



The Children's Medical Mission of Haiti

• St. Vincent's Centre for Handicapped Children • The Haiti Connection JANUARY 2015

Who We Are

The Children's Medical Mission of Haiti is a 501c3 organization committed to providing support for the delivery of medical and educational services to the people of Haiti through St. Vincent's Centre for Handicapped Children, Port-au-Prince. It also serves as an umbrella organization for related missions in Haiti and facilitates and organizes the Haiti Connection Conferences.

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Events of 2014 Promise Major Changes in 2015

Dear Friends,

What a year it was for St. Vincent's Centre for Handicapped Children in Port-au-Prince. What a year 2015 promises to be! There is much to tell, much to celebrate, and much to look forward to. So please bear with us for sending this rather extended narrative.

It has been some time since we wrote to you. We apologize for that. And while we have not been good about communicating, we have been faithful in supporting St. Vincent's with our monthly transfers of \$10,000 and periodic payments for special, major projects.

This story will center mainly on the physical plant since so much of what St. Vincent's does and can do revolves around its physical facilities.

The \$5 Million Gift

That's correct. In March of 2014 about 40 people associated with St. Vincent's, including the Rev. Sadoni Leon, Director of the Centre, the Rt. Rev. Jean Zache Duracin, Bishop of Haiti, the Rev. Bill Squire, President of CMMH at the time, and many others gathered in the residence of the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church at 815 Second Avenue in New York for a major announcement.

Dr. Mary White, a physician in New York City, who attended Haiti Connection Conferences in the past and maintained contact with Haiti over the years, pledged to give \$5 million toward the reconstruction of St. Vincent's.

Post-Earthquake Developments

As you probably remember, following the earthquake in 2010 the students sheltered in make-shift tents on the soccer field of the collapsed College Ste. Pierre, the Episcopal High School in downtown Port-au-Prince. Later they moved to tents on the former seminary at Montrouis, about 40 miles north of Port-au-Prince. Eventually, temporary buildings were constructed and a building was remodeled for residential students at the Foyer (Site 2). The students returned to their "home."

The Brace Shop, the only building at (Site 1) that survived the earthquake was reinforced and remodeled. The rubble of the remaining buildings – the classrooms, offices, health clinic, and residential areas – was removed, and a security wall built around the entire property.

CMMH paid for soil tests to determine the viability of the two sites for construction. CMMH also paid for an architect to prepare drawings for the complete reconstruction of St. Vincent's. Site 1, where the original school was located, would house a medical clinic, guest house, and a rehabilitation center. Site 2, previously the boys' dorm, would include a dormitory, classrooms, chapel, kitchen, library/computer room, and administrative offices.

All that was missing was the money to build the school. So we come again to Dr. Mary White and the \$5 million gift.

The Government of Haiti Has Other Plans

As part of a comprehensive plan to rebuild the downtown area of Port-au-Prince, the government of Haiti demolished hundreds of damaged and destroyed buildings and took ownership of the land by eminent domain.

All of the land between the Presidential Palace and the sea has been taken by the government in order to build a unified collection of government buildings and parks. St. Vincent's (Site 2) is within their plans.

Early in the spring of 2014 the government informed Sadoni that he would have to vacate Site 2 (the location of the entire school today except for the Brace Shop) by June of this year, later extended to August. Sadoni began a desperate search to find housing for the dozens of resident handicapped children as well as a site for school in the fall.

He began moving equipment and supplies to Site 1. He needed money to move the generator, the water filtration system, booths for the clinics, and electrical hookups and so much more. In mid-June he wrote: "We need to leave by the end of this month. Big headache! Pray for me." To make matters worse, he could not find a property owner willing to rent space for the residential students that was anywhere near reasonable.

Haitian Leaders Step Up

In early August Sadoni received a call from the Secretary of State for Inclusion inviting him to a meeting with the Prime Minister of Haiti. At that meeting the government promised to allow St. Vincent's to stay on Site 2 until the end of the school year in 2015. They said they would not force St. Vincent's

out its present site until there was a suitable location for the children. Sadoni, responded with well-earned skepticism saying "we'll see."

However, what was most encouraging was the formation of a Friends of St. Vincent's group in Haiti comprised of key business leaders and government officials. There now appears to be high-level, influential support for St. Vincent's in a way never seen before.

The Search for a New Site for St. Vincent's

Now that it was clear that the architectural plans for St. Vincent's, Site 1 and Site 2, were no longer viable, we began to search for a new site for the reconstructed St. Vincent's. One was found.

It is located north of the city near the airport and includes more than seven acres, a large house that can be converted to living quarters for the residential children, fruit trees, and space for gardens that can provide food for the children and a source of income.

Because of the amount of land, the buildings can be constructed on one floor, eliminating the need for elevators or ramps. It is located next door to an existing institute for the deaf, so that collaborative programs could be developed. The government runs buses from downtown to the deaf institute which could also carry St. Vincent's students. While the permanent Centre is being built – about a two-year project -- temporary classrooms could be built on the site that could later be repurposed.

In so many ways this site appears to be an ideal solution. In early November the Rt. Rev. Stacy Sauls, Chief Operating Office

for the Episcopal Church and Sam McDonald, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, traveled to Haiti to view the site, hire a Haitian attorney, and meet with potential local donors. They ultimately made an offer to purchase the site.

Unfortunately, the offer was turned down. At the moment the status of the offer is unclear. A team is looking for alternate sites. What is clear is that the clock is ticking. St. Vincent's has until the end of August 2015 to find a new location. Moving to one more temporary site is both expensive and stressful for the children.

We are hoping against hope that the airport site offer goes through, or that some similar equally-advantaged site becomes available.

Meanwhile Back in the States

In late September 2014, a *Gathering of the Committed* took place in Washington, DC – a coming together of groups that support or work with St. Vincent's in one way or another. Representatives of fourteen groups met at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Capitol Hill. Margaret McLaughlin, a member of the CMMH Board and the Board of the Friends of St. Vincent's, was the primary organizer of the event. Sadoni came from Haiti to meet with the group.

What became clear during the meeting was that the scope and vision of St. Vincent's will change significantly with the construction of a new St. Vincent's Centre.

A New Vision Emerging

For one, the new site would include space for many more handicapped children – as many as 550 to 600 students (double the current size of St. Vincent's) with housing for some 250 boarding students. It would include space for vegetable gardens, fish farming, and small animals like chickens and goats.

It would have its own medical services just for the children at St. Vincent's. There would be room to build a secondary school so that children could complete their high school studies on site, and not have to go through the difficult and

sometimes impossible task of finding a school that is built to accommodate their handicaps and which will accept them.

All of which, of course, will require additional staff, equipment, and added operating expenses. The current annual operating budget of about \$300,000 will potentially grow to \$700,000 or more.

Neither Sadoni nor the folk in Washington were daunted by the projected budget increases. The *Gathering of the Committed* plans to reconvene in the spring of 2015 to focus on fund raising. The Development Office of the Episcopal Church has made St. Vincent's a priority, including a campaign to grow its endowment fund to provide an even greater predictable, on-going stream of revenue. A corporation in Haiti has agreed to build a computer room in the new school, and a firm in New Orleans has pledged to supply the computers.

The New Vision Will Change Perceptions of the Handicapped in All of Haiti

Sadoni told the group in Washington that he is convinced that St. Vincent's can be a prime mover in changing attitudes throughout Haiti regarding the handicapped. The handicapped and non-handicapped can live together as equals, he says. But it will take education and healthcare, both of which St. Vincent's provides in spades.

As a harbinger of the future, Sadoni reports that deaf students are now attending the same classes as hearing students, with the help of an interpreter in the classroom. This year for the first time eight deaf children took the official state exam; all eight passed.

For those who attended the last Haiti Connection Conference in Port-au-Prince you will remember the bus full of St. Vincent's children arriving at the opening night's banquet, dressed for the occasion, taking their place in the banquet hall like everyone else, enjoying the evening. The blind

children performed beautifully on hand bells. A troupe of deaf students danced, interpreting the familiar hymn, *Amazing Grace*.

The children have gone on field trips to museums, and participated in a spelling contest to experience what non-handicapped children experience. "It was amazing to see the deaf in this contest," Sadoni reported.

School Talk

There are many other stories to report:

- ◆ For the first time St. Vincent's has a pre-school called the Sister Joan Margaret Kindergarten, which held its first graduation in June.
- ◆ M. Alexis Junior, Headmaster of the School, spent nine months at the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston and has returned with innovations and new techniques for teaching deaf and blind students.
- ◆ St. Vincent's now has a braille transcription unit which includes a braille photocopier, a scanner that converts regular text into a braille document, and a printer and Wi-Fi that enables the school to access documents for deaf and blind education.

What Now? What Next?

St. Vincent's needs remain significant. In the midst of all the promise of the future, the school must still pay salaries, feed the children, operate the brace shop and health clinics, and serve the needs of the most needy. Food is an issue. Staff salaries are an issue – bringing them up to the government-mandated minimum wage will be required.

St. Vincent's is in a remarkable place – poised to become the premier Centre for handicapped children in all of the West Indies – yet struggling to meet its day to day operational expenses. Many hands have joined in the cause – both American and Haitian.

Please be part of this bright, promising future for all of Haiti. Join the cause. Send a gift today. Remember St. Vincent's in your estate plans. Come to the Haiti Connection Conference in October 2015 (details to follow soon) and see for yourself what a difference you have made. Please help.

Sincerely,
Kenneth H. Quigley, Secretary/Treasurer
Children's Medical Mission of Haiti

P.S. Normally you would receive a letter at this time of year from the Rev. Canon Bill Squire, who has been president of CMMH for many years. Bill was also a missionary to Haiti for three years and served as interim director of St. Vincent's during a time of transition. Bill, who only recently was hiking the Appalachian Trail, had to resign earlier this year owing to a worsening heart condition. We thank Bill for his many years of service and pray for his renewed health.

Haiti Connection 2015

Many people have asked about the next Haiti Connection Conference. It is now scheduled for October 2015 with the exact date to be determined shortly as we negotiate for hotel rooms and meeting space in Port-au-Prince. Please visit www.haiticonnection.org for views from the last conference in April 2013. This is where we will post new information for the fall 2015 conference. You won't want to miss this important coming together of friends and supporters of Haiti.