

November 25, 2009 • Haiti Journal, Part 4 – by Trish Newton

It's already been six months since the Dean and I visited Haiti and met the hopeful parents at the school of St. Andre's Church in Cazale! Because many of you have contributed funds to the school project and continue to pray for the endeavor, we have been able to send \$4,600 to the school since May! On behalf of the school children at St. Andre's school, "*Merci anpil!*" Thank you very much!

Father Duveaux, who oversees the project, has been sending me updates on the progress of the repairs and school statistics. When the new semester began in September, 55 children enrolled. Many parents were hesitant to send their children because they didn't believe anything had changed. However, enough changes were made that school opened with three levels of pre-school and four primary classes. Some of the classrooms had new bench-desks and more are being constructed. Teachers received training over the summer, but the biggest improvement and incentive for them to show up regularly is receiving back-pay and the assurance that they will be paid for the entire semester! So word is out, and the number of students rose to 81 by the end of October.

There are still many children who want to attend school, but their families can't afford uniforms or school fees. These issues will be considered as we are able to increase our ability to raise sufficient funds.

Before we can begin to consider how to help these children, basic repairs still need to be finished to make the current school building safe and fully functional. A clean water system is needed. If you saw the slide show when we returned from Haiti, you will agree that new lavatories are a top priority! Finishing the unfinished church building will allow more classrooms. And teachers will continue to need a regular salary!

Father Duveaux sent us a preliminary estimate of \$75,000 to complete the repairs, build a roof on the unfinished church that will also cover new classrooms through grade 6, build classroom furniture and purchase the necessary books and school supplies. Such an expansion will also mean they need to hire additional teachers. Fr. Duveaux plans to provide one nutritious meal with vitamin supplements for the students every day. If possible, immunizations will also be given.

Sometimes, understanding the extent of the project is overwhelming. I wonder if we will be able to do our part: \$75,000 (at least!) Then I remember we don't have to do this in one year. And it isn't just a matter of bankrolling out of compassion. God assures us that this is HIS project too! I need to remember the biblical accounts of "impossible things" that have been done through the ages and increase my faith.

Some of the Cazale School Project needs are included on the Tree of Sharing this year. Instructions on how to designate your gifts are printed on the tags.

JWAYE NWÈL! JOYOUS CHRISTMAS!

October 26, 2009 • Haiti on my mind, Part 3 – by Trish Newton

I've just returned from a big, boisterous birthday party for my one- and four-year-old grandkids. What a scene! Lots of (healthy) finger food, cake, crafts and an enormous pile of presents. I had a great time reading to the kids and playing toddler games.

When I checked my e-mail today, I found an update from Father Duveaux, the priest in Cazale, Haiti, overseeing the school project. Here is an excerpt from his letter. You'll note the contrast with that birthday party scene:

“My greetings to you and best wishes. I am very glad to read that you don't stop work on our proposal. We open this new academic year with 7 classes: 3 preschool classes and 4 primary classes. We record at this present time 55 regular pupils. Most of the parents say that they are not ready yet to send their kids to school: we can't accept them without shoes or dress....”

“A hot meal will be distributed to each child during school sessions. For effective academic performance the child needs to eat, but now the school does not have a cafeteria and many parents cannot feed their children...”

Fr. Duveaux also expresses his hope for more initiatives for the kids: to provide daily vitamins and childhood immunizations: “since the majority of children have no access to health care and especially have no sufficient means to meet their daily [nutritional] requirement.”

Such a lop-sided world! Seems like the Church has a responsibility to help balance it...not to give every kid a pile of presents, but to extend to them the same quality of love and care we give our own children.



I'm happy to report that the Haiti Project committee received a \$500 Millennium Development Goals grant from the Social Justice Outreach Ministries Committee of the Diocese, plus a matching grant! I'm sure Fr. Duveaux will put the funds to use immediately.

September 7, 2009 • Haiti Chronicles, Part 2: Haiti on my mind – by Trish Newton

Funny how a place grows on you...two years ago Haiti was not a place I thought about daily. Yes, it was to be the Cathedral's outreach destination and I was learning about it and corresponding with Father Duveaux, the priest in charge of the school in Cazale we hoped to assist. But I didn't have pictures of people and places sneaking into my head all the time.

What happened? Haiti became real. It moved from my head to my heart about the second day of our visit. Fr. Duveaux decided to show Dean Ellis and me around the coastal plain since we couldn't get to Cazale safely until the river receded. He wanted to show us the countryside and the villages so we'd have a broader understanding of Haitian life.

An excerpt from my journal:

Why does being here make me so happy? I love it! The people are smiling, the colors are eye-popping-bright, there is life everywhere in all shapes and forms. A woman walks with a huge basin of laundry on her head, others stride gracefully, balancing trays of fresh rolls, bags of mangos, even 10-gallon buckets of water that don't even slosh as they walk.

Dogs (skinny and pregnant), chickens and goats that seem to belong to no one all wander freely in the streets. Vendors sit by the side of the road selling a few lollipops, hair ribbons or barrettes, a girl surrounded by brilliant oranges. Some wave, even as Fr. D blasts his horn continually as motorcycles with two (and even three!) passengers whizz by....

We saw a lot that day, and not all picturesque. A mother bathed her toddler in the muddy water of the irrigation canal for the banana plantation. But the little girl splashed and squealed as millions of kids do in their clean bathtubs all over the “developed” world. Later, when we stopped to watch the men on a plantation breaking the soil with heavy mattocks to plant rows of young banana trees, we saw their naked children peeking at us from behind their mamas’ legs: most had swollen bellies and patchy red hair--tell-tale signs of kwashiorkor (severe malnutrition.) Yet they giggled and played peek-a-boo when we waved to them.

These memories will always be with me, making me smile and ache. But the one that keeps me focused on Haiti comes from our meeting with the men at the little church in Cazale. During our conversation I showed them a photo album of some of the people of the Cathedral, and told them that people in our church in Spokane were praying for them. An old man jumped up with tears streaming down his cheeks. He raised his hands and shouted praises to God that He had heard their cries and had sent someone!

So...we were “sent.” We’d better get to work! That old man and his joyful cry is powerful motivation!

Update: This summer, the Haiti Committee sent \$2000 to the Diocese of Haiti for the Cazale school staff’s back wages, new benches and chalkboards. Thanks to all who contributed! We hope to get the projected costs for repairs to the current classrooms and new construction plans soon.

July 13, 2009 • My Haiti Journal: Part One – by Trish Newton

I was working in my garden a day or two ago and heard the oh-so-familiar sound of the ice cream truck coming down the street, which sent me back to a vivid memory from Haiti.

Six weeks ago, I woke up early in the morning, under a mosquito net, to that same jingly sound, though the melody was “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” instead of “Pop! Goes the Weasel”. An ice cream truck in a little Haitian town? Impossible!

Turns out that it wasn’t popsicles or sundaes-on-a-stick for sale, but bottles of clean water. The next morning the charcoal vendor came by, accompanied by a different medley of tinny tunes.

Water and charcoal: two staples in every Haitian home. In many homes, both can be a curse rather than a blessing: when a family can't afford to buy treated water, they will cook, drink, and bathe with river water--even with water from the irrigation ditch, and they will suffer from a variety of water-borne illnesses. Many, especially children, will die.

Providing clean water is a major focus of many charitable outreach programs, and will be part of the plans for the Cathedral's partnering with the school in Cazale.

Charcoal is the only fuel source for Haitians and is the number-one cause of soil erosion throughout the country. Only 1% of Haitian forests remain; the visible greenery consists of shallow-rooted shrubs and small trees that are no match for hurricanes and drenching rains. When the big storms come, villages and roads are destroyed, crop-lands wash away. Some areas become huge lakes with people clinging to the roofs of their submerged homes, praying for rescue.

Charcoal as fuel poses another danger: severe burns. Dean Ellis and I saw severely injured children in the Cazale clinic--burned when a charcoal stove tipped over on them, or when they tripped and fell into an outdoor charcoal pit or cooking ring.

Funny how a simple summer-time sound will now remind me of our new friends in a village far away. They are the ones who can't run to the water-vendor, nor do they use stoves with safety features.

These folk are now our partners, as is that vulnerable little village. Remember our partners in Cazale.

June 8, 2009 • Grinding Poverty And A Passion For Education – By Bill Ellis

Haiti is a beautiful land that has, over the centuries, been badly abused. Flying in over the gulf of Haiti, we could see the scope of deforestation of the hillsides and the soil erosion. The rivers are brown, and the run-off sends a chocolate plume well into the bay at the mouth of each river. Port au Prince, a city of more than two million people, has no sewer system to speak of, and the effluent finds its way untreated into the ground water and, ultimately the bay. The result is a toxic shoreline. The Episcopal Cathedral in Port au Prince is spare but beautiful. The paintings in the apse and transepts grabbed our attention immediately. In this art, Jesus and his disciples are clearly Haitian, and the biblical scenes occur in Haitian settings.

The main highway north is in good condition, by Haitian standards, paved and with few potholes. Around the cities it is crowded with motorcycles, pedestrians, brightly painted trucks called Tap Taps carrying fare-paying passengers and private automobiles. Outside the cities the roads are open, with few cars. The rest of the roads are dirt--in poor condition. Even recently graded roads quickly become rutted.

Our hosts are wonderful people who treated us royally. The food was prepared with great care, using only treated and clean water, and there was always plenty of it. On one occasion they took us to an open air market--an experience in itself. It was crowded; the stalls were made of whatever discarded wood or metal the vendors could scavenge, and everywhere was that unique smell comprised of equal parts rotting vegetation, human sweat, and garbage. So pervasive was it that we quickly became used to it and, after a short time no longer noticed it. Of special

interest was the charcoal-selling section. Haitians use huge amounts of charcoal for cooking. The market we went to featured an area by the seashore of more than two acres devoted exclusively to selling large gunnysacks of charcoal. Just offshore were the charcoal boats from the island of Gonave, where much of the wood for making charcoal comes from.

We took a dirt road to the small town of Cazales. Though recently redeveloped in the aftermath of Hurricane Ike, it nevertheless showed sign of wear. The town straddles the river, and the only access to the far side was a small footbridge that, by Sunday had been washed out, forcing us to wade the river in order to attend church. The people were uniformly gracious and delighted to see that someone from the outside has taken an interest in them. In our conversations with the people of Cazales we heard over and over that education for their children is their number one priority. Since there are almost no industrial jobs in Haiti, people without education have no chance to escape the grinding poverty that characterizes most of the country. With an education, a variety of opportunities opens up. We saw significant evidence of this ourselves. Those few who could read and write tend to find a variety of ways to make a living. Those who cannot have to eke out an existence selling whatever they can find, or become sharecroppers, growing crops for the landowners in exchange for the right to keep a portion.

We are concentrating on helping the people of Cazales develop a school for their children. This will be a long-term project that will require us to assist in building better facilities, develop a proper sanitation system for the school and raise funds to pay teachers. We will help these people to help themselves.

May 25, 2009 • Why Haiti? Why Not Haiti? – by Bill Ellis

Trish Newton and I are in Haiti now, returning to Spokane on the 27th. We are meeting with representatives from the diocese of Haiti and spending time in the small town of Casales. We will evaluate the possibilities and, when we return, if it looks good, we will formulate plans that I hope will result in relationships that are beneficial to everyone.

Reaching out to others is not an option for a Christian. The kind of love that involves us in the world, that entangles us in deep and important relationships with other people, is at the heart of the love delineated by *agape*, that word St. John uses over and over again. It is a love that does not take, but gives, and that finds its expression in living for the sake of others. It is not what we call co-dependent. It does not say “yes” to keep the peace when it should say “no” in service to the truth. It comes from God and only from God, but it is manifested in us as we are transformed by God’s grace.

Bishop Waggoner wrote a compelling piece in last week’s Diocesan Digest about the poverty and needs that are increasingly evident in the Yakima Valley. We could be doing something in Yakima. We don’t need to go to Haiti to find need. The only answer I have to that is: first, we can do both; and second, Haiti is where love, where *agape*, has taken us.

We have people in this church connected to Haiti: people who have been there, who are adoptive grandparents of Haitian children. There is energy and passion in this place to develop an ongoing relationship in Haiti.

The needs in the Yakima Valley are as important as those in Haiti, even the real needs in Spokane. But we have to listen to our hearts. Amidst the suffering that overwhelms our capacity to allay it, we have to pay attention to compassion that says Right Now...Right Here. That compassion, that love has told us to go to Haiti.

This trip, the entire effort, is being financed solely by gifts of individuals from this parish. No pledged income or other outreach dollars are being used in this initiative. Just as love has called us to Haiti, so it is love and only love, that finances it.

I need to finish with that notion of “compelling cause” and “important mission.” It is easy to imagine that because Haiti is so poor, we will give them something more significant than what they could offer us. This isn’t true. They know things about generosity of spirit, pooling resources, sticking to what really matters, about where real joy comes from that we have trouble bringing to mind. They can become part of the way God continues to transform us into new people.

What I envision over time is the building of a two-way street, so that, in the end, our thanks to them will be as emphatic and as heart-felt as their thanks to us.