

November 2023

Dear Friends,

In a spirit of joy and gratitude I write to you today as we mark a quarter century of our RJM mission in Haiti. **More than 25 years ago, three JM sisters were preparing to leave New York for Port-au-Prince to establish our first RJM mission in Haiti.** Today, a multinational group of Religious of Jesus and Mary and lay companions give new and courageous expression to the commitment made then: to respond to a people made poor by decades of reckless oversight and abuse.

What brought the RJM to Haiti in 1997? A story. One that some sisters read about little girls in Haiti, given by their families to be servants in wealthier families' homes – “restaveks” (‘stay-with’) they are called in Creole. These sisters asked: what type of hopelessness would give rise to such desperate action? *No RJM could hear about ‘restaveks’ without thinking of another story, one that features St. Claudine Thévenet, founder of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary. In the midst of the of the French Revolution, Claudine was tormented by the plight of the children, whose suffering “made her tremble;...moved her to tears.” And then, it moved her to action.*

Over a century and a half after Claudine’s experience, with both stories in their minds and hearts, our sisters had a province meeting to address the question: *Shall we open a mission in Haiti?* It was 1996, our numbers were going down and new members were few. And yet, there was that great need, in a country not 700 miles from our own shores. **With a vote that was at once a leap in the dark and filled with deep conviction, the decision was unanimous: YES! We open a mission in Haiti!**

1997 brought three RJMs to Gros Morne. The following year, the first of many lay companions in mission joined the sisters through our volunteer program, QUEST. Not long after, we welcomed the first sister from another province, and subsequently volunteers and sisters have come from Spain, Ireland, Canada, Argentina, Pakistan and Peru. A month ago, a young woman who was one of our QUEST volunteers in Haiti professed her first vows as an RJM. Our first Haitian sister is currently continuing her formation in Spain. Other Haitian women have expressed the desire to join our Congregation.



You know, from many sources, of the dangerous insecurity that plagues the Haitian world right now. In 2016 we faced the death of one of our own, Sister Isa Solá, who lost her life to violence. Those on the ground in our mission centers draw strength from the faith and resilience of the Haitian people. *Haitian co-workers continue to inspire with their dedication and perseverance in the face of such difficult challenges.*

Back to our Claudine story, which leads us directly to *you*. How did Claudine take action? ***“Together with some of her friends, she sought a solution....”*** Together with *you*, our friends, we have sought to be with and work with our sisters and brothers in Haiti. Because of *your support*, we have been able to do that for more than 25 years.

Today, we are asking you to continue your prayers for our mission, and, if you can, to make a donation of any size to support the RJM and companions in Haiti as they continue making Jesus and Mary known. Information about the needs of our mission, and how you might help, are on the back of this letter.

To each and all of you, my heartfelt gratitude for sharing in this mission!

Sr. Mary Bourdon, RJM
Province Leader
USA-Haiti Province



We're celebrating 25 years!

“Together with some of our friends...”

as we mark the completion of 25 years in Haiti,
we hope to raise \$225,000 by September 2024.

We recently invited Toby Harkleroad, a Secular Franciscan, to join our community as our Director of Mission Advancement. He has worked hard behind the scenes over the summer updating our database, renewing our website and social media, and adding new tools to enable you to give financially in convenient ways.

Look for messages from us in the mail and email and on social media in the weeks and months to come about the RJM mission and ministries. *We want to make sure that you know what we are accomplishing together in Haiti and many other places.* In the meantime, we ask you to visit our website www.rjmusa.org to learn more about what the Religious of Jesus and Mary USA-Haiti Province has done and is doing in all of the places where our community in mission serves.

Also, please reach out to us at www.rjmusa.org/contact to provide us with any information that will help us keep you as a vital part of our community ... updates to your address, prayer requests, or ideas. We also invite you to support the RJM mission and ministries through prayer!

Finally, our recently renewed website allows you to give today or set recurring donations by credit card, debit card, check, or even with Apple Pay by going to www.rjmusa.org/donate and you can always send a check to RJM Haiti Mission Fund, 821 Varnum St. NE, Washington, DC 20017



God our Father, you granted Saint Claudine Thévenet an intimate experience of your merciful goodness and you called her to dedicate her life to making Jesus and Mary known and loved. Help us, like her, to be witnesses to your love, given over to the action of the Spirit and open to the needs of our brothers and sisters, especially the most deprived. Grant us, through her intercession, and for the praise of your glory the grace for which we now pray. Amen.