



HAITI MISSION NEWSLETTER

Religious of Jesus and Mary

Summer 2023



HAITI MISSION PRAYER TEAM - Marillac Residence, Wellesley Hills, MA

On February 3rd, the RJM's at the Marillac Residence celebrated the feast of Claudine with a Mass of Thanksgiving for donors to the Province Haiti Fund. Many donations are made in memory or in honor of loved ones and include requests for prayer. At a table set before the altar (pictured below), the names of all those being remembered was posted.



Shown above in the chapel are: Srs. Roseline Marcoux (left), Bernadette Oliva, Agnes Bell, Fatima Viramontes, Therese Picard, Lucie Jusseaume, Dina Garcia, Gertrude Lavoie, Shirley Leveille, and Vivian Patenaude.

This table also held a picture of St. Claudine, our Peace plant, the Haitian flag, the RJM Constitutions, and the lists of the prayer intentions of our donors. The generosity of these “partners in mission” has raised more than \$100,000 in the prior 5 months (September - January), adding to the significant amounts gained through the initiatives of those serving in Haiti, their collaboration with **Mercy Focus on Haiti** and through grants from **Juntos Mejor** (Better Together), the foundation of our Spanish Province.

To you, our donors, on behalf of those being served in our missions, we say:

We are deeply grateful for our “partners in mission” who have given more than \$100,000 in a 5-month period to support the many programs of the Haiti Mission.

Thank you very much! / Mèsi Anpil!

PROTECTING CHILDREN / ENDING THE PRACTICE OF RESTAVEKS - Gros Morne

The spark for the founding of the Haiti Mission in 1997, occurred when Sr. Laura Dulude read an article about the plight of Haitian children in domestic service/slavery (Restaveks). After the opening of our first mission in Gros Morne when Sr. Vivian Patenaude was later missioned to Jean Rabel, she built three classrooms so that the Restavek students and teachers could have their own space. When Sr. Vivian moved to Port-au-Prince, she worked with Sr. Marthe Van Rompaey, ICM to change the attitudes of families who had Restaveks living with them and with the children to improve their self-esteem. Here in Gros Morne, we hope that everything we have done since 1997 helps families take better care of their children, so they treat them well and are less likely to give them away in hope of their having food and schooling.

Then in our 25th year, thanks to a grant from the **Conrad N. Hilton Foundation** to the Catholic Sisters Haiti Collaborative, the RJMs along with **The School Sisters of Notre Dame** and their partner, **Beyond Borders (BB)**, have begun a two-year *Child Protection Program*, which directly addresses how families treat and raise children, whether their own, or extended family or unrelated children living with them.

First, a team from Beyond Borders visited with leaders in four Gros Morne communities who had indicated an interest in the initiative. We RJM's are very grateful to Jill Foster, one of the **Maryknoll Lay Missioners** in Gros Morne who felt called to oversee the program's development. Jill shepherded the BB team around, kept people in touch with zoom calls and organized the interview committee that chose Innocent Derysse (right) as the coordinator.



After security-related delays, the Beyond Borders team returned in late November (2022) for two weeks of training for sixteen community animators and four supervisors. Each animator is responsible for engaging 15-20 of their neighbors in using the "Education is Conversation" model, a story-telling method to talk about the reality of how children are treated and leading people to see there are better alternatives.



During the second week, the supervisors and animators worked with neighborhood leaders to do social mapping, as seen in these photos where residents proudly show their mapped communities.

In March, more than 600 participants took part in this Open Space activity after eight weeks of dialogue groups about how to protect children. Each of the thirty groups (with 12 to 19 participants) used illustrated books with real stories of the plight of children in Restavek situations. People shared strategies about raising their own children and the children of deceased relatives living with them.

At the Open Space event after three months of dialogue groups, all the participants had a chance to form different sharing groups among themselves so that they could develop a 4-neighborhood plan for ending violence against children and women and girls. As I was leaving, one lovely young woman asked,

"Do we really have to stop after six months, this is so good for us!"

- Sr. Pat Dillon, RJM
(This photo by Innocent Derysse,
Program Coordinator for Gros Morne)



CARING FOR MALNOURISHED CHILDREN - Jean Rabel

In Jean Rabel, this isolated northwestern dot of Haiti, children are suffering from starvation. The political insecurity and the lack of transport fuel has pushed the price of basic food beyond the means of ordinary people.

This situation not only affects the daily diet of children, but also their overall physical and cognitive development. If these children are taken care of now, it will prevent many problems in the future:



- illnesses will be less,
- their caregivers, who are already engaged in seeking work or sustenance for each day, will not need to stay at home to look after their sick children.
- money, if one has it, will not be spent on doctors and medicines.
- children will not miss out on their education due to poor school attendance.

Celestin Celeste (left), a nurse assistant, never tires of reaching out to families and identifying those in urgent need of this program, such as this mother and child. She visits the schools. She distributes the food supplements as she advises the caregivers on simple and natural ways of combating hunger.

The numbers of those in need has increased drastically since last year. This is due not only to the rise in prices but also to the loss of the first harvest. Last year 200 children were enrolled. This January alone, over 100 have already presented for treatment. The project has added another person to the team, to cope with the increased demand.

Two weekly visits are made. The family situation is assessed, the height and weight of the child monitored, and supplements given....peanut butter.....milk powder....rice. There are always more fragile children to be found as Celestine and the mobile clinic team link up with the "Pastoral Timoun Piti" agents as both programs continue to minister to these isolated communities.

However, there is great joy in noticing the improvement in health over a six-month period of a child who was so weak that she was unable to walk, but who is now walking and attending school!

Thank you for your support in literally giving LIFE to these children!

- Sr. Rose Kelly, RJM

JESUS-MARY YOUTH ACTIVITIES - Gros Morne

Door-to-door Education Outreach

From mid-November to mid-December, *J-M Youth Gros Morne* initiated a work that brought joy to all the children involved. During this time, the country of Haiti was in a “lock down” and schools did not have a chance to open their doors. The RJM community in Gros Morne met with a number of young adults about the situation we have been living through in the country for a long time. After much discussion, the youth saw the truth in the words of Nelson Mandela, “Education is the most powerful weapon to save the world.” Because of this, the youth decided to accompany children in trying to free them in body, mind and spirit.

After the J-M Youth went door-to-door talking to parents, two hundred children in grades one to six were separated into four neighborhood locations. The young adults prepared math and reading lessons which were mixed with educational games and time for playing and sharing a snack.

Toward the end of the month, the children celebrated Christmas with great love and joy. Afterwards, the J-M Youth could not hide their feelings: Jeftalove Termintus said, **“Thanks to this experience, I was able to discover many hidden talents in myself”**; Kestana R.M. Dessé responded, **“This activity made me feel like I’m in a big family that is Pastoral Jesus-Mary”**; and Yves Renerson Dessé said, **“With this great work, we really showed that in union there is strength.”**



In this creative activity on the left, the youth are spelling-out “JJM” for “Jeunes Jesus-Marie” (which in English is “J-M Youth”).

- by Yves Renerson Dessé, a J-M Youth

Reflecting on St. Claudine

On January 28th, J-M Youth came together to reflect on St. Claudine and how her values and charism are alive today in their lives here in Gros Morne and in the 29 countries where J-M is present.

After a slide presentation on Claudine's early life (courtesy of our Canadian sisters), there was time for personal reflection and small group sharing. In a group activity, the spread of the seed planted by St. Claudine in Lyon was symbolized by the youth placing a heart with the name of a country and the year J-M arrived there on a bayonet plant. The countries were colored coded by continent.

The group has more members, who although away at university, keep in touch through social media.

- Sr. Middia Doute, RJM



SR. LIZ CORNEJO, RJM joins Haiti Mission

On December 16, full of hope for Haiti and joy for having one more member in the community, we went to the airport to receive a Peruvian RJM, Elizabeth “Liz” Cornejo. Shown here are Sr. Farzana Philip (left), Sr. Liz Cornejo, and Sr. Rosario Fumanal.

Thank you Liz for choosing Haiti! May your presence bring much joy and many blessings to our mission in Haiti.



EARTH DAY 2023 - Gros Morne

May 1st in Haiti is Agricultural Workers Day when everyone, young to old, plants a tree or two or more.

We have a little (500) tree nursery in the forest outside our house - on the other side from where you enter. I was so delighted this morning to look out the window and see neighbors there picking out trees to plant in their yards and gardens. Mme. Alexandre (right) chose Moringa and Papaya trees.



In the photo on the right, Bernio Felix (left), manager of the new tree nursery in the Jean 23 Forest, shows Met Leny Leguerre (right), J-M School director, the varieties of trees available - Pink Guava, Moringa, Papaya, among others. Cherry, Mango, Avocado and Bwachen trees were selected from the Fr. Jean Marie Vincent tree nursery in Grepin.

On April 27, Sr. Middia Doute, RJM, Pre-school Coordinator, welcomed the 4th to 8th graders to the Chacho pre-school grounds to plant the trees they carried. The students were well organized by Met Leny Leguerre, Met Kenson Valcin, Junior High Coordinator, and Claude Etienne, our School Guardian. The students brought water from the Trois Rivers to start the new trees along, and they also planted cherry trees on the main campus in Fon Ibo.

- Sr. Pat Dillon, RJM



These members of the *Cressac Peasant Organization for the Development of Gros Morne* chose trees for their May 1st planting in their hillside neighborhood and around their gardens outside of town. Many chose Mango trees and have plans to protect them from goats. The trees are in repurposed, plastic water bags.



ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS - Cotton (near Jean Rabel)

Our local Bishop, Mgr. Barthelus, has created a group, "GAPENO" (Group d'Actions pour la Protection de L'Environnement du Nord-Ouest) to try and create a cleaner environment, in response to Pope Francis' letter *Laudato Si* and the commitment "to care for our common home".



In the JM mission in Jean Rabel, a young agronomist, Olby Desir, was hired last September to work in the 3 school gardens of Acadien, Gros Sable and Cotton. He also gave educational and practical experience to the pupils and teachers. After visiting the schools and consulting with the principals, a plan was drawn up. Garden crops were bought and delivered, water canals were unblocked or built, ground was prepared and seeds planted. Travel to two of the schools was a problem during the fuel crisis, but Olby, like most of the teachers walked to the schools. Full evidence of this was seen in the wear and literally tear on the shoes and socks!

At Olby's direction, tomatoes, sweet and hot peppers, aubergines, onions, carrots, sweet potatoes, etc., were planted. Ripe tomatoes were eaten immediately, as there is still lack of food in the homes due to the huge hike in prices and drought. If one was fortunate enough to have seeds, there was a second planting.



Education classes teaching respect for the environment are taking place, with both teachers and pupils. An experiment was carried out, burying plastic and organic waste. Some months later it was unearthed to discover that the plastic waste remained the same, while the organic was degraded.

Recently a fantastic environmental celebration took place in Cotton! 110 pupils, 12 staff members, the local Casek leader, and other visitors attended the event.

Olby spoke about the importance of caring for the environment, and elicited information from the pupils, complimenting them on their involvement. Creole music was played, some pupils danced, a tasting competition took place, and there was a fabulous atmosphere of enjoyment.



There was a display of local produce, Chaka...a nutritious stew of various vegetables, spices and meat....cakes made using local corn and other types of flour, popcorn, and delicious Tamarin juice! There was a healthy meal of "diri djondjon" and vegetables.

Then the pupils went to the garden to plant some trees. They then took a tree plant each and promised to plant it in their own house garden and look after it.

A very worthwhile day was spent by all!

- Sr. Rose Kelly, RJM

BASKETBALL PARTNERSHIP - Jean Rabel

The basketball participants are improving daily. There are days for boys only, days for girls only, days for girls and boys, and days for inviting other participants.

On the right is Mesi, our friendly dog mascot!

Sunday, 5th March, was a fantastic experience as ten *Aksyon Gasymi* members from Mawouj arrived at the Jean Rabel basketball court.



Aksyon Gasymi is an amazing group that supports families who have children or adults requiring special care. They had car problems that had to be seen to, before they left. Then a little distance outside Jean Rabel town, the car broke down again! They made the last part of the journey by foot, (not easy if one already has walking problems) led by Madda Boschetti, who is shown on the left keeping a close eye on her team members, and her wonderful assistant.

They were given a tremendous welcome by Sr. Curin García Calvo, Renaldo, Fania, Renaldo 2, and all the Jean Rabel team.

All were then divided into 4 groups, and the games began! Two groups practiced at the baskets while the other two groups practiced passing the ball by hand, or dribbling. Every 20 minutes, the groups changed activities. Those who were new, were given special attention. Great applause erupted when a basket was scored! There was an intermission period for water, crackers and mamba.

As the Mawouj team waited for the car to be repaired again, they entertained all with their songs and chats. The Jean Rabel Team thanked them for coming, wished them a safe journey back and invited them to come again. A great afternoon for all who played, and indeed for the spectators!

- Sr. Curin Garcia Calvo, RJM

NEW PARTNER IN MISSION: Director of Mission Advancement

Tobias (Toby) Harkleroad, OFS recently assumed the position of Director of Mission Advancement for the USA-Haiti Province.



Toby's appointment will **"strengthen our volunteer program,"** and **"direct more financial resources to mission."** The DC Leadership Team has found in Toby the combination of passion for mission, experience and competence that made him the ideal choice.

Our new director's background includes time as the Director of Campaigns for the Franciscan Action Network and eleven years as the Founding Principal of St. Francis International School in Silver Spring, MD. He has received awards for his work including one for *Leadership in Promoting Diversity in Catholic Education*. Toby is currently pursuing a doctorate in ministry development at the Virginia Theological Seminary.

We warmly welcome our new companion in mission!



CELEBRATING 25 YEARS IN HAITI - *Virtually* in September

Over 25 years ago the Religious of Jesus and Mary made a faith-filled decision to go to the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere to make the presence of God known and felt among a suffering people. In recent years, that mission has been complicated by political turmoil that has made the social and economic situation in Haiti as bad as it has ever been. Despite the turmoil and challenges, the Religious of Jesus and Mary and our Companions in Ministry continue to serve the people of Haiti in the many ways contained in this newsletter and in so many other ways each and every day!

It has been difficult to celebrate this wonderful anniversary safely because of the unrest, but it is vital that we reflect and give thanks for our first 25 years in Haiti so that we can move forward into the future as we continue to love and serve the people of Haiti for many years to come!

Starting in September, we will begin to look back over the last 25 years of RJM presence in Haiti and celebrate all the good that has been done in the name of Jesus and Mary. We will be holding several online opportunities for prayer, reflection, and celebration starting this fall. *More details will be coming later in the summer.*

In the meantime, we invite you to connect with us electronically as we seek to bring you more good news from Haiti on a regular basis. You can find us on social media using the handle [@rjmusahaiti](#) on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn.



Over the summer, we will also be updating our website to be able to bring you more information about what is going on in Haiti and throughout the many RJM ministry sites in the USA and around the world. Please look for an increasing number of photos, videos, and stories online about our sisters and companions and their ministries of love. In the fall, we will also be introducing more ways and opportunities to give online in support of our mission in Haiti.

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION IN HAITI

If you follow the news out of Haiti, you know that floods, earthquakes, gang violence, and crime continue to be part of the headlines. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), more than 42 percent of Haiti’s population needs humanitarian assistance and currently the Haitian government is non-functioning.



Haiti Mission Fund donations are tax-deductible

Donate online at www.rjmusa.org, click on “Support us” above the green bar, select “Donate Online” and fill in information, select “RJM Haiti Fund” as designation.

Donate by check payable to “**Religious of Jesus and Mary**” with “**Haiti Fund**” on the memo line, and mail to:

**Haiti Mission Fund
c/o Religious of Jesus and Mary
821 Varnum Street, NE
Washington, DC 20017**

Despite the danger and difficulty caused by extreme poverty, natural disasters, crime, and political unrest, the RJM presence in Haiti remains strong! Our ministries continue to serve the people and we work every day to keep our sisters and companions, as well as the people we serve, as safe as possible.

As always, however, we rely on God *and on you* to keep our mission going and keep our people safe. We ask you to pray with us for the people of Haiti and if you are able, please consider financially supporting the RJM ministries that serve those people day in and day out despite the very difficult conditions.