



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

Dear Friends of *Operation Starfish®*.

This edition features a detailed narrative of Food For The Poor's Church of the Nativity 2010 mission trip to Haiti, condensed from Fr. Martin's Pastor's Corners.

BEING PRESENT TO THE POOR *The 2010 Parish Mission Trip to Haiti*

By Rev. Richard B. Martin
Pastor, Church of the Nativity

PART I "The Journey Begins"

"Standing with the poor, being present to the poor, seeing the world from the perspective of the poor, working with the poor, advocating for the poor, this is essential to being a follower of Christ. Christians stand with the poor because God stands with the poor." (J Milburn Thompson, Justice and Peace: A Christian Primer p 201)

For 5 days, 18 of us literally stood with the poor, in their world, working side by side, seeing Christ in each other. It was a journey that brought another Nativity group to Haiti, our 15th Operation Starfish® pilgrimage trip since 1999. This group included more young people than any previous mission trip. Our ages ranged from 19 to 76. While some of us "older folks" showed fatigue after several hours of serving meals in a prison, we had no trouble dancing to the drums in a "Conga Line" at dinner.

Indeed, aching muscles and hard work went hand in hand with joy and laughter. Hurting hearts and stinging tears were followed by celebration and warm hugs. *"Haiti is a land of contradiction,"* said one traveler. Our senses and emotions were on a see-saw all week long.

DAY ONE ... On Monday, June 28, 2010, we started our day at Food For The Poor Inc. (FFP) in Coconut Creek, Florida. CEO Robin Mahfood and Executive Director Angel Aloma briefed us on conditions in Haiti, we met with staff and toured FFP's headquarters and warehouse. Lauren M. recalls, *"While there, we met a different group who would be traveling to Jamaica. This group was the family and close friends of Stephanie Crispinelli, a Lynn University student who died in the Hotel Montana during the January 12th Haiti earthquake. Although she died in*

Haiti, her heart belonged to the people of Jamaica; and so with FFP's help, they were traveling there to build a school in her honor. As I sat there looking at this group of 30+ people, most of them quite young, I recognized their painful situation. To lose somebody you love tragically, unexpectedly, and violently is something you never get over."

That night most of us were in bed early – we had a 3:30 a.m. wake-up call.

DAY TWO ... Leaving the hotel at 4:30 a.m. was not an easy task. Leaving the U.S. for the poorest country in the western hemisphere filled us with anxiety. By 6:45 a.m. we were airborne and already adjusting to the sense that we were strangers. Haitians and Haitian-Americans filled the plane, with a scattering of mission groups like ours. One woman was wearing 6 hats stacked neatly on her head – taking them home to sell in the street markets.

Toussaint L'Ouverture International Airport in Port-au-Prince was severely damaged by the earthquake. The control tower is abandoned; air traffic control is handled by the U.S. Air Force from a temporary facility near the runway. The terminal building cannot be used, so temporary tented structures handle passengers and baggage. We were met by FFP's Haiti staff and a security team, who got us safely onto a bus for the short trip to FFP's Port-au-Prince complex. Driving through the city we were shocked by the piles of rubble everywhere. Streets were blocked, buildings partially collapsed, bodies still buried deeply under concrete. "*Where are the bulldozers and dump trucks?*" we asked. Even more disappointing were the tent cities – thousands of blue and white tents covering every open space, park, and even some road medians. According to ABC News, 2 million Haitians remained homeless 6 months after the earthquake. Today, 1.3 million are still living in tents.

Even though many FFP employees suffered terrible losses, and their Port-au-Prince complex was damaged, they were back to work a day after the quake and had the main feeding center up and running within a couple of days. Some 15,000 people are fed from this facility every day. We pitched in and served rice, beans and stew to hungry families who brought pails and other containers to be filled. We also heard from Bernard Chauvet, who manages FFP's fishing village program, and FFP engineer Clement Belizaire, as they told their personal stories of experiencing the "sinister," as Haitians call the earthquake.

At FFP's Haiti office, we also met with Fr. Jean Printemps, the parish priest at Nativity Village at Merger, Nativity's first village development. We were unable to go to the village because of security concerns – it is very close to Cite Soleil, a large slum where violence is on the increase. Last November, we visited this village and went into the slum, but during the January earthquake some 5,000 prisoners escaped and many have set up gangs in Cite Soleil. In the midst of this unsettled situation, Fr. Printemps is trying to provide trauma counseling and activities for more than 800 children. Many are still afraid to sleep indoors, fearing another quake. Dr. Sara Amodio, a former Nativity parishioner, has produced a Creole teachers guide and student workbook to assist with post-trauma stress, and we were able to provide this resource to Fr. Printemps, along with some funding assistance.

Our next stop today was the Little Children of Jesus Home in Santo. The staff at this orphanage cares for profoundly physically and mentally handicapped children. Nativity had rebuilt this

orphanage as an Operation Starfish project in 2000, following a fire. It was subsequently relocated and expanded.

Last November, parishioner Linda L. met a 12-year-old blind boy here. He was playing an old broken keyboard during mass. Linda was moved by this boy's talent and determination and she worked with FFP to purchase a new Yamaha keyboard and sound system. She also searched for Braille sheet music – not easy to find. As we entered the pavilion at the orphanage, Linda's friend started playing a beautiful Andrea Bocelli song on his new keyboard. There wasn't a dry eye in our group.

We had arrived at lunchtime, so everyone took up bowls and spoons and fed the children. Fans and new kitchen equipment, courtesy of Fr. Sikora Council 7992, K of C, were making the task of feeding the children easier. Lauren M. commented on the Little Children of Jesus Home, *"This place is an oasis – kids have beds, clothing, food, sanitation, a safe place to live, people who care about them... you could see Christ in there. Not only in the kids themselves, but in the people who cared for them."*

By late afternoon, we were exhausted, but we still had another flight to catch. We took a small chartered turboprop to Cap-Haitien, Haiti's second largest city. There, we were met by Fr. Duken Augustin, Food For The Poor's liaison for northern Haiti. It was a wonderful reunion for me and Fr. Duken (I call him my "little brother"), and for all of us who have worked with him over the years.

PART II "Breaking The Shackles of Poverty"

DAY THREE... We started the day at Nativity Tilapia Farm at Petit Anse. Rippling muscles and rippling water combined to produce a net full of tilapia – some as long as 14" – as one of the 5 ponds was harvested by hand-dragging the net across its 100' diameter. Following the fish harvest, we planted containers with fruit tree seeds to start the nursery process for providing fruit trees to our housing villages.

From Petit-Anse, we drove back to Cap-Haitien, where Fr. Duken had arranged a prisoner release. Nativity parishioners had visited this prison last November for the first time, and today we returned to feed the 500+ men, women and children (yes, there are children in this jail!). We also distributed shoes and toiletry kits to all of them. It was 3 solid hours of hard work in 100 degree heat and no A/C!!! The highlight of the visit was our ability to release 7 non-violent offenders. One man had taken a small refrigerator that had fallen off a truck, and he was locked up for 8 months waiting to have his case heard. Others had stolen food for their hungry families. Fr. Duken and I gave these men a pep talk and a hug; we fed them a hot meal, gave them some supplies and a little money, and walked them out the gates to freedom.

We spent the afternoon in the swamps of Prolonge, visiting people who live at the mercy of mud and tides. Their houses are 8' x 8' shacks patched together with scraps of tin, wood and cardboard. And yet they try... One woman had a bright pink cloth hanging in the doorway to keep out flies – a splash of color in a sea of misery. The children here look like ragamuffins. Many are naked; those that have clothing wear dirty, torn rags. Many have bloated bellies and

orange-tinged hair – signs of hunger and malnutrition. We saw abscesses, infected wounds, skin diseases and respiratory infections everywhere. Why must people live like this, we ask. Kids and adults alike, they all light up when we pass out Sillybandz – the new fad sweeping American kids at home. As tough as conditions are here in the swamp, the people are welcoming and joyful. They see our presence as a gift, a tangible sign that someone knows they exist, that someone cares enough to come to visit. They see our presence as a sign from God that they can allow themselves to hope for a better future. Their gift to us is their living example of the power of faith.

We walked a short distance to Nativity Village at Prolonge, where we have taken more than 350 families out of the swamp and moved them into decent housing, with access to clean water and sanitation. We were welcomed like heroes. These Nativity Village residents now have a school, solar streetlights, a community center for meetings, mass and vocational training, and the St. Anthony Health Center. They also have a sewing co-op, which we recently restocked with 600 lbs. of sewing supplies on our last Nativity sea container. We also brought several bags of needles, thread, etc. with us and handed it to the sewing teacher. Seeing the “before and after” of Operation Starfish side by side at Prolonge dramatically emphasized the huge difference we at Nativity are making in the lives of the poor.

DAY FOUR... A tropical thunderstorm last night cleaned the air, but didn’t dissipate the steaminess of another hot day. We wonder how the 1.3 million people living in tents in Port-au-Prince survive the almost daily downpours of the rainy season.

We descended into hell this morning as we wandered through the maze of dark, muddy alleyways in Shada. With FFP security close behind, we endured the stench and contamination of this warren of 3,500 families. It’s just unbelievable that human beings have to live in these conditions. Here we met 3 families who have been selected for new houses in Nativity Village at Chastenoye, our 6th village development, funded with our 2010 Operation Starfish campaign. One of them, a woman with three malnourished, sickly children, already had her meager belongings packed in a plastic garbage bag. She wanted to be ready when Fr. Duken’s staff came to take her to her new house. None of her children owned any clothing. Can you imagine being so poor, you don’t have a scrap of cloth to cover your 3 children? All 3 were lying in the dirt at the door of their shack, too weak to move. We can only pray that they survive until their house is ready. *(Editor’s note: This family was moved the following week to Chastenoye, where they are enjoying decent shelter and fresh air.)*

Most of us had emotional problems with this stop. A touching moment saw Kathy D. and Jim S., holding tight to each other, as the tears flowed. A bright spot brought together Gianina F. and a Shada woman, as they danced in the street to the sound of the World Cup theme music, coming from a jury-rigged radio. Josh M. and Maria W. captured much of what we saw through the lenses of their cameras.

Back on the emotional roller coaster, we traveled west to Chastenoye, to plant fruit trees and break ground on the next batch of houses, water wells and sanitation at Nativity Village at Chastenoye. This is a beautiful rural area, with arable land stretching for miles. The mountains at the Dominican Republic border are visible in the distance. Everyone took a turn with the hefty

grub hoe, as we symbolically began construction of our next Operation Starfish project. Laura G. takes the prize for “*most effective hoe stroke.*”

At Chastenoye we visited with earthquake refugees who are now living in our new houses. One mother, who had lost a foot, has a 5-year-old girl whose left leg was amputated. Jim M. carried this little girl on his shoulder like she was his own grandchild. She wanted us to see her new house. Our new village is caressed with fresh air breezes. There’s an old mango tree filled with birds singing. The water from the well is cool and clean. The houses actually have indoor toilets. This will be like paradise for the families moving from Shada.

PART III “Leaving Haiti With Hope”

DAY FOUR (con’t.)... Leaving Chastenoye, we made a brief stop at a Food For The Poor orphanage. Jim M. urged us to use the bathroom facilities, but not to linger with the children because it would delay our schedule – he’s always the taskmaster! But once the cute little kids with their brightly colored hair beads and big smiles greeted us with song, and we started handing out Sillybandz, playtime began. Brittany F. had her hair brushed out, photos were taken, and we grouped together to sing “*Do, Re, Mi...*” This was a light moment, much-needed.

The next event was certainly personally rewarding for me and my family. This afternoon we blessed and dedicated the “*Georgette Martin Sewing Center*” in Nativity Village at Demier. When my Mom died on December 27, 2008, our family suggested, in lieu of flowers, that donations be made to establish a sewing co-op in Haiti to train young people in garment design and fabrication. This would honor my Mom, who taught sewing, with a legacy that leads to small business opportunities for Haitian young people. Today, that legacy has begun to provide self-sustaining job skills to people in need. We blessed the building, cut a ribbon, and celebrated mass in the new sewing center. The community made us a wonderful lunch, with homemade cake decorated with tropical fruit. Our parishioners and friends had previously shipped 600 lbs. of fabric and sewing supplies, along with first communion dresses, in a Food For The Poor container. These items arrived just 2 days before our visit and were distributed to the Georgette Martin Sewing Center and to our sewing co-op in Nativity Village at Prolonge. Today, we brought several additional bags of sewing items that we had taken in our luggage, and made a monetary gift, courtesy of one of our parishioners.

Following the celebration, we emptied several barrels of fingerling fish into the lake at Demier. These Pangassia fish will grow quickly and provide a needed source of protein for the people of this Nativity Village. Today was a long day. We traveled from an abyss of anguish in Shada to a promise of paradise in Chastenoye and Demier. This is Haiti – land of paradox. This is Operation Starfish – making a difference, one at a time.

DAY FIVE... Our last day in Haiti, Friday, July 2nd, began early. We left Cap-Haitien on a 7 a.m. charter flight to Port-au-Prince. Our friends at Food For The Poor’s Haiti HQ again had a nice breakfast waiting for us. We then went to visit Food For The Poor’s HIV/AIDS clinic at the University of Miami Field Hospital in Port-au-Prince. We met with Dr.’s Jerry and Marlon Bitar, Haitian twin brothers and surgeons, who were doing 15-20 amputations a day during the month following the quake. I held both of them in my arms and blessed them for saving so many lives.

As we made our last drive through the ravaged city, I was overwhelmed with conflicting emotions. I prayed for the repose of the souls of the 250,000 killed in the earthquake; I prayed for healing for the injured and for the families who are grieving; I prayed for the 1.3 million people still living in tents; and I thanked God for this beautiful group of people on the bus with me, knowing that He is at this very moment stirring their hearts, touching their very souls. This group of 18, along with those who have gone to Haiti with us in the past, and all the good people of Nativity Parish, will continue to activate prayer with action. We at Nativity are firmly committed to the Gospel call to serve the poor. We have done everything asked of us in Matthew 25:34-36 (*Then the king will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me"*)

And with every fiber of my existence, I know that our Nativity community will continue to follow the Gospel in service to those in need, across the street and around the world. Our very essence as a parish community is found in the scripture (James 2:14-17) that I had printed on my prayer cards at my ordination to the priesthood on May 14, 1966: (*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*)

A sincere thank-you to each of the people who joined me on this latest mission trip to Haiti...

Fr. Martin

MISSION TRIP DVD AVAILABLE

If you would like to see what a Food For The Poor mission trip is like, we have an 18-minute DVD, filmed and edited by FFP videographer Ian Wood available for you. Stop by the Nativity Church office or contact Jim McDaniel (seastar2004@msn.com) for your copy.

OCTOBER 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 Edward daCruz of Connecticut, whose family and friends are building a library in Haiti in his honor;

† For the people of Haiti, who continue to struggle with the aftermath of the earthquake, that God provide them a measure of healing, and that He inspire us to keep serving our Haitian sisters and brothers in their need;

† For the continued healing of William McGinness of Massachusetts, as he recovers from a series of medical treatments over the past year;

† 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...

FOOD FOR THE POOR – CFC #10328

Food For The Poor is an official charity of the Combined Federal Campaign. If you are a federal, postal, or military employee, you can designate Food For The Poor (CFC #10328) as your preferred charity.



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.

HAITIAN WISDOM

**Pwoblèm se yon bourik.
Eske n'ap monte'l ou eske l'ap monte nou?**

Problem is a donkey.
Will we mount it or will it mount us?

CLOSING PRAYER...

**Lord, take me where You want me to go.
Let me meet who You want me to meet.
Tell me what You want me to say,
And keep me out of Your way.**

-----Fr. Mychal F. Judge, OFM*

Father Mychal F. Judge, OFM, was a busy Franciscan priest who dedicated his life to serving God's people. He is known for his work with the homeless, recovering addicts, AIDS patients, and his work as chaplain to the New York City Fire Department. On September 11, 2001, Father Mychal rushed from the friary at Saint Francis of Assisi Church to the scene of the World Trade Center attacks. After administering last rites to a firefighter, Father Mychal was hit by debris and killed. He became the first officially recorded fatality following the attack.

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.

OPERATION STARFISH NEWSLETTER (Vol. IX, Issue 4), October 2010: 1010newsltr.docx
Edited this month by Jim McDaniel (seastar2004@msn.com)