

Haiti Ministry Update July 2021



This has been a difficult time for our brothers and sisters in Haiti. The effect of the pandemic on the population in Haiti had been much less severe than it has been in the United States for most of the past year. However, since early June there has been a spike in cases, predominantly of a delta virus variant originating in the United Kingdom and India. Illness with these variants has been more severe leading to shortages of hospital beds in some sectors and shortages of oxygen.



Please continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in Haiti!

This year there also has been profound political and economic instability (See: *POSITION PAPER OF THE JÉSUISTS OF HAITI ON THE CURRENT HAITIAN CRISIS* on the Parish website under Haiti Ministry). The Congress has been disbanded. The President rules without clear mandate because of controversy over when his term started and when it should end. A discounted oil program from Venezuela has been terminated due to instability and economic crisis in that country and (presumed) embezzlement of funds related to that program in Haiti. In the absence of a functioning central government, gangs have come to control life in many towns and cities including Masak—one of our Chapel Communities—and frequently shut down roads between these cities.

Two years of drought have compromised the food supply. When we last spoke by Zoom in March, Father Sylvio reported that the prior month he had held 40 funerals for children under the age of eight who died of starvation. These are predominantly children of very poor and inexperienced young mothers fleeing gang violence in Masak. Many of these refugee families came to Pendus seeking shelter, safety and sustenance. Food for the Poor, an international relief organization, is providing one meal/day for children in school. This is often the only meal that the children will have that day.

The Haiti Ministry of St. Mary Cathedral is taking maximum available advantage of a matching grant from Food for the Poor for additional supplemental food for the community. The parishioners of St. Mary, through their donations to the Haiti Ministry made the maximum allowable donation of \$2,000, securing \$4,000 worth of food in the Fall of 2020 (receipts documented a value of more than \$6,000). This Spring, a special donation was made by a member of our parish responding to the loss of revenue from the inability to hold a *Song of Hope Dinner and Concert* for 2020 and 2021. That donation allowed us to take advantage of another Matching Grant offer from Food for the Poor (FFP) with \$4,000 worth of food distributed in early June for Pendus and the surrounding Chapels. Each grant provided relief to approximately 2,400 people.

Among the projects that have been most successful over the last couple years have been agronomy initiatives:

- **Animal husbandry.** St. Mary Cathedral has provided female goats to members of St. Joseph's Parish and several of the chapels. The individuals who receive the goats are chosen by the parishioners themselves. Goats typically have two litters/year, usually of two kids per litter. The first born from each goat is given to a different family selected by the parish, the remaining progeny are retained by the first recipient. The family that receives the first born of the first goat similarly contract to provide its firstborn to another family, and so on. The Agronomy center at Gre Pen (founded by Sister Pat Dillon) instructs the families on the care of the goats, provides inoculations, and sends a veterinary technician to Pendus every six months. The goat recipients in the community continue to meet for continuing education and for planning to support the agronomy effort in the community. The raising of chickens has been plagued by some problems. In April we were able to



arrange for Dr. Pat Wakenell, DVM, Ph.D., a world authority on poultry from Purdue, to provide a Zoom presentation for veterinary technicians on nutrition and viral disease in chickens.

- **Family gardens.** An initial grant of seeds, or a micro finance loan for seeds is made. Families receive training in productive gardening from consultants that come from Gre Pen. Produce is consumed by the family, and some is sold in the local market, providing resources for further seeds, school and other necessities. Again, gardeners continue to meet for continuing education, sharing of experiences and management of the program.
- **Microfinance.** Father Sylvio has set aside some funds to provide loans to local women (predominantly) for sustainable projects such as gardening, production and sale of handmade clothes tools or other useful items, or for buying non-local goods for resale in the local market. Repayment of loans finances the continuation of the initiative.
- **Sewing machines.** For several years Sharon Newell has been asking, “what happened to the sewing machines that were donated in 2002?” Father Sylvio has unearthed them. Father recognized a problem with early pregnancy among the young women especially among those coming down from Masak. Among other things he has organized classes to instruct young women (currently 25) in sewing to help them find productive ways to fill their time and to build their confidence and self-worth. Cooking classes have been organized by the local matrons. Important relationships are being made among these young women as well as between the young women and the older females.



Father Sylvio is bringing more people to God. When we last spoke by Zoom, the Parish was celebrating and praying a Novena leading up to the Feast Day of their patron saint, Saint Joseph, a joyful time for the people. Father Sylvio was preparing to celebrate the 25th anniversary of his ordination in late April when he fell ill and required hospitalization. Your prayers for him were most appreciated. He has largely recovered after a period of convalescence and has returned to his ministry.

The greatest source of hope for Father Sylvio, however, is the growth in Faith and the change in attitude and perspective that he has seen among the people of his region due to their own resilient character, the work of the Holy Spirit, and his own inspired and inspiring efforts. The Haiti Ministry has grown, along with Father Sylvio, in our approach to challenges in Haiti. Much of our current perspective was enlightened by Robert D. Lupton’s 2011 book, Toxic Charity, (How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help, and How to Reverse It).

The parishioners of St. Mary Cathedral continue to subsidize certain essential services: teacher’s salaries, a nurse’s salary, and Father Sylvio’s salary. Thank you for your help!

Father Sylvio says that the people of his parish and chapels are **eager for us to return, so that we can see what they have done**. We continue to keep in touch by email, text, occasional phone calls, and, when circumstances allow, by Zoom with a translator, Geri Lanham. We will not be able to physically return to Haiti in the foreseeable future nor Father Sylvio return to see us, but we continue to be present to each other.

The Haiti website has been integrated into the parish website and continues to be updated. You will find a listing of many of the projects that your generosity has supported over the years, and photos related to some of these initiatives. The Haiti Planning Committee (a small, but essential part of the Haiti Ministry) has lost several dedicated members to relocation over the last year and thank them for their service: Tony Behr, Tim and Jodie Tully, George and Pam White. We want your help! Would you help us in managing agricultural initiatives, or planning and promoting prayer for our brothers and sisters in Haiti (They *never* forget us in their prayers), or help in medical affairs, or be a digital communications czar? You can also simply hang with us until your role emerges. We are excited to welcome some younger members and give them key roles.

Please hear and answer the call as the Holy Spirit guides you!

David Schmidt
Secretary-Treasurer

Jeff Newell
Chairman, Haiti Ministry