Living the Gospel by Bringing Comfort and Dignity to Haiti

By Frank Wilcox

In 2015, the parishioners of St. Mary of the Lake partnered with Reiser Relief to provide relief, hope, and dignity to the poor, elderly, and homeless people of Haiti. Reiser Relief was founded by Fr. Bernard Reiser, former associate pastor at St. Mary of the Lake. Reiser Relief has been a presence in Haiti for many years and has developed relationships with people and organizations, ensuring financial support has the greatest impact. The people of St. Mary of the Lake are grateful to join with Reiser Relief in some of their efforts.

Let's start with a few statistics:

- Haiti has the distinction of being the poorest country in the western hemisphere.
- 80% of Haitians live under the poverty line and 54% live in abject poverty.
- The average per capita income in Haiti is $480 a year.
- Haiti has the highest percentage of orphans of any country in the Western Hemisphere.
  Before the 2010 earthquake, the United Nations estimated there were 430,000 orphans living in Haiti; slightly more than the population of Minneapolis.

But statistics are sterile and impersonal. They fail to convey the human pain and suffering of the people living in Haiti. The statistics also fail to tell of the efforts to bring comfort and dignity to the Haitian people by organizations such as Reiser Relief and the parishioners of St. Mary of the Lake.

Two projects made possible by St. Mary of the Lake

One of the projects funded involves a home for 31 abandoned adults in Marfranc, Haiti. The residence operates under the direction of Sister Evelyn Moliney and two other hard working and dedicated nuns and provides physical, emotional and spiritual care for the residents. Through its partnership with St. Mary's, Reiser Relief purchased and shipped a storage container filled with food for the residents and replaced leaky roofs on the men's and women's dormitories.

A second joint project between St. Mary of the Lake and Reiser Relief is the construction of an elementary school in Marfranc. The first phase of that construction, a building for the youngest students in the village, is nearing completion. The goal is to add grades as resources are available.

The parishioners of St. Mary of the Lake have also contributed to other Reiser Relief projects, including an orphanage in Port au Prince, a school named Reiser Heights, and organizations assisting the elderly and abandoned and dying babies.
How can St. Mary of the Lake continue to help?

When asked how we can continue to help the people of Haiti, Matt Palkert, Outreach Coordinator at St. Mary's, offered the following suggestions:

**First, with our prayers.** This is so important because our efforts in regard to Haiti will bear the most fruit if they are led by the Holy Spirit and rooted in our love of God and a humble love of neighbor.

**Second, get to know the country and people of Haiti.** Attend a presentation after the parish-sponsored trip to Haiti. Go on a trip yourself, if you're able. Read a book about Haiti from our parish library.

**Third, material, and especially financial, donations can go a long way.** For example, $125.00 can pay for a year's tuition for a child. $50.00 can purchase a goat or pig for a family. Financial donations have the added benefit of supporting the local economy in Haiti.

St. Mary of the Lake is sponsoring a mission trip in March that will involve visiting some of the organizations that partner with Reiser Relief and spending time with the people supported by these organizations. We will assist with various tasks such as delivering potable water where it is needed, but our service will mainly be offering our caring and compassionate presence to those we encounter.

Watch the Sunday bulletin for information and announcements about how all of us at St. Mary of the Lake can "be the hands and feet of Christ."

**More about Reiser Relief**

This Reiser Relief Vision Statement offers a clear and succinct statement of our belief as Christians:

We believe in the sanctity of all life. The impoverished and orphaned children and elderly of Haiti are beloved children of God and should be treated with faith, respect and dignity.

Those of us who are blessed with good health and earthly treasures are called by Christ to help the less fortunate who don't have the means to help themselves.


*Matthew 25:40-The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."*