

Haitians building a school for
Haitians – supported by Silent
Children’s Mission.



SILENT CHILDREN’S MISSION

NEWSLETTER

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Dear SCM benefactors,

We travelled to Haiti this August and I found our visit both disheartening as well as affirming. Disheartening because Haiti remains the poorest country in the West and we saw so much suffering. As we know, Haiti is vulnerable to hurricanes and earthquakes and we can still see the effects of the 2010 earthquake. Haiti continues to struggle with poverty and the country will not change for the better any time soon. According to the UN Human Development Report (2016), 53.9% of people live below the poverty line. Only 61.7% of the population have jobs but these are the working poor as many make only \$3.10 per day. Women are least likely to go to school or have a job. Violence against women is common with 22.8% of women reporting abuse – what of the abuse that goes unreported? Of course the issue of “restavek” children or child slavery persists despite national and international laws. It is a socially accepted norm to sell children ages 5-15 and to make them work for no pay, to deny them the opportunity to attend school and results in children being abused both physically and sexually.

Also, one day when we were travelling to St. Joseph’s parish located in the slums of Port au Prince to assist at the wound clinic, we approached an intersection and heard gunfire. The expression on the sister’s face and her quick instructions to the driver to turn right and take an alternative route was an indication (cont. page 3)

Spiritual Director's Letter

Glimpses of God in Haiti



After returning from a mission trip, I usually pray, reflect and then try to choose one or two experiences that moved me in order to write an in-depth article; most often this features one or more of the children we support. This trip however left me with several special moments I would like to share.

We arrived safely at Delmas 31 on August 6th in Port au Prince in Haiti, at the home for malnourished children run by the same Missionary of Charity Sisters we had visited on our previous trips. Their inspiring work for the poor includes food distributions, wound care, HIV, TB and malnutrition clinics, catechesis and a home for the dying.

They warmly welcomed us and showed us into the little apartment for volunteers we stayed in last time. We always look forward to meeting the wonderful faith filled people who help out from all over the world. This year was no exception as we met a Mexican woman the first night who was there with her two children and another girl. She was genuinely touched when we shared the core mission, vision and work of Silent Children's Mission, which seeks to help abused children. Later that night, after we shared testimonies of faith, she opened up and felt she needed to share something important with us. She told us how necessary she felt the work of Silent Children is. She revealed that she herself had been abused as a child. At that time she did not want to say anything, but this changed when she discovered that the same person began to abuse her sister. She then related that although she thought it would get better after confronting the individual, it only got worse. Her family did not believe her. She related her painful struggle of what it was like to have undergone that whole experience but then paused and said something I think is very profound and will help in ministering to children in this same circumstance. She related how those who are abused need to hear the

redeeming message that although their bodies were touched, THEIR SOULS WERE NOT!

This single insight which correctly distinguishes and thus limits the violation to the corporal dimension can help girls retain the dignity and purity of their souls by reminding them this most sacred part of them is still untouched and intact. As I heard her state this with conviction and authority, I knew that it had obviously given her great consolation and peace in her own life.

I pray this liberating, hope filled affirmation is good news for all victims of abuse and incest. I think it is a very comforting and empowering truth, which can not only salvage their self-esteem but also encourage these precious girls to uncover the deeper reality of their true identity, which is rooted in our being made in the image and likeness of God. The reality that this spiritual truth is irrevocable and can never be lost, despite circumstance, can enable them to rediscover their deeper inherent dignity and worth. In many ways, the ultimate meaning of our lives and most profound truth is grounded in our being created and loved by a good God, who calls us to the glorious destiny of being with Him for all eternity. This brilliant wisdom from a brave Mexican woman fully aligns with our mission statement to "develop the souls" of the poor.

When we went to feed the malnourished babies, I began to reflect on our God's unconditional, enduring love and care; of how our God continues to nurture and feed us throughout our lives. As I fed the children, I was reminded of how messy and sometimes difficult feeding can be and began to imagine how God himself must have experienced the messiness of "feeding" his children throughout salvation history. The readings of the week came mostly from Exodus and spoke of God offering miraculous food from heaven in the dessert called manna. The Hebrews, however, resisted this free food, were ungrateful and complained and even demanded meat, leeks and onions instead. Feeding the children of Israel was not easy and many failed to learn the underlying lesson of trusting in God's providence.

As I brought this to prayer, several question entered my heart and I wondered if I was any better? I not only receive bread from Heaven, but our Lord himself, and yet can often complain. Do I trust in God to provide all I need? Do I believe what Jesus said to St. Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you"? Do we ever appreciate what we are given or are we ever really satisfied?

Peace,

Fr. Michael Della Penna ofm

Executive Director's Update

of how violent and dangerous Port au Prince can be. A picture can paint a thousand words but unfortunately we don't have photos of the children or of the clinics from our stay with the Missionaries of Charity as they have a strict rule of no photos. But much of what I saw is forever imprinted in my memory.

There are over 100 children at various stages of malnutrition at the MOC home where we stayed. What struck me was the severity of some of the cases; many of the toddlers were over one year old but barely weighed seven pounds. Loose skin covered their bones and yet they still had the energy to cry for you to pick them up to be comforted in your arms. It is very difficult to describe but I spoke with Gerry, our Canadian missionary in Haiti and SCM board member, and he describes it well: "Frankie – when I entered the room and saw all those children, like living skeletons, I felt like dropping to my knees and crying. All I could think about was my new baby grandson in Canada who I had not yet seen. But then there was a small girl to my left who struggled to get to her feet and when she did - she waved to me! That baby gave me hope because she made me see the beauty of each person in the centre of all that suffering. How can you put that into words so someone can understand?"

Our visit also provided affirmation for the work we support, especially when we travelled to Cerca Carvajal, a three-hour drive from Port au Prince in rural Haiti. What we found there was so encouraging. The project Gerry directs has brought hope to a very poor community. He started by engaging the locals and building a water station and inviting the villagers to come and get clean water whenever they want it. As a result he has earned their trust and friendship. The school and clinic is presently being built with financial support of SCM (see picture on front page) and locals are doing the work.

One morning I woke early to watch the sunrise and found a young boy carrying a heavy bucket to water the small mango trees that were newly planted. He did his job eagerly knowing payment would be lunch to fill his stomach. Pope Francis says: "Work is fundamental to the dignity of a person. Work, to use an image, "anoints" us with dignity, fills us with dignity, makes us similar to God, who has worked and still works, who always acts." Sustainable projects led by the people who have identified their need are important and make a difference but charities are sometimes criticized for not working to eliminate the origin of the problem. We at SCM understand the importance of sustainable development but we also recognize that when a child is hungry, it is our Christian duty to feed them. The children of Haiti are the future of Haiti, as are all children in countries that require assistance throughout the world. Your donations will continue to fund projects such as the school in Haiti, the farm in Malawi, and the bakery project in Guatemala – but we will also continue to support feeding projects that provide food for children now – when they need it most. Please keep this work in your prayers.

Peace and love, Frankie



Gerry with the children in Cerca Carvajal.

"I find the people here in Canada have a difficult time understanding what it is like to be a Haitian and what it is like to struggle and live like a Haitian. They still smile but don't have a place to call home and they greet you with a hug even though they have no food in their belly. They have so much to give us. Our duty is to serve them – we don't save them – that attitude is wrong. And we can't turn our backs on them because there is so much potential. We do it out of love and loving them is what we are called to do. Silent Children's Mission is love – if today you don't have the means to help financially – please pray.

We are in the process of putting the roof on the school; please keep us in your prayers because we are vulnerable to natural disasters, as we speak, there is a category five hurricane threatening."

Gerry Brinston

**"I will never tire of repeating this: what the poor need the most is not pity but love. They need to feel respect for their human dignity, which is neither less nor different from the dignity of any other human being."
St. Teresa of Calcutta**



In 1987, Joan with Andrew (7 months old) and baby suffering from malnutrition.

INTERVIEW WITH JOAN AND ANDREW SIMONE (August, 2017)

After returning from Haiti I sat down with Joan and Andrew and we chatted about their experiences in Haiti. Here are a few of the highlights.

What year was this picture taken?

In 1987 – Andrew, our youngest son was 7 months old and the other baby in the photo was born on the same day.

Can you share with us the significance of this photo?

We rented a place where there were many starving children and we knew this baby was 7 months old. We thought it was an example of the difference when the mother is healthy and has food. Andrew weighed 15 pounds and she weighed 5 pounds. Andrew grew up and is the father of twins now and this little girl is an angel. Her mother had AIDS. If you go into our living room you will see the photo and we have made it a tradition that all (33) grandchildren have their picture taken when they are 7 months old. At some of our family celebrations and just recently at Mother's day we came in and said a prayer in front of the pictures in memory of all the poor children.

Dr. Simone, was Haiti the first poor country you visited after your conversion and your calling to help the poor?

Yes, Sister Carmeline asked us to come and I said, "We don't have to come" and she said, "You come". I would go for two to five weeks but I found it hard to be away from my wife and children.

What was the situation like in Haiti at the time?

It's always bad. Even after the earthquake, with people sending money and movie stars talking about the problems, nothing has changed because the answer is always Jesus. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life". What the missionaries are doing is helping – that is the answer. You can't buy love.

Is there anything you would like to share with our benefactors?

Along with the starvation and the dirt and poor living conditions there is tremendous sexual abuse. In order to eat, sometimes the mother will encourage her daughter to be a prostitute for a rich neighbour. We can't judge them.

News: After many years, Dr. Simone will be visiting the poor in Haiti this coming December 2017. Please pray for his safe journey and fruitful mission.



Thirty-three Simone grandchildren displayed along with the photo that inspired this tradition.

“Let us more and more insist on raising funds of love, of kindness, of understanding, of peace. Money will come if we seek first the Kingdom of God – the rest will be given.” St. Teresa of Calcutta

How You Can Help

- You can make a donation by sending a cheque written to: **Silent Children's Mission** and mail it to: RR#1 16060 Concession 8, Schomberg, ON L0G 1T0 Canada (Make sure to include your mailing address for a tax receipt.)
- You can also donate online via **Canada Helps** or we gladly accept post-dated cheques or e-transfers.
- Question? Write to us at silentchildrenca@yahoo.com
- Look for us online at www.silentchildrensmmission.com
- If you would like a speaker call Frankie Burg-Feret at: 416-418-0314