

Life in Petite Riviere

To get to Petite Riviere de Nippes (Ti Riv for short) you follow the shore of the Caribbean coast west with the mountains rising to your left and the sea on the right. You know you have arrived when you see the white church and three-story high school between the road and the sea. If you lived in Ti Riv (before the earthquake) you probably live in a house you made yourself out of wood, stone and branches chinked with mud or it might have a cement floor and walls made of cement blocks. The roof is probably metal or cement. You have a bed, table, and chairs which you made yourself or bought from a local carver. Your house probably has 2 rooms with an outdoor kitchen and outhouse and has no electricity or running water. Your food is cooked over a wood or charcoal fire.

You live on a piece of land in the mountains on which you grow vegetables and fruit trees and have some livestock – chickens, goats, and maybe a donkey. If you grow extra produce, you bring it down the mountain to the market which is held on the main road in Ti Riv on Wednesday or Saturday morning. You might bring the produce by donkey or in a basket on your head. The market is open-air with some manufactured, imported goods on tables or spread on a cloth on the ground but mostly consists of your neighbors selling their produce or meat. You do not have a formal job, instead working on your farm, selling things in the market, or working in another informal method.

If you are a woman or child, you are tasked with getting your family's water from a nearby stream or cistern. The water used in cooking or drinking might be filtered in a Gift of Water bucket system and treated with chlorine tablets. Your clothes are washed in the stream which is also where you bathe.

If you are over 35, you probably have not been to school and cannot read or write but there is a good chance your elementary-aged children now attend school which is not provided by the government but by the Catholic church or other charitable organization. You pay a

small tuition, your children wear a hand-sewn uniform and are required to wear shoes to school. The children probably are served rice and beans at lunchtime on a plate they brought from home which may be their only meal of the day.

You were probably born at home and have little access to medical or dental care except for a Vodou doctor. You speak Creole which is a derivative of French with a strong African influence. Your children are taught French in school which is the language of commerce and government. You are an avid soccer fan and play or watch games in an open field, for refreshment you might buy a small baggie of cold water. Dominos is also a favorite game. Walking is the main form of transportation although you might own a donkey to transport food or other items. If you are traveling farther, you probably take a brightly painted tap-tap truck or bus or rent a seat on the back of a motorbike. Lately, however, gangs of thieves have made travel to and from the main cities dangerous.

The vast majority of your neighbors are Roman Catholic. On Sunday you often walk, possibly for hours, down the mountain to attend Mass, or you might go to a chapel built in the mountains which is closer to your home where a sacristan leads prayers on Sundays. Occasionally, Fr. Volcy travels to say Mass in the chapel, which doubles as an elementary classroom on weekdays. The biggest local holiday in Ti Riv is the feast day of St. Anthony of Padua, the patron of the church and the town. The Catholic church is the most stable and important institution in Haiti, playing a leading role in providing social services like education, health care, and community development and making it the best way to quickly provide help in a disaster especially in an inaccessible rural area.

Next month: OLMC parishioners visit St. Antoine (mission trips)

This is the Part 2 of a year-long series celebrating our 20-year relationship with St. Antoine parish. Read Part 1 at olmc1.org/haiti-mission.