



**CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY'S
OPERATION STARFISH®
NEWSLETTER
JANUARY, 2010**

Dear Friends of *Operation Starfish®*.

Let us begin with a photo meditation...



photo by Jim McDaniel – Nov. 2009

Fr. Dick Martin at Shada, Haiti, the site of the next Nativity Village project

SIXTH NATIVITY VILLAGE SITE SELECTED

During a mission trip with Food For The Poor in November, Fr. Dick Martin and Nativity parishioners visited the site of the 6th Nativity Village project in Haiti. Located along a polluted canal in downtown Cap-Haitien, the Shada neighborhood is home to thousands of impoverished families. Basic necessities of life are lacking – decent shelter, clean drinking water, sanitation and food. Fr. Duken Augustin and Food For The Poor have

proposed moving these families onto higher ground where simple but sturdy houses can be built, wells can be dug, and sanitation provided. Nativity Catholic Church has pledged that their Operation Starfish program will support this major effort to save lives.

For the past 11 years, Nativity parishioners have worked with Food For The Poor to make a difference in the poorest country in the western hemisphere. "Nativity Village" projects have provided housing, sanitation, clean water, schools, clinics, vocational training, small business enterprises, sewing and fishing co-op's, tilapia farms, agricultural and reforestation projects, and other humanitarian aid across a wide area of Haiti. Nativity Villages are located in Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haitien (2 villages), El Corte (on the Dominican Republic border), and Lozandier (on the south coast).

On this latest mission trip, Fr. Martin, Fr. Terry Hazel (St. Michael's, Canfield, OH), and Dn. Jose Pardo of Nativity, joined Fr. Duken Augustin of Food For The Poor to bless the residents and their new houses in Nativity Village V, near Cap-Haitien.

Nativity's Operation Starfish program brings people of all ages and means together to make a difference in the lives of the poor, one at a time. Since 1998, Nativity parishioners have donated more than \$2.2 million to Food For The Poor to implement projects in Haiti. More than 100 Nativity parishioners have traveled to Haiti on mission trips. Nativity's 2010 Operation Starfish effort will first focus on the basic needs of the Shada community, then plan for self-sustaining micro-enterprise projects in the future.

HAITIAN PRISONERS RELEASED DURING MISSION TRIP

Four non-violent offenders were released from a Cap-Haitien prison during a recent visit by Nativity parishioners. The men were jailed for minor offenses like stealing food or non-payment of debts, and languished in jail for as long as 8 months waiting for their cases to be heard. Fr. Duken Augustin, with assistance from Food For The Poor, negotiated their fines and arranged their release while Nativity parishioners were at the prison.

Fr. Martin and the Nativity group, along with Fr. Terry Hazel and parishioners from St. Michael's, Canfield, Ohio, visited the prison on the morning of November 11, midway through their week in Haiti. As they approached the prison gate, Delane Bailey-Herd, of Food For The Poor, read from scripture: *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners..."* (Isaiah 61:1-3)

Neither the American travelers nor the prisoners knew in advance about the release. So it came as a surprise. Once the prisoners were brought into an inner courtyard, the church members, in imitation of Christ at the Last Supper, washed their feet, gave them

new shoes, toiletries and some money, and walked them to the gates and freedom. (John 13:1-17)



While at the prison, the mission group visited men, women and children in their cells. They were packed into 16' x 16' enclosures, 15, 20, 30, even 50 in some cells. One toilet served each cell and prisoners were let out twice a day for 5 minutes at a time to exercise, shower and wash their clothes. Nativity parishioner Linda Lenertz said, "I thought I would be sick from the smell, but I knew there was no place to go, so I prayed that my stomach would settle down and it did." There was a poignant moment when the American women and the Haitian women prisoners exchanged details about their children with each other. One of the men handed a note to Jim McDaniel, asking only for prayer and to be remembered.

During the prison visit, the mission group fed hot meals to all 553 prisoners and gave them soap, toothpaste and other toiletries. Speaking about the experience, Cynde Mausolf of Nativity said, "At one point several men were stretching their arms through the cell opening, hoping for a human touch. I tried to touch them all, but it was a strange feeling not knowing whose face belonged to the hands I held in mine."

Leaving the prison, Fr. Martin said, "Through Operation Starfish, we have now touched on every element of Matthew 25. We have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick and visited those in prison."

For press coverage of this prison event, see
http://www.catholicherald.com/detail.html?sub_id=11974 and
<http://www.cathexpo.org/articledetails.aspx?articleid=514>

DETAILS OF MISSION TRIP AVAILABLE

Fr. Martin took another group of Nativity parishioners to Haiti on November 9, 2009. 19 travelers on this 5-day mission trip, sponsored by Food For The Poor, stopped in Florida to tour Food For The Poor's world headquarters and meet with their leadership, then spent 4 days in Haiti. The group included Fr. Terry Hazel, Pastor of St. Michaels Church in Canfield, Ohio, and 3 of his parishioners. While in Haiti they visited the Little Children of Jesus Home for Handicapped Children, which has been supported by St. Michael's parish for several years. The group fed the hungry at Food For The Poor's Feeding Center in Port-au-Prince, and celebrated Mass at Nativity Village at Merger – the first Nativity Village project. In Cap Haitien, the group brought food and gifts to prisoners, inaugurated Nativity Village V with food, new shoes and blessing of houses, and inspected the site of Nativity Village VI, our 2010 Operation Starfish project.

Fr. Martin, in 3 consecutive Pastor's Corner articles, described in detail this journey of service to the poor. To read his narrative, go to www.operation-starfish.org, or contact Jim McDaniel for a copy (seastar2004@msn.com).

MY TEACHING EXPERIENCE IN HAITI by Cynde Mausolf

This past July, I traveled to Haiti with the Lazarus Project (www.lazarusprojecthaiti.org) in partnership with Food for the Poor. Our team of ten went to teach students at The Village of Hope School various hand skills for its week-long July Enrichment Program. We taught woodworking, crocheting, hand sewing, basket weaving, painting, paper bead construction, crafting with recyclable materials, and music (recorder and hand rhythm games). At the end of the week, we sent our students home with the tools and materials necessary to continue developing the skills they learned. In addition to teaching, we visited Food for the Poor housing, helped with the community feeding program at Food for the Poor in Port au Prince, distributed donations to and played with the girls at Grace Mission Orphanage and School, visited Little Children of Jesus (orphanage for disabled children), and experienced various other aspects of life in Croix des Bouquets, Haiti. This trip proved an amazing experience on so many different levels!



For many years, I'd been intrigued with the "idea" of mission work but never acted on it. I wasn't sure how to go about it or in what capacity I might serve, and of course, I had a million excuses why the timing just wasn't right. This past April, I discovered the Lazarus Project through the Operation Starfish newsletter. The Lazarus Project needed a crochet teacher. All the signs were there – this was what I was supposed to do – and I could not ignore the call. Again, the usual list of excuses ran through my mind, but I could no longer heed them. I really felt in my heart that if I did not go, I would be turning my back on God and my brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

God calls all of us to serve in some capacity through his command to love one another. As Father Martin of Nativity Church so lovingly says, "we are called to help those across the street and around the world." We all possess different God-given talents and find our callings in a variety of ways. Some of us are called to help in third-world countries, some to help here in the United States (homeless shelters, pro-life efforts, building homes, etc.), some to help individuals we know (bringing meals to those in grief, driving a person in need to the doctor, lending a listening ear or a giving supporting smile, etc.) No matter how we fulfill the call to serve, all ways of helping others are important. Serving others through a love of God is truly an amazing experience – life changing.

While in Haiti, I witnessed unbelievable sacrifices by wonderful people to help those in need: Debbie Berquist (a Canadian resident), working in Haiti since 1989 in medical clinics, now heads the new clinic at The Village of Hope; Marie Major (a Haitian

woman), honored a “deal” she made with God and opened the Grace Mission Orphanage and School for girls; Roberta (an American citizen), lives in Haiti, adopted 28 abandoned children, and successfully home schools them in academics and life skills (her fabulous children worked as our interpreters while teaching at The Village of Hope School); and Pastor Larry Bollinger and his wife, Margaret have lived in Haiti for the past 5 years tirelessly working for the Lazarus Project. Their commitments to serving God are absolutely amazing and inspiring.

I returned from Haiti with a love of the country and its people in my heart. It is part of me now, and I plan on returning – there is much to be done.

Haiti is a country of contrast. Amidst extreme poverty, faces of hunger and uncertainty, inadequate housing and infrastructure, dirty water and garbage, and abandoned children for a variety of reasons, there exists the beauty of mountains and flowers, smiles and laughter in spite of hunger and hardship, thankfulness for kindnesses shown, Christian faith and a love of God, hope for a better future, and the extreme sacrifices of others to improve the lives of Haitians. I am truly thankful for my experience in Haiti. I returned home with so much more than I gave while I was there. I know this is something we hear people speak of often – receiving more than they give. But this is not just a cliché – it truly does happen. Haiti is a beautiful country with a beautiful people who simply need a helping hand from their brothers and sisters in Christ.

“God has given each of you some special abilities; be sure to use them to help each other, passing on to others God’s many kinds of blessings.” (1 Peter 4:10 Living Bible translation) I wish you all many blessings as you reach out to serve others each in your own unique way.

[Note: Cynde kept her promise to herself to return to Haiti. She joined the Nativity Mission Trip in November 2009. A Nativity parishioner, Cynde is now researching ways to help Operation Starfish sewing co-ops with clothing design and marketing.]

CROCHETED STARFISH GIVEN TO NATIVITY PARISHIONERS

The patients at Cardinal Leger Leper Hospital in Leogane, Haiti have once again sent a batch of hand-crocheted starfish ornaments to Church of the Nativity to be distributed to parishioners as a “thank-you” for parish prayers and support. Parishioner Natacha Hines, who first encouraged the patients to crochet starfish during a Food For The Poor mission trip 10 years ago, placed the ornaments on a Christmas tree at Nativity Church. At each mass on Christmas weekend, people were encouraged to take home an ornament as a gift from the hospital patients.

Cardinal Leger Leper Hospital is located east of Port-au-Prince, Haiti’s capital. It is operated by the Missionary Sisters of Christ the King with support from Food For The Poor. Fr. Martin recalls one visit to the hospital on the Feast of the Assumption, which is a national holiday in Haiti. The patients and staff had not had a priest visit in several

weeks, so they asked Fr. Martin if he would celebrate mass with them. Even though he had taken everyone to the cathedral in Port-au-Prince for mass earlier in the day, he gladly accommodated this request. "As we all stood in a circle – patients, staff, Food For The Poor officials, and Nativity parishioners – we held hands, said the Lord's Prayer, and wished each other peace. When I looked down, neither the person on my right nor the one on my left had fingers. Leprosy had taken them. But the strength of their grip on me mirrored the strength of their faith in God. That day the poor gave me a gift – the gift of Christian love."

The leper patients continue to give their gifts of thanks to Nativity. According to Fr. Martin, the parish is truly blessed with this ministry that Natacha keeps alive. Although the crocheted starfish are given freely, many parishioners choose to leave donations for the patients and their families. Each year such donations total more than \$2,000, which is forwarded entirely to the sisters at Cardinal Leger for the benefit of the patients.

In a recent letter to Fr. Martin, Sr. Leona Dugas, m.c.r., wrote "The Mission Office of the Missionary Sisters of Christ the King offers sincere thanks to you and your parish community for the generous participation and cooperation with the Hospital Cardinal Leger of Haiti. Your parishioners are really missionary at heart and in action and deserve to be congratulated for the wonderful work they are doing in the different parts of Haiti. ...may God continue to bless you and your parishioners in the wonderful way that you have of helping the poor who are God's loved ones."

THE POOR GIVE MORE

Recent surveys have found that not only do the poor donate more per capita than individuals in higher income brackets, but that their generosity tends to remain higher during economic downturns, McClatchy Newspapers reports.

According to Virginia Hodgkinson, former vice president for research at **Independent Sector**, people in the bottom 20 percent of the population in terms of wealth tend to give more than their capacity to give, while those in the next two-fifths give at capacity. Americans in the top 40 percent are capable of donating two or three times more than they actually give, Hodgkinson said.

The latest survey of consumer expenditures by the **U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics** found that the poorest one-fifth of American households contributed an average of 4.3 percent of their income to charitable organizations in 2007, while the richest fifth donated 2.1 percent of their income. The pretax household income of the poorest fifth averaged \$10,531 in 2007, while the top fifth averaged \$158,388. The discrepancy is even more noteworthy because charitable gifts from the poor are effectively not tax-deductible because the poor don't earn enough to justify itemizing their deductions.

While the poorest Americans tend to be the least educated and most likely to be on welfare, the ranks of the poor also include a large number of women, who tend to be more generous than men. Moreover, the working poor — a disproportionate number of whom are recent immigrants — are America's most generous group, according to Arthur Brooks, author of *Who Really Cares* and president of the **American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research**, a conservative think tank.

Others believe that the poor give more because they require less to be happy. "When you have just a little, you're thankful for what you have," said Pastor Coletta Jones, minister of the Rock Christian Church, a tithing, largely low-income congregation in Washington, D.C. "But with every step you take up the ladder of success, the money clouds your mind and gets you into a state of never being satisfied."

Greve, Frank. "America's Poor Are Its Most Generous Givers." McClatchy Newspapers 5/19/09

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

We have listed Nativity's Operation Starfish as a benefiting charity on GOODSEARCH. Every GOODSEARCH click yields a penny for Operation Starfish. 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.

SEPTEMBER PRAYER REQUESTS

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

† For all the clergy, religious and lay ministers who labor "across the street and around the world" to serve the poor and marginalized, that God grant all of them strength, courage and the resources they need to continue their mission work;

† For the repose of the soul of Frank Fantasia in Adelaide, South Australia, who succumbed recently to lung cancer, and for his family, that God grant them healing;

† For Barbara Fazekas, who continues her struggle with illness, and for those who are providing the care and support she needs;

† For Fr. Dick Martin, Fr. Terry Hazel, Fr. Henry Roodbeen, Sr. Karl Ann Homberg, Sr. Francis Annice, Sr. Mary Atillia, Sr. Donatella, Dn. Jose Pardo, Dn. John Needham, Sr. Kathleen Coll, and all the clergy and religious who have accompanied Nativity

parishioners to Haiti and continue to provide inspiration and spiritual guidance to those whose hearts are committed to the poor, may you know the gratefulness we have for your ministry to us;

† For the repose of the soul of Eleanor Farrell, and for her brother, Fr. Charles Sheehy, a long time supporter of Operation Starfish, and for her family as well, especially her children and grandchildren, who received her love and returned it full measure;

† For all those who struggled through the holidays because of grief, separation, loneliness or illness, that those around them be the hands and feet of Christ, bringing healing, understanding, and love to all who are in need;

† For all whose lives are in need of resurrection - those who are hurting, families that are divided, and nations at war, may the peace of Christ be felt by all those who struggle;

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

HAITIAN WISDOM

**“Senyè,
Ala nou kontan
Se pa nou k’ap kenbe ou
Men se ou k’ap kenbe nou.”**

Lord,
How glad we are
That we don’t hold you
But that you hold us.

CLOSING THOUGHTS...

We especially need to keep an eye on our inner dispositions. It is important to focus on God’s call to us to do this work, and to have humility and gentleness and joy. The true measure of fruitfulness of the past year is simple: did we increase faith in the world? Did we increase hope? Did we increase love?

--- Fr. Rick Frechette, C.P.

[Note: Fr. Frechette, a Passionist priest and physician, operates a free pediatric hospital in Haiti. He met with Nativity parishioners during their November mission trip.]

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

NEW SUBSCRIPTION? If you have a friend who would like to receive this newsletter, go to www.starfishmission.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 seastar2004@msn.com or send a note to the address above.

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