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Our Mission

To provide special educational opportunities and life skills training to children with disabilities in Haiti.

Principles:

Ensure that every child receives an education that meets the requirements established by the Haitian Ministry of Education and prepares them to be global citizens in the 21st century.

Incorporate life skills and vocational training into the curriculum to aid students in their formation as productive adults in Haitian society. Ensure opportunities for continuing education and certification for all teachers.

Contact Information

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N'AP Kanpe Ansanm

"We Stand Together" March 2021

Meet Rose Carmelle, One of Our Third Graders

Rose Carmelle has attended St. Vincent's since 2015. With her motor disabilities, she had difficulty sitting up, thus making her unable to focus clearly in class, not to mention her discomfort all of the time. Doctors were deeply concerned about her gaining any improvement to her mobility.

And then in 2019, Rose Carmelle received a wheelchair tailored specifically to her needs. She also had a special seat located in her classroom, so that she can now sit properly and concentrate on her work. The health of this sunnily-dispositioned child is improving. She no longer complains of pain and is beginning to move her lower limbs. She is also faring well in third grade!



"It fits me and I can propel myself."



Above: In her first wheelchair. At left: Rose Carmelle in a wheelchair tailored to her needs.

Why I am Committed to St. Vincent's

Kenneth H. Quigley, Board President

On one of my many visits to St. Vincent's I remember "meeting" a two-year old child who had no arms. She was bright-eyed, smiling, and happily putting plastic shapes into a sphere with her toes. Her name was Dieumene.

Over the years I watched Dieumene grow up. When she was in grade school and I visited her classroom she would wave to me with her foot and bring her pad of paper tucked under her chin to show me her perfect penmanship. Later I watched her shuffle a deck of cards with her toes and deal the cards as skillfully as any card shark in Las Vegas.

Eventually Dieumene graduated from St. Vincent's, went on to high school, learned English, and after a long delay obtained a sponsor who sent her to the University of Kansas where she is currently studying psychology on her way to becoming a social worker. Most children who attend St. Vincent's are either blind, deaf, or physically disabled. However, nothing about their physical disability speaks to their mental capacity. Yet in Haitian society, and I would venture to say in American society as well, there is a stigma associated with disability. Somehow these children are considered less able. **Nothing could be farther from the truth.**

At St. Vincent's, our children are challenged to learn as any other school child is challenged. Inclusion is common and encouraged knowing that when a student leaves St. Vincent's they will face a society unaccustomed to dealing with disability. They must live and learn among their able-bodied peers. Equipping them for life's journey, with requisite life skills, is what St. Vincent's is all about.

I first traveled to Haiti nearly 30 years ago with some friends to consider ways to raise money in the U.S. for St. Vincent's. Over the decades I have returned to Haiti more times than I can count. What is it that draws me back?

Surely it is the people of Haiti -- their resilience, their strength in the teeth of adversity, their common decency and commitment to one another. And the children, of course, so full of life, joy and gratitude in spite of their disability or the poverty in which many live. The limitless promise of a child who is cherished, nourished, and educated — and seeing what they can be and do, given half a chance, is what attracts me. I am blessed to be part of this extraordinary venture.

Meet George, Merry, Kenson, and Mary Jo



George is a bright and mature young man, a 13-year-old day student at St. Vincent's with an untreated right club foot and hydrocephaly.

He came to SVC at age nine with good hand skills to push a wheelchair and with good sitting balance. **But**, his wheelchair was too big, had no foot rests, and no support for sitting all day in a classroom. He couldn't push the wheelchair easily and it was damaging to his posture.

Enter Merry Kaulbach and Mary Jo Wagner, both OTs with *Wheelchair Works for Haiti*, and Don Fredette, wheelchair designer, who, since their first visit in 2016, have customized more than 20 wheelchairs for SVC students.



Left to right: Merry Kaulbach, OT, Kenson Adrien, SVC resident, teacher, mechanic and repairer of wheelchairs and Braille; and Mary Jo Wagner, OT, SVC Medical Committee Member.

George was one of the recipients of a customized wheelchair. He could now join his friends on the playground and in small group learning sessions. Because it is not possible to commute on a school bus with a wheelchair, George needs one at home and one for school. Now that he is 13, and has grown, he needs new equipment.

The unstable and often violent political atmosphere in Haiti has prohibited safe travel for nearly two years, preventing the volunteers

from *Wheelchair Works* from traveling to Haiti. Thus, St. Vincent's relies on the immensely capable skills of adult resident Kenson Adrien, teacher and mechanic, to maintain equipment. Kenson maintains wheelchairs for Zanmi Beni, a nearby orphanage which is a *Partners in Health* entity, and repairs SVC Braille. A resident of St. Vincent's since 1994 when his parents left him, never to return, Kenson calls SVC home.

St. Vincent's celebrated International Day for the Disabled in early December 2020. At right: Students help to bring the offering to the altar during the opening service. Below: Deacon Ernsou Plantin, chaplain, holds the mike for Mackenson Guerrier, a representative of persons with disabilities on the Leadership and Management team, as he reads his prepared remarks from his Braille text.



At right: Several members of the SVC Agricultural Committee prepare the gardens at Santo 17 for spring planting. The team implements best agricultural practices, develops ways to teach agriculture in the school, and drafts plans for future agricultural projects.



The Saga of a Wheelchair's Journey to St. Vincent's

Some 31 of SVC students use wheelchairs, which are neither made nor readily available in Haiti. But, this journey of many miles does indeed have its origin in Haiti.

As soon as new students arrive at the Santo 17 campus, their needs are evaluated. For those who have a mobility impairment, there is an extensive bilingual (French and English) form which is completed by Kenson Adrien, long-time resident and repairer extraordinaire of both wheelchairs and Brailers. Kenson takes extensive and exacting measurements and pictures of the student sitting in their most typical posture.

All that information then goes to Mary Jo Wagner of *Wheelchair Works for Haiti*, who is an Occupational Therapist in Massachusetts and serves on St. Vincent's Medical Advisory Committee. Mary Jo and fellow OT, Merry Kaulbach, then scour the Boston area for good used wheelchairs, and those wheelchairs are then refurbished by Phil Moran, a wheelchair mechanic. Mary Jo and Merry find used seats, headrests, backs, etc. to complete the seating system. Finding and refurbishment can take up to six months.

The next step is to box these wheelchairs for safe shipping. (Mary Jo and Merry try to send a year's needs in one shipment.) Each box weighs between 45-75 pounds. And both the airlines and Haitian Customs charge by the pound. The flight to Haiti costs \$1.75 per pound and Customs charges \$1.00 per pound. So, this is not an inexpensive transaction.

Mary Jo and Merry fly to Haiti and along with one of their mechanics, meet the delivery in Haiti, as every inch and item on the wheelchair is accessed, adjusted, and modified or fabricated many times to precisely fit the user's particular needs. This specialized work takes from a few hours to a full day. The wheelchair itself makes the long and silent journey, but it is the devoted and tireless energy, expertise, time, and donations graciously given by so many volunteers which enables much of our work in Haiti.



Adam is a student at St. Vincent's. Here, he has accurately represented the main building on the Santo 17 campus. Note the student in a wheelchair and the ramp.

From Struggle to Success

You, our donors, have made possible the success stories of Dieumene, Rose Carmelle, Kenson, Henry and many others. Without your support, St. Vincent's would flounder, and these remarkable children and young adults would have no future. In the 75th year since Sister Joan Margaret founded St. Vincent's, we are challenged to sustain and enrich her work.

Our 2021 \$600,000 operating budget covers only the basics of salaries, program, and maintenance at our three locations: school, medical

clinic, and brace shop. And that budget does not include any upgrades in the program and facilities we wish to offer.

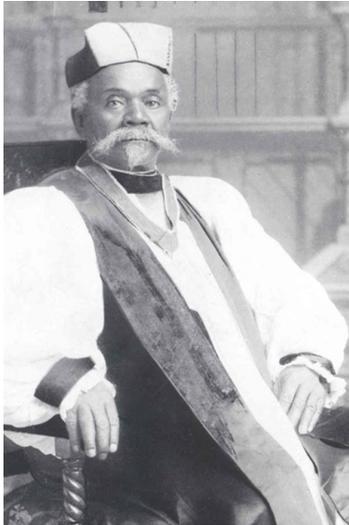
Our new art teacher needs supplies. Our students yearn for a playground and such "routine" athletic equipment as jump ropes, volley balls, and swings. Solar panels at the school would provide more reliable electricity. Investment in Assistive Technology (AT) would enable our deaf and blind students to progress academically more quickly and easily, to say nothing of preparing them for employment in a technologically-savvy world.

Your contribution can turn these dreams into reality, so that today's Dieumene, Rose Carmelle, Kenson and Henry can grasp the opportunity to move through struggle to success. Please prayerfully ponder how you can make a difference. If you do not need the third stimulus check from the U.S. government, could you contribute some, or all, of it to St. Vincent's, to secure a future for these remarkable, resilient children? You can use the enclosed return envelope to send your gift or go to www.stvincentshaiti.org and click on the DONATE button. Whichever way you choose, your gift will be a blessing, and you will be blessed.

That \$600,000 is a daunting sum to raise. It has been made even more difficult in the past year by the Haitian government's devaluation of the U.S. dollar against the gourde: our dollars buy only about half as much as they did a year ago.



Sir Christopher Wren, Bishop James Theodore Holly, and Sister Joan Margaret



The Rt. Rev. James Theodore Holly, first Bishop of Haiti, is buried on the grounds of the St. Vincent's Medical Center in downtown Port-au-Prince.

"Si monumentum requiris circumspice - If you seek his monument, look around." These are the words on the tomb of the great British architect, Sir Christopher Wren, in St. Paul's Cathedral, London. He designed St. Paul's and 54 other London churches after the Great Fire.

Bishop James Theodore Holly, the first Bishop of Haiti and the first Black bishop in The Episcopal Church, died 110 years ago on March 13, 1911: a day now honored as his feast day in The Episcopal Church. In his 25 years in Haiti, Bishop Holly established Holy Trinity Church (now, Cathedral), numerous schools, other churches, and rural medical programs.

In fact, "if you seek his monument, look around," for he decreed that for every church that The Episcopal Church built in Haiti, there should also be a school. That holds true today. Fittingly, Bishop Holly is buried at St. Vincent's at what was the School's original site and is now the Medical Clinic on Rue Paul VI in downtown Port-au-Prince.

And "monuments" to Sister Joan? Let's begin with St. Vincent's itself, which, as a Physical Therapist, Sister Joan founded in 1945. It is now a school, a medical clinic and a brace shop serving 5,000+ children a year. Providing wheelchairs and education in Braille and sign language, the school teaches some 200+ mobility-challenged, blind and deaf students. With orthopedic surgeons, pediatricians, an ophthalmologist and a psychologist, the medical center touches thousands more, from all over the country. Creating tailor-made prosthetic limbs, the brace shop helps hundreds more. Sister Joan's legacy continues to touch and heal: a living "monument" to this compassionate visionary.

Calling for E-Mail Addresses

As part of our plan to improve communications with our donors we plan to begin using Constant Contact for regular, more frequent updates. This requires an email address. About a third of our mailing list includes email addresses. Please reply to Patti Savoulidis, our database manager, to add your name to the list.

Send to
patti.savoulidis@gmail.com

It's Easy to Give from Your Retirement Fund

For those of us 72 years or older with an Individual Retirement Account (IRA), we must take an annual Required Minimum Distribution (RMD), which is based on the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Uniform Lifetime Table and the preceding December 31st value of that IRA. The amount is taxable as income...unless we give it directly from the IRA to a charity. The process for doing this is simple and direct.

You contact your account manager and say that you wish to give to St. Vincent's Center, Haiti from your RMD. You are sent paperwork requesting the name and mailing address of St. Vincent's and the amount you wish to donate. You **must sign** the request. Once received by your account manager, a check is processed and mailed to St. Vincent's. Because you are not taking this amount as income, it is not taxable to you. However, it is also not eligible for a tax deduction. Because this contribution lowers your overall income, it results in a lower tax for you. Depending on the size of your gift and your personal situation, it could be a significant savings.

Are you a Member of an Episcopal Church In Fort Worth, Maryland or Massachusetts?

If so, your diocese has a global mission grants program from which St. Vincent's could benefit.

We've identified 20 such dioceses and are already working with churches in Connecticut, Maine, and New Hampshire; and, as you know, North Dakota funded our new medical analysis lab in 2020. St. Vincent's needs are great, and dioceses tend to grant larger funds than parishes, which is one of the reasons why we would like to approach them.

The grant proposal must come from a parish, which means that there needs to be an individual willing to help involve and educate fellow parishioners. St. Vincent's can help by supplying specific, one-time projects and the back-up documentation which the proposal will likely require. If you are one of these treasured people, please contact SVC Trustee Elizabeth Lowell elowell236@aol.com who will happily assist you in this process.

Support for St. Vincent's Center

Please consider a gift to this special mission in Haiti. Send your check to:

St. Vincent's Center, Haiti
925 Hertzler Road
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

Or, go online to our website www.stvincentshaiti.org and click on the *Donation* button. All gifts are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. To make a gift of appreciated securities or mutual funds please contact Ken Quigley at khquigley@comcast.net or call him at 717-796-1852.