

## **OPERATION STARFISH NEWSLETTER**

### **May, 2005**

Dear Friends of ***Operation Starfish***:

One recent afternoon I watched my five-year old grandson as his battery wore down after a full day. As he grew more and more tired, he gravitated toward his grandmother, climbed into her lap, and just lay there, still and spent. I thought about those of us who keep praying and working, even as the news from Haiti continues to be filled with violence and desperation. I also thought about our sisters and brothers in Haiti, trying to survive through this difficult period. My thoughts and my mood led me to this passage from Prayer by O. Hallesby...

*"As evening drew nigh, and our little fellow had played until he was tired, I noticed that he grew closer and closer to his mother. At last he found the place he was longing for, mother's lap. He did not have a great deal to say, either. He simply lay there, and let his mother caress him to sleep.*

*"We, too, become tired, deadly tired, of ourselves, of others, of the world, of life, of everything! Then it is blessed to know of a place where we can lay our tired head and heart, our heavenly Father's arms, and say to him, 'I can do no more. And I have nothing to tell you. May I lie here a while and rest? Everything will soon be well again if I can only rest in your arms a while.'"*

### **NATIVITY VILLAGE UPDATE**

In spite of the danger and disruption in the Port-au-Prince area, construction has continued in Nativity Village. Food for the Poor advises us that 16 double house units were completed in March. Fr. Martin's commitment to the villagers to build homes for all 500 families is complete. House building will continue as families move into the area, but Nativity Church will now focus its resources on construction of a 10-room school with food distribution and vocational training facilities.

### **NATIVITY'S 2005 OPERATION STARFISH A SUCCESS**

Operation Starfish at Nativity Church has concluded its Lenten campaign. Over \$155,000 was put in the Starfish basket during Lent. Starfish giving, however, has become continuous, with additional gifts coming in throughout the year. For example, a Starfish Walk will be conducted by the Knights of Columbus this summer; funeral gifts in lieu of flowers, and wedding gifts in lieu of favors come in regularly; and gifts of stock, monthly gifts and special event gifts are also made through the year. Next month's

Operation Starfish Newsletter will have a final total for Church of the Nativity, an update on other church efforts, and a story on Fr. Martin's visit with the people of Food For The Poor on May 26-27.

## **EZEKIEL VILLAGE UPDATE**

Our friend Curt Larson from River Falls, Wisconsin, has been working with a consortium of churches of different denominations in the River Falls area to provide desperately needed housing and assistance to a very poor village in Haiti. Their teamwork and ecumenical approach is most inspiring. Curt recently wrote us an update...

*Dear Jim,*

*Having just played FFP's "Project Starfish" video at a meeting at our home last night, and once again seeing and hearing you and other members of Nativity speak, I was reminded that you might be interested in an up-date on Ezekiel Village.*

*We didn't know about Project Starfish when we started our project, but I had heard the "starfish" story before. Our project is quite different than yours in that it involves seven churches in our community, whose theologies are quite varied, and whose total combined membership is about the size of your church. This provides great challenges in organization, but also a great opportunity for ecumenism and community.*

*Ezekiel Village has become a reality, although on a much smaller scale than Nativity Village. I may have mentioned to you earlier that ten of us from River Falls went on a FFP pilgrimage last July, one aspect of which was to dedicate the village. The first 25 double houses and one sanitation block were completed at that time. A second sanitation block has since been completed. Water is still a problem that we are working on. A 250 ft well was drilled, but failed to yield good water, so we will have to solve that problem in some other way. I invited our pastor, Rev. David Hagstrom (recently called to Ezekiel Lutheran) to be a member of our pilgrimage and he came along. Having seen first hand the appalling destitution in Haiti, he is very excited about our work.*

*As soon as I heard about your Project Starfish, I realized how wonderfully appropriately the starfish story relates to mission. Instead of looking at the vast hopelessness of infinite need, we look at what we can do for one family at a time. Instead of being paralyzed, we do something. I have felt for a long time that this was the approach we had to take, but Operation Starfish gives it a name, a vision, and a framework.*

*I wanted you to know that we are starting Operation Starfish formally in River Falls, Wisconsin, this Lenten season. We are using the new materials provided by FFP, including the children's workbook, the Lenten calendar, the Lenten boxes, and of course, the Project Starfish video made at Nativity. Not all of our churches will start immediately, but all think it's a great program, and will join when they can. St. Bridget's Catholic church, for example, has historically supported the "Rice Bowl" program during*

*Lent, so they are planning on starting Operation Starfish to kick-off the new church season next Fall.*

*The new project we are undertaking at Ezekiel Village will be to build and staff a small medical clinic on the site. Future plans include a community center and 25 more houses. There really isn't room for much more than that on the site we have. Of course, we must continue to work on the need for potable water.*

*I thank Father Martin and you folks at Nativity for developing such a wonderful model that we all can use. I will let you know how it goes. Incidentally, the free will offering at our second annual "It Takes a Village" concert, featuring six church choirs and a massed choir, made up of all six choirs, raised a little over \$3,000 for Ezekiel Village. We almost filled the sanctuary at St. Bridget's Catholic Church for the wonderful community event.*

*Yours in Christ,  
Curt*

## **ADDITIONAL LETTERS FROM OUR READERS**

### **FROM Marion Owen in Kodiak, Alaska...**

*On another subject, I read over the newsletter you sent. Thank you for sending it. Very inspiring.*

*Blessings of love, courage and faith in Operation Starfish!*

*Cheers, Marion*

[Check out Marion's web site at [www.plantea.com](http://www.plantea.com)]

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### **FROM Fr. Daniel Ache in Kumbo, Cameroon, West Africa...**

*Dear Jim,*

*Thank you immensely for communicating to us the Newsletter of Operation -Starfish. While apologising for the delay in acknowledging receipt of the Newsletter, I wish to earnestly say I find the Newsletter to be very rich and inspiring. I have been able to share the news with my closest collaborators on the diocesan youth formation team of seven persons. We have organised a meeting for all the chaplains, and youth advisers and workers of all the parishes of the diocese. There are twenty-three parishes in the diocese of Kumbo and we are hoping to have at least four persons per parish. This will be another very great opportunity to share on my experiences at the Pittsburgh conference, stay at Virginia and experiences of the great people of God of the Nativity*

*together with the very loving and inspiring pastor Fr. Martin. Memories of my stay are still so fresh and so pleasant that today they are really a part of my prayer. I pray for you all and that the Good Lord who has begun this good work in you should bring it to fulfillment. I hope with your permission I am able to reproduce parts of the Newsletter for sharing with the parishes of our diocese. I think it will be one way of also encouraging charity among our people. The tendency in life may be for some people, like our people, to think that when they have limited means or resources they cannot share these with others. I think it will also be one way of helping our people to think about other people and to see in which ways they can be of help to the needy of their communities. I know this is going to be a real challenge but I pray it works. I know you are not doing all what you are doing because you have the means but more so because you have a heart that is loving and caring especially for the underprivileged. Share my greetings with all especially your natural and parish families.*

*May God bless and reward you all abundantly.*

*Fr. Daniel*

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FROM Frederick J. Ryan, Jr., Chairman of the Reagan Presidential Foundation and President of Allbritton Communications (TV Channels 7 & 8 in Washington, DC). Mr. Ryan served in the White House as Chief of Staff to President Ronald Reagan...

*Dear Jim,*

*This letter is long overdue, but I want to thank you for sending me the video on Project Starfish.*

*It is an incredible project. Congratulations on having such a positive impact on improving the lives of so many people. It is a remarkable story and I appreciate your sharing it with me.*

*With best regards,*

*Fred*

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## **NEWS BRIEFS**

- The Haitian Ministry Commission of the Diocese of Richmond, Virginia is sponsoring a one-week basic immersion course in Haitian Creole July 17, 2005 to July 23, 2005 in Montpelier, Virginia. Cost for tuition, room, board and materials is \$500. The instructor is Dr. Flore Zéphir, Associate Professor of Romance Languages, University of Missouri. Space is limited. For more

information contact Br. Cosmas Rubencamp, who can be reached by email at [crubencamp@richmonddiocese.org](mailto:crubencamp@richmonddiocese.org).

- WQED Pittsburgh has produced a DVD and VHS tape of “A Celebration of Faiths: the Papal Concert of Reconciliation.” This concert celebrates the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pope John Paul II’s Papacy. It was performed at the Vatican to a standing room audience on January 17, 2004 and brought together the leaders of the three Abrahamic faiths. Available for \$19.95 at [www.wqed.org](http://www.wqed.org) or call 800-274-1307.

## **TSUNAMI – FIRST HAND ACCOUNT FROM A RELIEF WORKER**

Lest we forget, there is still much suffering and recovery work going on in the areas affected by the tsunami. Food For The Poor works primarily in the Caribbean and Latin America. But because of the great need following the tsunami, FFP mobilized its relief capabilities and quickly moved needed supplies and materials to South Asia. FFP employees Tony Barbieri and Cliff Feldman were in Indonesia to get a first hand assessment of the situation. Excerpts from Tony’s emails (edited) are reprinted below...

MESSAGE 1...

*On Friday the 14th (January) we visited a refugee camp, one of many around the city used for housing and distribution of goods to those that were displaced from the Tsunami. Most of the survivors are from Banda Ache, which was hit hardest by the earthquake and the subsequent Tsunami.. While visiting the refugee camp we saw a distribution of assorted food items that had been collected by the Church as an ongoing effort "in country" to help these victims. There were approximately 3500 people waiting there to receive assistance. Many of the children at this shelter have no parents or siblings left and have been taken in by foster parents. The majority of the refugees in the shelter have been taken in by local families leaving a minimum at the shelter.*

*There are a great deal of tragic stories and loss of life and possessions here and we came across one particular story that seemed to be miraculous. This involved an 11 year old boy named Daniel Yuri who was spared in the Tsunami and brought to this shelter to care for. He had been swept into the sea along with his family and somehow managed to stay afloat for 6 hours and then he felt an animal near him. He was unconscious during this episode but he believed that this animal brought him to shore.*

*On January 15, 2005, we flew to Banda Ache airport and then we were escorted by the military for our “safety”. We are told that the government soldiers had done a sweep for insurgents as we drove and before we arrived. It has been reported that insurgents were shooting in Banda Ache and that aid workers must be escorted there. Reports from the insurgents are that they are not harming aid workers and have given them safe*

passage. In a province with a long history of conflict it is impossible to tell who is telling the truth if anyone. There are many political agendas in Aceh province, the only province governed by Islamic law in Indonesia. As we get closer on our nearly one hour drive from the airport to Banda Aceh we begin to see some destruction and smell the putrid odor of death mixed with sewage and other rotting matter. The destruction in the city of Banda Aceh is very serious but it was expected as we are entering an area that had endured a 9.5 earthquake. As we drove closer to the shore the destruction grew. Approximately 10 minutes from the main city driving towards the beach we could not believe our eyes. Entire communities of houses and businesses were completely destroyed, leaving just the foundations and piles of rubble. As far as the eye could see and all the way miles to the coast all was in ruins. Surrealistically in this desolation one home or mosque would stand leaning, shattered and in solitude among the rubble. The destruction is in epic proportions and with only a scattering of workers the area looked as though it was knocked down by bulldozers. We saw body bags filled with corpses along the road as they are put there and then picked up for burial in mass graves. What you and I would call dump sites. There are heavy vehicles hundreds of yards from any road and boats sit smashed to unrecognizable proportions more than miles from any water. Only being there with this view and smell can truly capture the impossible obliteration of this region. We try to capture it with our cameras but I fear that it might be impossible for the vastness of the devastation.

As we continue to an area of survivors to distribute boxes of mixed food items provided by Food For The Poor we all sit silently just looking out at the ruins and not believing our eyes.

We arrive at a camp for survivors and a very large truck pulls in behind us with the relief boxes. The army is there to help keep order and protect our group from harm we are told. Hundreds of women, children and elderly gather around the truck as we begin distribution. Little girls of maybe 12 years old are holding what I believe might be a younger sibling or perhaps just an orphan. They seem to be the mother figure of these toddlers more than baby sitters. Elderly women with babies also look strange as does the lack of adults on the whole. So many children seem alone here and seem to be led by just a few adults. Everyone is well behaved and perhaps it is the shock of the tsunami that keeps them calm and almost tranquil.

We give food and love to those who seemingly need it at this time or maybe because we as humans need to embrace the victims of this great tragedy.

Next we visit one of five clinics operated by our in-country counterpart organization. They receive as many as one thousand patients a day in this clinic which is staffed by volunteer doctors and nurses from Singapore and as far away as Sweden. It is a medium sized clinic which seems well staffed and well supplied at this time. Many of the supplies are being purchased by the church that is hosting us. There is an influx of aid here but no one knows how long supplies will last. Food For The Poor's decision to send needed medicines and food items quickly by air and shipping the rest by cargo ship was appropriate. Seeing first hand the needs of these people we have surely made

*the right decision. When the first flood of aid is gone Food For The Poor's containers will arrive and re-supply the needs of the clinics, shelters and feeding centers.*

*I couldn't imagine after witnessing this catastrophic event first hand that we would have any reservations as an organization that we did the right thing. The network on the ground is functioning efficiently and up till now Cliff and I are very impressed with the churches progress on the ground. In my heart I couldn't ever imagine doing anything less then what we are doing now. The assistance here is vital to life itself.*

*Tone*

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MESSAGE 2...

*Hello everyone,*

*We're back and happy to be in the U.S.A. Subsequent to my last e-mail we visited Jakarta, a major metropolitan city in the southern part of the country. We visited a dump that had an orphanage on the site which is run by a woman whose husband passed away and she's taken this place under her guidance. She is a Church of God member and receives a lot of help from them and recently FFP. She was ecstatic to see us as she has heard of FFP and the good work it does for the poor throughout our territories.*

*While we were there rains had come the night before and as we visited the children and mothers in the area the waters rose about 4 ft. high. The children had received goods from us and the Church consisting of foodstuffs, toiletries and an assortment of critical emergency supplies to take home packaged in plastic bags. They had to take this home through the flooded streets. Mind you the women in the community have taken in a lot of orphaned children into their homes to be cared for.*

*The other part of this story is that their houses that were flooded were built on and around a dump site where there was serious garbage all over. This results in dengue fever, malaria and cholera. The conditions these people lived in were atrocious, however, their prayers and faith were remarkable in view of the conditions. They sang for us and really opened my eyes to their spirituality given the circumstances.*

*I spoke to one woman who was a converted Muslim through an interpreter and her new found faith was startling in that she had been disowned by her family. Her husband wanted nothing to do with her and her two boys one of which the husband had poured hot scalding water on his back and burnt him severely. She lives in fear of the repercussions from leaving the family but her faith in God gets her through the day. "Amazing"!*

*We had some other meetings scheduled that afternoon but due to the floods and tremendous traffic were unable to get to those until the evening and next morning. That evening of the 19th Indonesian time we met with leaders of the Lutheran Church who are personal friends of the Church of God and whom also share with the Episcopal*

*Church goods that are sent for distribution. I found this particularly satisfying because this is exactly what FFP does throughout all our countries and was happy to see this work in action.*

*Additionally, met with pastor Niko who is a very spiritual and powerful leader of the Church of God who recently led a crusade at a soccer stadium in which 85,000 people attended. That evening met with the Foundation of the Church that runs the humanitarian area and was impressed with their system of working with all the denominations for the distribution of goods.*

*The following morning met with Fr. Stef Sumpna the pastor of St. Christopher's Roman Catholic Church who oversees the charitable end of things into the community and was delighted to see us. Knowing that there were more goods coming into Indonesia and knowing the working relationship we all had together he was very happy to know he would be a beneficiary of additional items.*

*All in all very pleased with the way in which operations were in place to work with all the Churches. Therefore, I believe that we all made the right decision not only from a practical standpoint but from a humanitarian point as well.*

*I was privileged to represent all of my colleagues that work so hard in getting things accomplished at FFP and I know that if any of you were there you'd agree. To know that we were all a part of this as a group surely showed in our dealing with the Indonesian people.*

*I'm looking forward to seeing you all when I get into the office.*

*Tone*

## **MAY PRAYER REQUESTS**

Our readers have submitted the following prayer requests for this month:

† In thanksgiving to the parishioners and friends of Nativity Church, who gave so generously in the spirit of Matthew 25 this Lent, and for all those across the country who participated with prayer and sacrifice in their own Starfish projects;

† For the families of Capt. James Adamowski and Capt. Mark Norman Stubenhofer, parishioners of Nativity Church who gave the ultimate sacrifice for their country in Iraq, that God may continue to provide a measure of His comfort to those who grieve the loss of these two fine young men;

† For the families of innocent Iraqis, for the victims of man's inhumanity in Sudan and elsewhere, may there be compassion and relief for all who suffer at the hands of others;

† For Sr. Francis Annice, that she continue her recuperation, and that her always good spirits continue to be an example for us;

† For all our friends at Food For The Poor, and for all those who work here and abroad to alleviate suffering;

† For the people of Haiti, that the violence may subside, and that the international community come together to help alleviate their suffering;

† For the people of the Asian and African countries who lost loved ones, who were injured, and who are still trying to recover from the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami;

For these and all our intentions, hear us, Oh Lord...

### **VISIT US ON THE WEB**

Please visit us at [www.starfishmission.org](http://www.starfishmission.org) . We would appreciate your comments and suggestions. Feel free to contact us at [info@starfishmission.org](mailto:info@starfishmission.org).

For information on Food For The Poor's programs in Haiti, contact Barbara Fazekas at 954-427-2222 x6258; [barbf@foodforthe poor.com](mailto:barbf@foodforthe poor.com). Web: [www.foodforthe poor.org](http://www.foodforthe poor.org).

### **CLOSING THOUGHT...**

"Let us not be satisfied with just giving money. Money is not enough, money can be got, but they need your hearts to love them. So, spread love everywhere you go: first of all in your own home. Give love to your children, to your wife or husband, to a next-door neighbor."

---From A Gift For God by Mother Teresa

### **God Bless You...**

*NEW SUBSCRIPTION?* If you have a friend who would like to receive this newsletter, go to [www.starfishmission.org](http://www.starfishmission.org) to sign up, or send a note to Operation Starfish, Church of the Nativity, 6400 Nativity Lane, Burke, VA 22015.

*CANCEL YOUR SUBSCRIPTION?* If you no longer wish to receive OPERATION STARFISH NEWSLETTER, send an email to [info@starfishmission.org](mailto:info@starfishmission.org) or send a note to the address above.

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Edited this month by Jim McDaniel ([info@starfishmission.org](mailto:info@starfishmission.org))

### **OPERATION STARFISH: MAKING A DIFFERENCE, ONE PERSON AT A TIME**

*As a young boy walked the beach at dawn, he noticed an old man ahead of him picking up starfish and tossing them into the sea. Catching up with the man, the boy asked why he was doing this. The old man explained to the boy that the stranded starfish would die if left in the morning sun.*

*“But the beach goes on for miles and there are millions of starfish,” exclaimed the boy. “How can your effort make any difference?”*

*The old man looked at the starfish in his hand and then threw it safely into the waves. He turned to the boy and said, “**It made a difference to that one.**”*

--Based on the writing of Loren Eiseley