

OPERATION STARFISH NEWSLETTER

JULY, 2005

Dear Friends of *Operation Starfish*:

This month we have learned of several friends who are struggling with illnesses – some minor, some serious. Let's begin with a prayer for all who are not well:

Heavenly Father, giver of life and health:
Comfort and relieve your sick servant,
and give your power of healing to those who minister to her/his needs,
that she/he may be strengthened in his weakness
and have confidence in your loving care;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

I would also urge each of you to think about those you know who may be ill and take the time to make a phone call or send a card. If you don't have any cards handy, send us an email with your address and we will send you a pack of 3 greeting cards (blank inside). No charge, but if you want to send back a dollar or two for Operation Starfish, we'll be happy to accept it. (email: info@starfishmission.org)

NATIVITY VILLAGE UPDATE

Fr. Berard Wedner, pastor of Ste. Marie Madeleine Church, near Nativity Village, informs us that construction of the new school for the people of Nativity Village is underway. He recently sent some photos of the work on the foundation walls of the two-story school building.



Figure 1 Nativity School Construction July, 2005

When completed, the school will alleviate the current situation of 200 children in 4 grades sharing one room. It will also allow more of the village children to attend school, and there will be a lunch distribution facility to provide one good nutritious meal a day. Once the school is finished, the existing pavilion will be converted into a job training center.

Work on the school has not been easy, given the current unsettled conditions. The road to Nativity Village has become dangerous and Fr. Berard has had to personally escort the engineer and material deliveries to get them safely through the area. Local villagers have been hired to provide the labor, and they are working proudly and diligently.

NATIVITY'S 2005 OPERATION STARFISH A SUCCESS

The ability to move ahead with construction of the Nativity Village School is a direct result of the support of Nativity Church parishioners through their 2005 Lenten Operation Starfish. In a ceremony at the end of May at Food For The Poor headquarters in Deerfield Beach, Florida, Fr. Richard Martin, pastor of Nativity Church, presented a check for \$185,000 to Robin Mahfood, President and CEO of Food For The Poor.

Addressing many of the Food For The Poor employees at a prayer service, Fr. Martin said "On behalf of all of our parishioners here at Church of the Nativity, please accept this gift in the amount of \$185,045.93 and use it to alleviate the suffering of the poor. With our gift this year, Project Starfish at Nativity Church has now raised \$1,060,000.00 since 1998 to facilitate the work of Food For The Poor in Haiti."

The total 2005 gift included an Operation Starfish collection box with \$45.93 in currency and coins. This box was given to Fr. Martin by a 7-year-old parishioner named Danny. Danny wanted to do his part in true allegiance to the "Starfish" concept of "making a difference." See Fr. Martin's description of Danny's gift below.

DANNY'S GIFT

Here is the text of Fr. Martin's remarks to the employees of Food For The Poor at a ceremony on May 26, 2005:

Danny is a young boy who lives in a beautiful four-bedroom house in Burke, Virginia. The azaleas in his front yard are in full bloom, although he hardly notices.

He has three nutritious meals every day. He can take a drink of water just about any time he wants, anywhere he wants, and he never even thinks about whether the water from the tap is clean. He takes safe water for granted.

Danny goes to school every day on a modern school bus, driven by a well-trained driver. All the traffic lights between home and school are working, all the time. The pavement is smooth, and police are nearby to help with any problem that might occur. Danny's teachers are well-educated and highly motivated. He has the latest textbooks, computers, a modern library and a clean lunch room.

Danny's parents see that he gets good preventive health care. His immunizations are up to date. He is minutes away from a state-of-the-art emergency room, if he needs it. His pediatrician can consult with specialists by computer. His pharmacist has the latest medications and plenty of them.

Danny has shelter, food, education and health care – immediately accessible, and in abundance.

Yet, for the 40 days of Lent, 2005, Danny thought about children his same age who don't have what he has.

He thought about children in Haiti who live under cardboard and plastic, taking turns sleeping on straw mats because there is not space for everyone, standing when it rains, so only their feet are in the mud.

For 40 days, Danny thought about children who eat salted clay and call them biscuits, because there is no food, children who die of water-borne diseases unheard of in Burke, Virginia.

For 40 days, Danny thought about children crowded into an open air pavilion, trying to learn their lessons while 200 others in 4 different grades stand and sit nearby, trying to learn as well. He thought about the many children who don't go to school because they have to carry water. He thought about the restavec's, although he doesn't know all the horrible details of child slavery.

For 40 days, Danny thought about children who never see a doctor, never get a shot, never get a Big Bird Band-Aid for their boo-boo. Children who don't have to die, but do.

Danny thought about all this because Operation Starfish was underway this past Lent at Nativity Church – his church. Danny thought and thought, and then he acted. He decided to put every penny of his allowance into his Starfish box during the 40 days of Lent. He wanted each penny to make a difference, somehow, someway – a difference in the lives of the poor children in Haiti.

Danny's gift totaled forty-five dollars and ninety-three cents. He proudly brought his Starfish box to church at Easter and placed it in the Starfish basket. Danny's contribution joined the pennies given by other children and the dollars given by other adults throughout Lent.

Danny has made a difference. His gift will help house, feed, educate and care for his sisters and brothers in Christ, who happen to have been born in Haiti. His gift, together with the gifts of all the people of Nativity Church in Burke, Virginia, total \$185,045.93.

This is Danny Shamley's Starfish box. He wrote his name on it – right here. He also wrote the total - \$45.93.

Inside this box, which we now present to you, are a check for \$185,000, and Danny's \$45.93.

Danny thought long and hard about this gift. He is counting on you to use this money to care for his poor sisters and brothers in Haiti. God is counting on all of us to keep the poor in our prayers and in our hearts.

God bless you.

CONDITIONS IN HAITI

Reporter Joe Mozingo of the Miami Herald recently reported that Cité Soleil, the worst slum in the capital of Haiti, has become a battleground in a shooting war between the 800 U.N. troops on its outskirts and a few hundred violent thugs who hide in the midst of the 250,000 or so poverty-stricken residents. No longer do cars move along its alleys, whole blocks of tin, wood and cardboard slum dwellings have burned to the ground, and machine gun fire constantly erupts.

While other areas of Haiti have tentatively settled back into some semblance of calm, Cité Soleil and its companion slum Bel Air, are still in turmoil. According to Mozingo, "No one knows how many people have died since March because neither police nor peacekeepers pick up the bodies, and residents say many of the dead are simply dumped in the hills north of the city."

Haiti's main highway is deserted where it runs along the edge of Cité Soleil. Further along the road, kidnappings and robberies have become common. Recently the French Consul, based in Cap Haitien, was murdered and the manager of the Hotel St. Christophe was shot. Earlier this year the manager of the Hotel Montana was kidnapped but returned safely, presumably after a ransom was paid. Hopefully, some semblance of order will result from the continued U.N. presence and the international attention that will be focused on Haiti as we approach elections this fall.

HURRICANE DENNIS HITS HAITI'S SOUTH COAST

Between July 8-10, the winds and rain from Hurricane Dennis battered the south coast of Haiti before moving on to Cuba and the Florida Panhandle. The death toll in Haiti is estimated at about 40 people, with many more reported missing. Several international aid agencies are distributing food and drinking water to those displaced by the storm. About 15,000 people lost their homes in the storm. Two towns, Grand Goave and Cote-de-Fer lost their water systems and a bridge on the main road between Port-au-Prince and Les Cayes was destroyed.

STARFISH HINTS FROM OUR READERS

Dave O'Connell from St. Michaels Church in Richmond, Virginia reports that his church has a twinning arrangement with a church in Dos-Palais, east of Mirebalais on the Central Plateau. St. Michaels parishioners are building a school in Dos-Palais, in cooperation with the parish priest. According to Dave, "We put a HAITI envelope in the monthly envelope set. We took photos of the school kids and offered 5x7's to the parish to sponsor for \$120/yr. Sold out after two masses. That provides operating money for the school."

Once the school is complete, St. Michaels will start on a water project, clinic, and then entrepreneurial projects.

For more information, contact Dave O'Donnell at daveodonel@aol.com.

VIRGINIA CHURCHES GATHER TO SHARE HAITI EFFORTS

The annual "Haiti Gathering" of churches in the Catholic Diocese of Richmond took place in Charlottesville, VA on April 9th. The keynote speaker, Pierre Labossiere, emphasized the importance of the connections between parishes in Haiti and the U.S. He talked about the blessings that move in both directions, for the people of Haiti, as well as for those here in the U.S. Labossiere encouraged more interaction between U.S. and Haitian churches, especially through "twinning" arrangements. He also gave insightful updates on the political, economic, health care and education issues in Haiti.

The Richmond Diocese sponsors an annual language course in Haitian Kreyòl. For more information contact the Haitian Ministry Commission at ldraucker@richmonddiocese.org or check out the web site at www.richmonddiocese.org/haiti.

NEWS BRIEFS

- **Fr. Martin and Jim McDaniel appeared on Fox Cable's "Catholic Life"** television program recently. Hosted by John Buckries, "Catholic Life" airs three times a week in the Northern Virginia area. Two half-hour programs were produced on the subject of Operation Starfish. If any of our readers would like to borrow a set of DVD's of both shows, please email us at jim@starfishmission.org with your mailing address and we will put them in the mail to you. We'll pay the postage out if you pay the postage back!
- **Special thanks to Bobby Jasinski**, a senior at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. Bobby recently gave his second piano recital for the benefit of Operation Starfish. In 1999, his Dad, Bob, accompanied Fr. Martin on a pilgrimage to Haiti. Bobby was so moved by his Dad's

journey that he decided to do his part to help the poor. The two recitals Bobby has given at his home have raised \$1,500 for Operation Starfish. According to Fr. Martin, "Bobby's story is just one of hundreds in this parish [Church of the Nativity] of people who are living the Gospel message both in, and more importantly, outside the church." **Special Note:** Bobby's Dad was the person who first suggested the "Starfish" name. It was he who said "Let's call our work "Project Starfish" at a prayer meeting after Fr. Martin told the "Starfish" story.

- **For those federal workers who read our newsletter**, you can designate Food For The Poor, Inc. in your charitable giving through the Combined Federal Campaign. The CFC code for Food For The Poor is 0802. For more information, go to www.opm.gov/cfc or contact Ann Briere at Food For the Poor (annb@foodforthe poor.com).
- **Food For The Poor, Inc. reported a 4% expense ratio in 2004**, according to its annual report. With total expenditures of \$623 million and operating expenses of \$24 million, Robin Mahfood, President and CEO, stated "Our hard work last year has resulted in an operating cost of 3.98% - our lowest ever." Food For The Poor and Church of the Nativity have partnered in relief work in Haiti since 1998.
- **The United Kingdom has suspended Consular operations in Haiti**, due to increasing violence and kidnappings for ransom, especially directed at foreigners. The kidnappings are taking place mostly in Port-au-Prince. The U.K.'s Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in its statement, said "We advise against all but essential travel to Haiti, because of the deteriorating general security situation and the increasing threat to personal security, particularly in the capital, Port-au-Prince, where even the main airport road is proving vulnerable. The kidnapping of foreign nationals for ransom money appears to be on the increase, with five foreign nationals having been kidnapped for ransom so far in May and June 2005."
- In a recent presentation, Fr. Richard Martin of Nativity Church recognized the family and friends of Jill Marie Dwyer, a Nativity parishioner who lost her battle with illness. Through the efforts of Jill Marie's mother and father, Mary and Jerry Dwyer (pictured here with Fr. Martin), a house was built in Nativity Village, Haiti, in Jill Marie's honor. In lieu of flowers, friends and family contributed funds that were used by Operation Starfish to provide safe shelter for a Haitian family. The framed presentation was provided courtesy of Food For The Poor, Inc.



Figure 2 l. to r. Jerry Dwyer, Fr. Martin, Mary Dwyer

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 success of the upcoming youth mission in the Diocese of Kumbo, Cameroon, may Our Lord grant Fr. Daniel Ache the resources, the strength and the compassionate love that he will need to help direct these young people on the right path;

† For Carol Mack, may her upcoming surgery be successful and her recovery complete and swift;

† For Natacha Hines, who is dealing with the recurrence of an earlier illness, may she be blessed with a lasting cure;

† For Terry Moore, who is taking on a difficult battle with illness, with the strong support of his family, neighbors and parishioners, may God grant him healing;

† For Joe Mahfood, may his treatment be successful so that he can continue his service to the poor of Jamaica;

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

VISIT US ON THE WEB

Please visit us at www.starfishmission.org . We would appreciate your comments and suggestions. Feel free to contact us at 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. Web: www.foodforthe poor.org.

CLOSING THOUGHT...

*"I am only one; but still I am one.
I cannot do everything, but still I can do something.
I will not refuse to do the something I can do."*

Helen Keller

God Bless You...

NEW SUBSCRIPTION? If you have a friend who would like to receive this newsletter, go to 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 or send a note to the address above.

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Edited this month by Jim McDaniel (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