

FROM THE PASTOR'S



Second Sunday in Ordinary Time January 20, 2008 A

REPORT ON MY TRIP TO HAITI

I went to Haiti with Jim and Maryann Loafman, who head up Holy Name of Jesus' (our neighbors on the beach) Haitian Mission Ministry. They have built one school in Haiti and are in the process of building a second one. They need help to complete this second school. This past fall we gave \$10,000 from our parish tithes to the school project. So, I wanted to visit the area where the school is being built.

I had been to Haiti on two previous occasions about 15 years ago. It was good to travel with the Loafmans who have been going to Haiti for about ten years. Presently they spend about four months a year in Haiti. They are very familiar with the country and with various projects. When I decided to give a personal or parish donation to a project, I need to be very clear that I know where the money is going and that there is accountability. My policy is "trust but verify" as President Reagan used to say. I like very much that the Loafmans are very much on the scene and make sure that donations are used in the way the donor intended them to be.

I spent three nights in Haiti. The first day we visited the area Morne A Chandelle, where the school we are helping to build is located. Presently, the students (about 150) have classes in a church. They have about ten different classes with no walls between the classes, which as you might imagine is very challenging. The new school will be a wonderful addition to the area.

In Morne A Chandelle we met with the local Pastor, the teachers and the students. There was no village. The parents of children live in very simple homes over a wide area scattered over several hills. Many of the students walk one hour or more to school. Some of the teachers walk two hours each way to school. They are very dedicated. Individual parishioners at Holy Name contribute \$360 towards each teacher's salary which is about 80% of their salary. The Loafmans also brought with them big bags of school supplies.

The second day was not as eventful. We visited a school which had been funded by an Irish cell

telephone company—a company which is huge in Haiti. We visited there because the Loafmans had worked with the priest who oversees the school. We visited each of the classrooms. This school was located in Durissy which is about a one hour journey from the town of Petit Guave. Travel was very slow (about five miles an hour) once we left the good roads. We had a driver and interpreter. We spent our second night in Durissy. Five of us slept on three mattresses in one little room. I had four layers of clothes on me and a blanket and was still cold. We spent two nights in the mountains. It gets dark about 6:00pm. We had very little light.

Back in Port-au-Prince

Our third and final night was spent at St. Joseph's in Port-au-Prince. It was like being back in heaven. It was especially good to have a shower. There one could visit with several other individuals or groups—all from the United States who were also on a mission trip to Haiti.

Fishing Villages

At the airport in Port-au-Prince, I met a 'retired' priest from Chicago who now works seven days a week. He lives in Ft. Lauderdale. He works with *Food for the Poor* and has some other projects going on as well. Fr. Laz and I hit it off very well. It was inspiring to me to see a priest in his retirement years with such passion for making a difference in the lives of the poor. One of the projects he is involved with is *Food for the Poor* was the creation of *Fishing Villages*. These Fishing Villages benefit not only the fishermen, but also their families and communities. Villagers are taught deep-sea fishing and business practices that are both ecologically friendly and economically sound. Fr. Laz is also involved with *The University of Fondwa*—established in 2004, Haiti's first rural university. I wish I had the opportunity to visit one of the Fishing Villages and the University of Fondwa. For more information www.UNIFusa.org

Gift of Water

While up in the mountains, I witnessed the good work of *Gift of Water*. In both places where we stayed, the water we drank was the result of the *Gift of Water* program. We also visited some of the hundreds of homes that were blessed with the Gift of Water filters. Without these the locals would be drinking water detrimental to their health. Any of you who financially support *Gift of Water* should be very glad. It is a most wonderful blessing to all who have it. For more information about *Gift of Water* visit their website at www.giftofwater.org or call Phil or Barbara Warwick at 242-2036.

Leaving Microsoft to Change the World

While traveling I read a book called *Leaving Microsoft to Change the World—an Entrepreneur’s Odyssey to Educate the World’s Children*. By John Wood. I had seen him interviewed on Oprah. The back cover of the book states:

John Wood discovered his passion, his greatest success, and his life’s work not at business school or helping lead Microsoft’s charge into Asia in the 1990’s but on a soul-searching trip to the Himalayas. At the age of 35 he made the difficult decision to walk away from his lucrative career to create Room to Read, a nonprofit organization that promotes education across the developing world. By the end of 2007, the organization will have established over 5,000 libraries and 400 schools, and awarded long-term scholarships to more than 3,000 girls, giving more than one million children the lifelong gift of education.

If you have ever pondered abandoning your desk job for an adventure and an opportunity to give back, Wood’s story will inspire you. He offers a vivid, emotional, and absorbing tale of how to take the lessons learned at a hard-charging company like Microsoft and apply them to the world’s most pressing social problems.

One reviewer of the book writes:

“A rare business book that not only provides savvy insights for better business practices but transcends the category altogether, to rank as an infectiously inspiring read. . . Marked by sincerity and savvy, this is the kind of book that business colleagues will discuss with their acquaintances, spouses and friends.”

Having a very senior position with Microsoft, John Wood had many very helpful contacts all over the world. Nevertheless anyone involved in outreach work to the poor would benefit from reading this book. For more information on Wood’s *Room to Read* program visit his website at www.roomtoread.org.

Concluding Remarks

A mission trip to a poor country is always a very worthwhile use of one’s time. It can or should touch us in many ways.

- It was good for me to spend time conversing at length with individuals who are committed to giving a leg up to the poor.
- It was good to spend a couple of days with people whose lives are radically different from mine - economically.
- It was good to spend a couple of nights in a location that did not have the amenities that we so easily take for granted. For me it took me back to my early childhood days. In my home in the 1950’s we had no electricity or indoor plumbing.
- It was nice to be with the children and their teachers. I still think of the long distances that the children and teachers had to walk to school and not on nice roads.
- Meeting Fr. Med Laz was a very powerful experience for me as I move towards retirement years.
- Visiting Haiti was another reminder of how blessed we are in America—at least most of us and how our great responsibility to partner with and support those who are willing to spend huge amounts of time on site helping the poor. As I struggle to balance our parish and school budget, a trip to Haiti dispels the doubts that I sometimes have about setting aside a good slice of our offertory income to help the poor (This year \$112,500).

A reminder. I have said it before and I will say it again that for many of us our *Last Will & Testament* is probably our biggest opportunity to make a sizable contribution to an organization that is on the front line of making a positive difference to the poor. About half of the people in our world live daily in dire poverty

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Frank

PRAYER OF PROTECTION FOR THE UNBORN

Father, all life is in Your care.

**You have entrusted us to one another,
that we may show our brothers and sisters
the same love you have for us.**

**We pray, then, for the least among us,
the children in the womb.**

Protect them from the violence of abortion.

**We pray for those that are scheduled to
die today at some abortion clinic.**

Save them from death.

**Give new hope to their parents,
that they may turn away from the desperate
act of abortion.**

**Grand conversion to the abortionist and to the staff.
Show us how we are to respond to the bloodshed in our
midst, and lead us to the day when this place of death
will be transformed into a haven of life.**

**Guard us with your joy and your peace, for in You,
life is victorious.**

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Fr. Frank Pavone