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Haiti Project

I am the vine, you are the branches.



Celebrating 30 Years of Partnership with St. Marc's School
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Parishioners of St. Marc's (above). First trip from the Diocese (photo below).



Pictured here from left to right are Ted Chesney (Portage), Bishop Roger White, Linda Foss (then Dousman), the Rev. Dale Casey (then Dousman), the Rev. Larry Smith (then Trinity, Wauwatosa), Charles Bradley (Baraboo) and Ed Gleason, American Missionary in Haiti.

REFLECTIONS ON THIRTY YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP

When one thinks back on the last thirty years of the Diocese of Milwaukee-

Haiti Project, many stories come to mind. A timeline of construction projects or major events at St. Marc's would certainly be appropriate to share. However, after weeks of wrestling with this question, I have been struck that it is not the building projects or the amount of money spent. It wasn't even the problems that we have solved with our brothers and sisters in Christ, but **the importance of the relationships built and sustained over the years.**

In mid-January 1986, a small group of Americans were connected through the Diocese of Haiti office and American missionary, Ed Gleason with the Rev. Octave Lafontant. In all likelihood, this group went to Jeannette on January 10, preceding a mission trip to another part of Haiti. How interesting to read the scope of their vision today! It was a blank canvas with the exception of a small church in the mountains, faithful Christians, and the beginnings of the foundation of a primary school. From those beginnings of the partnership, a few construction and medical teams were sent. Over time, financial investments in the campus and a lot of dedication on the part of the Haitian staff at the school, have resulted in one of the best schools in Haiti (based on test scores, advancement rate and graduation rate) and a healthy, thriving community.

What we have learned over the years through our partnership is this:

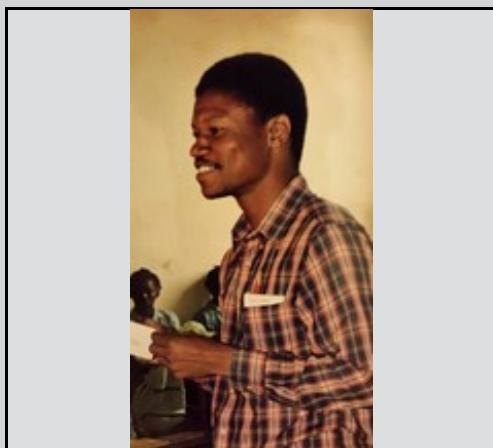
- 1) The Church in Haiti revolves around the lay ministry. Missions aren't even assigned a priest until they have proven a strong lay ministry and leadership.
- 2) Education is probably the only way out of poverty. There may or may not be jobs for a graduating student, but knowing how to read means that one can read the Bible, be informed when voting in an election. Parents can assist their children in the learning process. An educated woman is more Schools are a binding program and communication point of the community
- 3) Prayerful intercultural exchanges change people's lives. Over 500 people from the U.S. have traveled to Haiti, mostly on 10 day mission trips. A few have stayed for extended periods. Haitians and Americans have been exposed to each other values, ways of life, language and culture. Sometimes this is painful, especially when once realizes how impoverished the Haitians have been. Yet both communities have seen each other through political crises, natural disasters, shortage of funds, births, deaths, marriages, sickness and health. Those experiences have sometimes been a roller-coaster of emotions.
- 4) A balance of personalities, outlook and experiences are healthy for the life of the Project. The majority of our "energy" comes from those who have been filled with spirit while in Haiti. Not everyone can go or should go to Haiti. Some of those bring fundraising and communication skills. "We" are a group of medical professional, housewives, clergy, construction workers, artists, teachers, and every other calling. No one group is "better than" the other. Some go once. Some go every year.
- 5) Listening to each other has been central to the success of the Project. Just like a good marriage or good parenting, open communication, honesty, compassion and understanding bring trust in each other and success in daily life.

We have a ministry of presence as much as or more than a ministry of “doing”. When a medical team returns from Haiti, there is always a story of some sick person being saved from death. And yet, in the bigger scheme of things, so many of us have been saved by receiving the grace of God through our loving relationships. At the end of the day, Haitian and American can look each other in the eye and agree that we pursued the “Bon Ide” (good idea) and have done “Bon bagay” (Good stuff!) We have brought about good in the world in answering our baptismal call of loving one another as God loves us. We give God great thanks for all that has been given and accomplished, by the Grace of God, in the last thirty years. Most importantly, we give thanks for the dedication and hard work of all those who have contributed to and participated in this thing we call the “Haiti Project,” a ministry of partnership between two communities a world apart and yet, one in Christ.

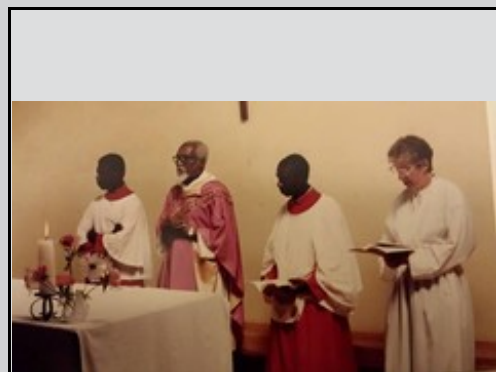
Please keep the Haiti Project, the community of St. Marc’s Jeannette, the Diocese of Milwaukee and the extended greater Church in your prayers. Give thanks for God’s gifts to us all.

Mary Alice Eschweiler, St. Mary’s Dousman

Rodolph Eloi, St. Marc’s School Administrator pictured in 1993. Eloi is still overseeing the school today.



Pere Octave Lafontant leading liturgy. Former Haiti Project Chair, Ginny Wolfe, on the right.



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