

Rayjon Share Care

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Introduction/Opening Remarks

The story begins in 1984. Maggy overheard Br Anthony talking about an Ontario-wide Poverty Awareness Trip to Haiti in 1985. Trip targeted students, teachers and other interested adults.

- 4 of us from Sarnia - Maggy, Ray, Kathleen Panela (G13 student from St Pat's) and myself applied and were accepted for this 10-day trip to experience life in the poorest country in the Western hemisphere. 27 people in total participated.
- Trip had major impact. We told our story and showed slides to over 2,500 people primarily in Sarnia area - to schools, church groups and service organizations.
- Response was overwhelming. Ray and I were challenged to organize a Sarnia-based trip to Haiti in 1986. Rayjon organization was born in January 1986 immediately prior to Rayjon's first trip.
- On their return, those 26 Rayjon pioneers told their stories of their life changing experiences.
- From then on Rayjon has organized Awareness trips to Haiti and the DR every year (apart from the most recent COVID 2020 & 2021 year(s)).

Rayjon Branches Out to Other Trip Related Activities

In addition to attracting new people wanting to experience the richness of life in the Developing World, many of the people returning wanted to get/stay involved in supporting Rayjon projects/activities in Haiti/DR and other Developing countries.

- In particular, people got involved in a variety of Work Groups, e.g., Habitat trips, Nursing Student initiatives. Rayjon's Eye Glass program, launched in the late 1980's, was, and still is, a major success. 10's of thousands of used eye glasses have been collected, processed and distributed to needy people in many Developing countries.
- To-date, 6,000 people have participated in Rayjon trips over the 35 years. Many have come from Sacred Heart and other London Diocesan parishes. Strong support from other church denominations.

Rayjon's Involvement in Community Development

Started in 1987 with the support of the construction and operation of rural schools and health clinics in the St Marc area of Haiti.

- Interest spread to supporting a malnutrition clinic in the North of Haiti. The Cap-Haitian centre was run by Sr Rosemary Fry (Sr of St Joseph's)
- Then in 2008, Rayjon started supporting community development in one "Battey" in the DR where Haitian cane cutters live in appalling conditions.
- All 3 initiatives above continue to this day to be Rayjon's main community development centres of focus.
- For over 20 years, between 1989 and 2012, Rayjon's rural project in St Marc, Haiti was supported by CIDA funding and enabled strides to be made in rural education, health care and women's initiatives.
- Since the Haiti earthquake in 2010 and subsequent change in Canadian Government funding policy towards small NGO's like Rayjon, Rayjon's focus has turned to *Sustainable* Community Development with local communities taking the lead in the development process.
- Much emphasis has, and is, being placed on adult literacy, microcredit initiatives and empowerment of local Women's Federations – not just in the St Marc region but also in Cap-Haitian and the DR.
- Over the years, 10's of thousands of children and adults have been educated and vaccinated. Measles has been eradicated in the St Marc region of Haiti.

Wrap-Up

Rayjon has been able to support all the above outstanding initiatives thanks to amazing local fundraising efforts and longstanding and dedicated support from numerous organizations. In particular, Rayjon's thanks go to Sacred Heart and St Michael parish Mission Committee for their long standing and unwavering support.