morning of September 11th. Shaken to the core by the fear of harm to my family and of my own death, I underwent a sweeping conversion within a matter of moments as I realized my need for God and that I had been ignoring His call for years. Suddenly in prayer, I was intensely aware of His presence as I immediately

sought new life in Christ. At the impromptu Mass that evening at Nativity, I was in tears craving His comfort and guidance in my life.

Since that pivotal moment, my life has increasingly been Christ centered. I entered the RCIA program in 2002 to complete my Catholic conversion. During this spiritual journey, my daily schedule has radically changed, as I began to attend daily Mass, became a member of Nativity's prayer group and of a men's Cursillo group, avidly read the Bible and other spiritual writings, and engaged in a variety of ministries – Eucharistic Minister, lector, RCIA instructor, Bishop's Lenten Appeal lay representative, visiting a nursing home and feeding the homeless. As these ministries have seemed to find me – rather than vice versa – it seems as if these ministries were consistent with God's will for me. At the same time, the anticipated pull-back from my bank consulting practice has not been realized.

In recent months, I have increasingly sensed that God is beckoning me to a deeper relationship with Him, and to a life more focused on serving Him. I sense that a degree of complacency in my spiritual life may have set in. In certain respects this reminds me of the career plateau before my conversion experience. Over the last few months, my prayer has increasingly centered on the nature of God's additional will for my life. Then, as if a confirmation of pending change, within a few day period several "signposts" appeared, that is, situations that seem to point to a more complete focus on Him. These "signposts" took the form of other Catholics – a past client, a banking attorney colleague, a talented professional musician – all who have largely abandoned their successful careers to follow the will of God. These people have pursued advanced religious studies, conducted parish missions nationwide, published books about pursuing God's will and/or released numerous Catholic music CDs. Like the Apostles and St. Paul, they were abruptly called away from their livelihoods to pursue God's design. These "signposts" appear to be signaling that I too must be prepared for such an abrupt change – perhaps I will be called away from my career. Terry has been similarly discerning that God is preparing her – and us together – for a drastic transformation.

It is easy to become anxious and jump into various ministries and service projects. Just like Martha, it is easy to become busy bodies and seek to serve the Lord in the manner we believe is right. After continual prayer, discussion and reading, we both appear to be concluding that we need to be more like Mary and listen to the Lord and allow Him to be present to us. God has continually revealed His will to us, and we believe He will continue to do so. We must be patient and have open hearts and minds to receive Him. We will continue to serve as we have been, regularly receive the Sacraments and pray for discernment, recognizing that the spiritual journey that lies ahead may call for an abrupt change and we must trust Him in pursuing His will.

Thomas Merton's discernment prayer, from The Road Ahead, is a fitting close. "My Lord, I have no idea where I am going, I do not see the road ahead of me, I cannot know for certain where it will end, nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope that I will never do anything

apart from that desire. And I know if I do this, you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face perils alone.” Amen.

NEW HAITI MAP ON STARFISH WEB SITE

Check out the new map showing all of Nativity’s Operation Starfish projects! Go to www.operation-starfish.org and click on “THE RESULTS.” This new map has scrolling and enlarging features that show all three “Nativity Village” developments, along with the components of each project.

For information on Food For The Poor’s programs in Haiti, go to www.foodforthe poor.org.

1998 – 2008 TENTH ANNIVERSARY IS NEAR

In 1998, Nativity Catholic Church parishioners raised \$67,000 during Lent to build houses for the poor in Haiti. Today, as we approach the 10th anniversary of Operation Starfish® and our partnership with Food For The Poor, Inc., the list of projects undertaken by this one church is quite substantial. If you look at the map of Haiti on the Starfish web site (www.operation-starfish.org), you will see the extent of Nativity’s work in this impoverished country.

Nativity Pastor, Fr. Dick Martin, says “When a parish develops a heart for the poor, it becomes more generous overall.” The evidence behind this statement can be found in Nativity’s outreach to other parts of the world as well as around the corner. So far, in 2007, Nativity parishioners have supported:

- Casa de Pobres, Tijuana, Mexico
- Fr. Joseph Swam’s home for the poor in India
- An orphanage in Pakistan
- Annual Youth Camp, Diocese of Kumbo, Cameroon
- Health programs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Missions in the Philippines, Chile, and other countries
- House building by our Knights of Columbus in Kentucky
- Home repairs by 92 Nativity teens in Pennsylvania
- Flood victims in Kansas
- Continuing support of families relocated after Hurricane Katrina
- Hypothermia programs in Washington, D.C.
- Food for the Homeless in Alexandria, Virginia
- And many other local, U.S., and international needs.

Nativity's financial support to the poor has not diminished giving in other areas. Nativity consistently exceeds its goals for diocesan capital campaigns, Bishop's Lenten Appeal, and other necessary fundraising efforts. Fr. Martin attributes this success to his parishioners' practice of giving to the poor. Quoting his late father, he says, "Whatever you give out to the poor comes back double."

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!!!

MARCH PRAYER REQUESTS

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

† For Fr. Jean Printemps and Fr. Duken Augustin, and those they serve in Haiti, and for Fr. Daniel Gee and Fr. Chris Murphy, and those they serve in the Dominican Republic, that God grant all of them strength, courage and the resources they need to continue their mission work;

† For our friend, Bishop David A. Zubik, in his new assignment as Bishop of Pittsburgh;

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

† For the people of La Linea, that they may be encouraged and that they allow themselves to have hope for a better future;

† For the safety of the fishermen at Petit-Anse, Bord-de-Mer, and Fort Liberté, as they put their new boats to work to feed their people;

† 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 people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as they try to recover from the horrors of civil war;
- † For Terry Moore, that God's loving kindness continues to bless him and his family;
- † For the repose of the soul of Theresa Coursey, and for her family;
- † For Barbara Fazekas, in appreciation of her many years of service to the poor;
- † 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 Fr. Cedric Wilson and his family, that they be comforted in their loss by the compassion of Christ;

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

HAITIAN WISDOM

Jezi,

Uo se garaj nou.
 Ou ban nou yon lonbraj fre.
 Fè nou dire pi lontan pou nou rann sèvis.
 Se sèlman lè sa ke nou gen vale.

Jesus,
 You are our garage.
 You give us cool shade.
 Make us last longer for service.
 Only then do we have value.

---Courtesy of Baptist Haiti Mission

CLOSING THOUGHT...

"Fr. Martin's devotion, along with the efforts and support of the people of Nativity parish, have beyond doubt, not only given hope to the people you have helped in Haiti, but inspired other parishes to do the same..."

---Fr. Charles Sheehy, Regina Cleri, Archdiocese of Boston, 6/29/07

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CANCEL YOUR SUBSCRIPTION? If you no longer wish to receive OPERATION STARFISH NEWSLETTER, send an email to seastar2004@msn.com or send a note to the address above.

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Edited this month by Jim McDaniel (seastar2004@msn.com)

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