

## History of our Haiti Mission

With the assistance of Deacon Eugene, program director for Christian Child Care International (CCCI) and the invite of Sister Monica from the Good Shepherd Sisters of Jeremie, Fr. Chris Lynch, Mark Stanistreet and David Lowe made the first Parish mission trip to Haiti on October 24, 2004. At that time we were introduced to Fr. Jean Antoine, a Diocesan Priest who had a vision of starting a Ministry to help homeless street children of Jeremie.

During their visit the group visited various school project sites developed by CCCI. It was at one of these project sites, a small village 6 km west of Jeremie called Carrefour Sanon, that the group came across a situation calling for action. The school children had to eat their meals outdoors, as there was no facility for them to eat indoors; furthermore, the food they were eating was limited to cold plates as there were no cooking facilities. The group was told that a cafeteria was needed but no funding was available from the Haitian government and that the cost of the building would be about \$25,000.

On their return, Fr. Chris, Mark, and David presented to parish council the opportunity for the Parish to fund the building of a cafeteria. Parish council approved and the fund raising project was given the name Building Blocks for Haiti. Thus started our Capital Projects with Haiti.

The Parishioner response to the appeal was outstanding and the funds were raised. The following year the project was completed and the cafeteria was officially put into use in September 2005. The project came in on budget leaving a surplus. These additional funds enabled the parish to finance two more, much needed projects. The second project being the building of a classroom at a trade school located in the town of Latibolliere. The third project was the building of a small convent home to provide housing to a group of Nuns who provide care to the aged and homeless in a village called Mafranc.

Our fourth capital project (a three classroom schoolhouse) was undertaken and even before the school was finished, the children could not wait to get into the new school and moved in.

In addition to the above capital projects, the parish donated to an orphanage in Jeremie, purchased school supplies for the school children of Carrefour Sanon and donated funds for Sister Monica's food program in Jeremie. The parish has also donated clothing, Tylenol and school supplies.

In October 2008 the Parish was invited to participate in a sponsorship program for students in St. Jean Bosco School in Jeremie, Haiti. This school was founded by Fr. Jean and was for street children (the poorest of the poor).

We started off with 60 children in July 2009 and after posting pictures and dossiers of the children at one weekend Mass, the entire 60 children were picked up by our parishioners.

The sponsorship costs \$25.00 a month (\$300/per year) and provides shoes, uniforms, school materials, medical and most importantly – one meal per day.

We continue to sponsor children. The children have now moved to a new school building funded by a benefactor, with the land for the school donated by Fr. Jean's family. The school is one of the better schools in Jeremie and there are many children who want to attend. But, Fr. Jean continues to only register children who are from the underprivileged and poor – many of these children have parents who have died from Aids, are from single parent families where the parent has no home, some are from extended families but are denied an education due to socioeconomic reasons. Really these children are the poorest of the poor and the meal they receive at school, is for many, the only meal they have that day.

On a visit to our parish to celebrate our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our mission work in Haiti, Fr. Jean brought some items of embroidery and jewelry that the children at the school have made. It was his wish to show that, besides an education, the children are taught skills that will allow them to make and sell these items to help them in the future.

We are very proud of this grass roots project which enables sponsors to visit Jeremie, Haiti, see our school and students, and see their sponsored monies in action. We thank our parishioners for their continued generosity to our mission in Haiti.

Throughout all of these capital projects and now the sponsorship program, we have been guided by a set of values that respects the people and culture of Haiti, most important being 'to always maintain their dignity'.