



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

Dear Friends of *Operation Starfish*®:

Let us begin with a photo meditation...



FOOD DISTRIBUTION – NATIVITY VILLAGE AT DEMIER

SIXTH NATIVITY VILLAGE PLANNED

With the proceeds from Church of the Nativity's 2010 Lenten campaign, Food For The Poor will begin development of Nativity Village 6 near Cap Haitien, Haiti's second largest city. Fr. Duken Augustin, Food For The Poor's liaison in northern Haiti, will supervise the project, with support from Delane Bailey-Herd and Food For The Poor's Florida project staff.

Located in the Chestanoye community, where Fr. Duken has obtained title to a tract of land, this development will offer people who now live along a polluted canal in

downtown Cap-Haitien the opportunity to live in decent conditions. The current Shada neighborhood is home to thousands of impoverished families. Basic necessities of life are lacking – decent shelter, clean drinking water, sanitation and food. The “bridge people,” as they are now known, will be able to move to Chestanoye, where simple but sturdy houses can be built, wells can be dug, and sanitation provided.

For the past 12 years, Nativity parishioners have worked with Food For The Poor to make a difference in Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere. “Nativity Village” projects have provided housing, sanitation, clean water, schools, clinics, vocational training, small business enterprises, sewing and fishing co-op’s, tilapia farms, agricultural and reforestation projects, and other humanitarian aid across a wide area of Haiti. Nativity Villages are located in Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haitien (2 villages), El Corte (on the Dominican Republic border), and Lozandier (on the south coast).

Nativity’s Operation Starfish program brings people of all ages and means together to make a difference in the lives of the poor, one at a time. Since 1998, Nativity parishioners have donated more than \$2.2 million to Food For The Poor to implement projects in Haiti. More than 100 Nativity parishioners have traveled to Haiti on mission trips. Nativity’s 2010 Operation Starfish effort will first focus on the basic needs of the Shada community, then plan for self-sustaining micro-enterprise projects in the future.

GROWING THROUGH SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

By Fr. Mike Hann, CICM, Cursillo Spiritual Director

Spiritual direction has many parallels in life’s journey. Let me share with you my experience with spiritual direction. I am a fisherman’s son. I lived my first 16 years with my family by the sea in the province of Newfoundland, Canada. Although the ocean temperature was always rather chilly, there was a short period in the summer months when we could go swimming, if you could take 40 degree ocean water temperatures. I taught myself how to swim by following the movements of the family pet as it swam, a rather rudimentary dog paddle, but effective. As I grew older and went to college I had the chance to take an elective in swimming and lifesaving. My professor taught me how to take my minimal knowledge of swimming and, under his care, I became a first rate swimmer. As a result, I worked for many summers as a lifeguard and swimming instructor at an institute for disturbed and underprivileged children. I earned enough to pay my college expenses. College tuition was not very expensive in those days. My swimming teacher became not only my teacher in swimming but also my “soul - friend” who accompanied me during my years in college and beyond. Over a period of time we became relaxed with each other and I could open my heart to him about my family, my faith, my confusions about God, about church and my future. We discussed many things and I never needed a mask while with him; I was myself. He became my echo. He echoed back my reflections, and the direction I should take was becoming clearer.

As I was approaching graduation I began to see that there was something lacking in my life, a space that wasn't being filled. I wanted more; I felt there was an inner yearning I needed to take a look at. I can say I had a rather simple faith based mostly on devotions and ordinary relationship with God. I attended Church on an irregular basis. With the help of my swimming instructor, my soul-friend, I was accompanied through a discernment process and the end result pointed me in the direction of another type of institute, a religious missionary congregation. He was with me the day I entered to become a missionary and a religious. In the religious institute I was fortunate to meet a confrere who took on a similar role as my soul-friend at college. My religious soul-friend accompanied me throughout my studies and spiritual growth and, in spite of some very rough times, I made it through to ordination, a somewhat joyful and fulfilled person.

Over the years, as a missionary in several countries, I became very much aware of God's presence with me and it amazed me how often He showed up in people I loved and situations in which I lived and worked. My soul-friends pointed me to prayer and study early on so as to let my faith open my life to God's loving presence. The Lord took on the role of soul-friend and I knew He would always be there through the good and bad times. Now I am back at the community where I started my missionary journey. My earlier soul-friend is still around and we picked up where we left off, with many years to catch up on. I would have had a difficult time over the years if God had not put some special mentors, reflectors and guides in my life as spiritual directors. Through them God has touched my life in a profound way. Thank you, Lord. Do you have a "soul-friend" to accompany you? And would you be one for another sojourner?

Editor's note: Fr. Hann spent 23 years as a Missionhurst priest in Haiti. He tells of one assignment in a rural island community where he went from village to village in a beat-up, unreliable, leaky boat. Ferdie Mahfood, founder of Food For The Poor, came through one day and asked what he needed most. Fr. Hann replied, "a new boat!," thinking that it was just a pipe dream. Two months later, he got a call from Haitian Customs in Port-au-Prince, informing him that a new boat with a powerful motor was waiting for him on the dock.

NO COINCIDENCES IN LIFE

By Linda Lenertz, Parishioner, Church of the Nativity

I am sitting on a plastic chair and the sweat is pouring down my face as it is about 92 degrees and that is with a ceiling fan over head and flies are everywhere it seems. The place is quite pretty really as the sun shines brightly through Food For The Poor's Little Children of Jesus Home in Santo, Haiti. The home is painted a bright turquoise blue and the sides are all open in the Haitian style. The beds that the children lay on are starch white but it is hot and the flies come and some children are not able to swat them away as most of the children have special needs. It is hard to see this and all these children want is to be held but that is not what I am supposed to do today. As a grandmother of five, all I want to do is hold these babies, but I am sitting on a chair waiting for mass to

begin. I realize that I should be honored as there were only a few seats available and I got one of them. Some of the older children sit next to me and give me big smiles that just warm my heart. They hold my hand.

I am about 6 feet from the altar. My mind is having trouble focusing on the mass and wondering what I am doing here sitting, when I could be in the back with the others, holding the babies. Then I get it. I'm embarrassed to say it took awhile, but right in front of me I notice a young man dressed in black slacks, long sleeve shirt, dress belt and black shoes. He's nicely groomed. You can tell he cares a great deal about his appearance as his clothes are freshly ironed. But who irons them I wonder? The young man I find out later is called Phillip but his real name is Fiones. Phillip is playing the keyboard at the mass and I sit in amazement as I watch and listen. He plays beautifully and with such passion. The keyboard is old and worn and has seen better days. But that makes no difference to Phillip as he never misses a beat and just ignores the flies as they swarm. In such conditions this talented young man flourishes. Did I mention that he is blind?



I know that God didn't have me sit there just because, but to somehow help this young man. How, is still a question that nags at my mind as I wonder how does a blind person survive in Haiti with no family? With the help of Food from the Poor, we were able to replace Phillip's keyboard and to add some speakers.

I find out from Gladys at the orphanage that he would really like some classical music sheets in Braille. Might I add this is before he had received the keyboard? All that he wanted was music sheets when asked. As a sighted person with no musical talent whatsoever, I found this to be a big challenge. You can't just surf the Internet or go to a music store, as very little Braille music exists. You can find the top 30 most requested songs, but that is a far cry from the classical music that I needed. I have also learned how much we have in the United States to help the blind, but very little if any in Haiti.

After many e-mails and numerous phone calls to anyone and everyone that could be associated with the blind or just anyone that would listen, the director of the Music Section at the Library of Congress came to my rescue with a box of first class scores. He has a huge heart and a love of music! I am also blessed to have met a friend in my "Engaging Spirituality" group at Church of the Nativity. She is blind and she graciously donated a refurbished Braille machine for Phillip.

This one young man in Haiti has touched several hearts so far and somehow I feel it might just be the beginning. There are no coincidences in life – only steps in God's Plan...

NEXT MISSION TRIP SET FOR JUNE 28

Fr. Martin will lead another group of Nativity parishioners to Haiti on June 28, 2010. This 5-day mission trip, sponsored by Food For The Poor, will stop in Florida to tour Food For The Poor's world headquarters and meet with their leadership, then spent 4 days in Haiti. This is the first mission trip to Haiti since the January 12 earthquake.

The group will spend a day in Port-au-Prince visiting Nativity Village at Merger, Little Children of Jesus Home and Food For The Poor's feeding center and Haiti headquarters. The remainder of the week will take the group to Cap Haitien, on the north coast, where several Nativity projects have been completed. The new community center at Nativity Village at Madras will be opened, and the Georgette Martin Sewing Center at Nativity Village at Demier will be dedicated. The group will visit Chestanoye, site of the 6th Nativity Village project, and several other facilities along the north coast.

Nativity's last mission trip to Haiti took place in November, 2009. Fr. Martin, in 3 consecutive Pastor's Corner articles, described in detail this November journey of service to the poor. To read his narrative, go to www.operation-starfish.org, or contact Jim McDaniel for a hard copy (seastar2004@msn.com).

We offer a prayer for all the travelers on the June mission trip to Haiti. This prayer, the Tefilat HaDerech, is a traditional Hebrew prayer for a safe journey:

May it be Your will, LORD, our God and the God of our ancestors, that You lead us toward peace, guide our footsteps toward peace, and make us reach our desired destination for life, gladness, and peace. May You rescue us from the hand of every foe, ambush along the way, and from all manner of punishments that assemble to come to earth. May You send blessing in our handiwork, and grant us grace, kindness, and mercy in Your eyes and in the eyes of all who see us. May You hear the sound of our humble request because You are God Who hears prayer requests. Blessed are You, Adonai, Who hears prayer.

HAITI EARTHQUAKE: 4 MONTHS LATER

According to Food For The Poor, more than a million people remain homeless from the January earthquake. With the hurricane season beginning in June, the need for safe, secure housing is critical. That's why building houses is a priority for Food For The Poor. President/CEO Robin Mahfood has set a goal of 5,000 new housing units for Haiti by the end of this year. Nativity's Operation Starfish will contribute to this effort with the construction of Nativity Village 6. Houses will be built to accommodate families now living in the swampy Shada neighborhood of Cap Haitien, along with earthquake refugees who fled Port-au-Prince.

School reconstruction is an additional priority, with 8-10 new schools planned by Food For The Poor. Both traditional concrete construction and new pre-fabricated steel sandwich panel methods will be used. The children in Nativity's religious education program have funded 50 new scholarships this year through Operation Starfish. This gift will allow Haitian children, who otherwise could not afford to go to school, the opportunity to get an education.

Since the earthquake, Food For The Poor has delivered 681 tractor-trailer loads of food, medical supplies, pharmaceuticals, building materials and other goods to Haiti. Thousands of hot meals are provided every day through FFP's main feeding center in Port-au-Prince. FFP/Haiti has a distribution network of more than 2,000 beneficiary organizations.

OPERATION STARFISH EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE

"This parish is going through a grief process," said Fr. Cedric Wilson, OSA, in a homily at Church of the Nativity shortly after the January earthquake in Haiti. He continued, "You have a 12-year relationship with the people of Haiti. You are suffering along with them. That's why you feel the way you do."

Through this grief, Nativity parishioners wiped away their tears, rolled up their sleeves, and went to work. Within 24 hours of the tragedy, Nativity had set up a Facebook group to open communication, provide updates and seek volunteers. Parishioners involved with Operation Starfish organized themselves into committees and accomplished an incredible feat of support for the people of Haiti:

- Within 2 weeks, Operation Starfish collected and sent \$250,000 to Food For The Poor for immediate aid
- Another collection for Catholic Relief Services netted nearly \$50,000
- Joining with Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Nativity helped organize 700 volunteers who packaged over 240,000 meals in two days and shipped them to Haiti
- Nativity filled a 40-foot sea container with \$41,500 of water food, diapers and medicine and Food For The Poor shipped it to Haiti – a second sea container is just about full and will be shipped on June 7th
- Nativity parishioner Jen Schmidt organized a charter plane load of medical supplies for our St. Anthony Clinic at Nativity Village at Prolonge and led a medical mission trip to Cap Haitien
- Nativity parishioners organized several special events to publicize the needs and raise funds for Operation Starfish

Food For The Poor Executive Director Angel Aloma visited Nativity Parish on January 30 & 31 to personally thank our parish community for such an overwhelming response to the earthquake.

OPERATION STARFISH IN THE NEWS

Catholic Digest

http://www.catholicdigest.com/articles/good_works/love_your_neighbor/2010/01-29/haiti-changed-our-parishhellipand-my-life

Arlington Catholic Herald

http://www.catholicherald.com/local_news/detail.html?sub_id=12116

http://www.catholicherald.com/detail.html?sub_id=12290

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.

MAY 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 Joan McDonald, and for her family, that God grant them healing – Joan's family and friends are building a house in Haiti to honor this lovely woman;
- † For Barbara Fazekas, who continues her struggle with illness, and for those who are providing the care and support she needs;
- † For Fr. Dick Martin, in celebration of the 44th anniversary of his ordination;
- † For the family of Eleanor Farrell, that they continue to find peace and healing;
- † For Elaine Frenette, that each succeeding course of chemotherapy be easier;

† 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...

HAITIAN WISDOM

“Si se Bondye ki voye, Li peya fre ou.”

If it is God who sends you, He'll pay your expenses.

CLOSING THOUGHT...

“Kidogo na kidoga na gaza icibanda.”

Little by little makes it full

Ugandan proverb, courtesy Rev. Andrew Amaruma, AJ

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.

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