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| Haiti Twinning @ St. Lawrence ChurchTruly I tell you, whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for MeMatthew 25:40 |
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In the summer of 2012, St. Lawrence began its twinning relationship with St. Francois d’Assise in Dufailly, Haiti. Parish Twinning Program of the Americas is the organization that “twinned” us with this desperately poor community located in thecentral plateau of Haiti. Twinning, as defined by PTPA is “a viable and loving relationship that is established. This relationship then becomes a bridge whereby the love of God flows in both directions as parishes learn to care, share and pray for one another. Through the Twinning Program, a sister parish is chosen, and a relationship is established between a North American parish and a parish in a Caribbean country or Latin America. Both spiritual and financial support is offered”.God called on us here at St. Lawrence, and we answered with love and gratitude for this opportunity. With your support we will continue to help our brothers and sisters in Christ.

If you’re not familiar with Haiti, it is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, by a wide margin. It is less than 700 miles from Miami, yet the differences between the US and Haiti could not be more drastic. Haiti occupies the western third of the island Hispaniola (about the size of Maryland), the other 2/3rds of the island is occupied by the Dominican Republic. Haitian Creole is the native language and some that have attended school also speak French. The literacy rate in Haiti is a meager 61% (64.3 for males/57.3% for females). To put that in perspective, the literacy rate for Latin America averages 90%. Witha population of approximately 11.5 million, more than 40% suffer from malnutrition. One-in-five Haitian children are malnourished. One-in-ten Haitian children are acutely malnourished. One-in-fourteen children will die before age five. Please stop and think about these staggering numbers, yetthey live less than 700 miles away from the United States.

In 2020, due to the pandemic and the terrible crime, many relief organizations made the difficult decision to pull out of the country. This caused the already dire Haitian economy to contract an additional 3.8%. The inflation rate has risen year after year from 3.9% in 2014 to a whopping 22.41% in 2021. The cost of food is expensive, often more than in the US because most of it is imported. In July of 2022, food and non-alcoholic beverages, clothing, footwear, and furniture increased to 33.6 percent annually while imports and local products increased 43.2 percent and 23.2 percent year-on-year, respectively. For many already living on the brink, this is a very frightening actuality.

Droughts, deforestation, and the lack of irrigation for all but large farms makes growing fruits & vegetables difficult. 80% of rice, which is the main staple, is imported. The medical care is abysmal with an average life expectancy of 61 years for males and 64 for females.The minimum wage, for those that are lucky enough to find work, ranges from $1.30 to $3.12 -PER DAY. In the remote central plateau where our sister churches and schools are located, jobs are very scarce. Plagued by natural disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes, political instability and gang violence in the cities, the problems in Haiti often seem insurmountable.

Despite all of the suffering, trials and tribulations, the Haitian people are resilient and strong. Theirhospitality is remarkable.St. Lawrence has visited St. Francois d’Assise on three separate occasions and the previous pastor of St. Francois d’Assise has visited us twice. On one of our trips, we visited a family that was lucky enough to have a home but only had a folding table and one plastic chair inside. Not only did they offer us their only chair, they immediately began cutting coconutsfor us to have a drink of coconut milk. They will share what little they have, which reminds us of the widow in Mark 12: 41-44 who gave only two small copper coins but Jesus argues she has sacrificed the most because she has given “even all her living”. What a blessing it is to visit the humble people of Dufailly, Delagon and Balandry, Haiti.

While the Haiti Twinning Committee at St. Lawrence is not large, our parishioner’s generosity and the guidance of our heavenly Father has allowed us to accomplish many necessary projects in just 10 years of twinning.

Accomplishments of St. Lawrence Church and our Parishioners:

Helped to build (in conjunction with a German organization) the only Middle/High school in the Dufailly area – which currently has an enrollment of 178students. The school has grown exponentially due to its reputation as a pillar of learning.For the school year ending in June of 2021, the school has achieved a 100% on the state proficiency exams for the graduating class.

We continue to subsidize the teachers and staff salaries at the High School and 2 primary schools in the mountains

Paid for the church roof and floor in Balandry

Paid for the water well in Balandry

Paid for the water well in Delagon

Donated many musical instruments for a music program at the high school

Donated many clothes, shoes, household items, electronics, etc. to over 360 students and their families

Collected and shipped over 300 backpacks with school supplies for the students at the 3 schools

Started an ongoing economic “Goat Program” for families of students in all 3 schools.

Completed a school recreation area that is used primarily for basketball, but also tennis. The previous pastor felt “it is important and beneficial for the students because intellectual education does not work without physical education”.

Paid for an enclosure of the school grounds and rectory of St. Francois d’Assise .

If reading all of this has not made you feel good, please read it again! These are significant, positive changes for the poorest of the poor. God did not put us on this earth to indulge ourselves. It is our purpose and duty to help those that are suffering. “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” In this spirit we ask for your assistance whether it be your time, talent or treasure. There is so, so much more that needs to be done.

Fr. Esterlin is the current pastor of St. Francois d’Assise. Last year he asked if St. Lawrence would consider starting a scholarship program for the most promising students of the 2021 graduating class. He identified 3 students: Halande Grand Pierre, female (aspirations - Medicine or Administrative Sciences), Phadjana Bercy, female (aspirations – Medicine)& Menard Soneus, male (aspirations – Auto Diesel Mehanic). We are hoping for $4500/per year for each student. Depending on the course of study and where the student attends school, this may not cover the full cost but Fr. Esterlin believes they should be able to fund the additional monies needed for food, etc. We are looking for parishioners (individuals or families) that are willing to sponsor these students. Because this is a new program, we are open to multiple families sponsoring one student, a single year or multi-year support, etc. If you are able to help support this program or are willing to coordinate and manage this program, please contact Christine Colannino!

People die of starvation in Haiti! While it is incomprehensible for residents of the US to fathom this, it happens everyday, and for the poor it is considered a reality. Predominantly it is the elderly or blind that suffer this fate. Starting a monthly food distribution is a priority. If you are interested in helping, please contact Christine Colannino.

Self-sufficiency for the residents in this area is a primary goal of St. Lawrence. If there are parishioners who work in solar energy, championing a project to install solar panels that can power water pumps for irrigation is a priority. Droughts, lack of irrigationand lack of fertilizer eliminates the ability to grow crops.

If there are parishioners who are agronomists, or well versed in agriculture, natural pest control and solid growing practices, you are needed to help the parishioners produce crops. This is a lifeline for many.

If there are parishioners that are willing to apply to companies for grants, you are needed. With grant money, we can begin a microcredit program, possibly begin a dental clinic, hire a doctor, etc. So much is needed but this all requires the funds to begin.

Again, thank you for your kindness and generosity toward the poorest of the poor. With God’s guidance and your help, we are confident that we can accomplishmany great things in the coming years!

Christine Colannino - Chair, Haiti Ministry of St. Lawrence and the Haiti Twinning Committee

cbcolannino@comcast.net