

Reflections from Haiti May 17 -23 2011 Gesu Mission Team

Lynn Connolly, Mission Team Co-Leader

Gesu Mission Team May 17-23, 2011

What the eye does not see does not move the heart. (Haitian proverb)

On Tuesday, May 17, our mission team headed to Haiti. This would be my 3rd visit to this Caribbean country and to our twin parish, St. Jude. I would soon see the wisdom of this Haitian proverb.

Ever since the January 2010 earthquake that struck Haiti, I've been very concerned about its on-going impact on the land and the people. I've seen many pictures and heard many news reports, some hopeful and some describing the challenges people still face daily. So I was bracing myself for this face-to-face encounter. On our drive to Norwich Mission House that afternoon and on other drives around Port-au-prince I observed these discouraging signs:

- Collapsed buildings on many streets;
- Earthquake rubble in most neighborhoods;
- Streets with more ruts and bumps;
- Large tent cities with one family right next to another;
- People living in tents next to the street or in any space near their homes;
- A significantly rougher ride up to St. Jude and seeing that some families are still living in make-shift homes;
- Higher gas prices (\$5 plus) and higher food prices continue.

Yet even though life in Haiti has become more difficult for most people, I also saw many signs of hope:

The streets of Port-au-prince and Petion-Ville are bustling with people and traffic;

- Street markets filled with people selling food, clothing, medicine, etc. all trying to make a living;
- Some new buildings rising out of the rubble;
- Wednesday, May 15 – observing the celebration of Haiti's National Flag Day Holiday and seeing a man so proud he draped himself in flags;
- National Museum – touring this facility and learning more about the history of Haiti and its people.

And at St. Jude:

- Being warmly welcomed once again, receiving kisses and hugs from the elder women of the community;
- Seeing the joy and excitement of the children as we played jump rope, circle games, dancing to the Hokey Pokey, and hand-clapping games;
- Hearing the beautiful voices of the children's choir, ages 7 to 18, at Sunday mass;
- Witnessing young adults participating in Sunday mass and leading a Legion Of Mary prayer group;
- Meeting my Prayer Partner for the first time and seeing her new home;
- Touring the clinic with Nurse Virginia and seeing the Labor & Delivery room – where approximately 4 babies are born every month.

Seeing Haiti first hand and interacting with the people, has touched my heart yet again. At Sunday mass Fr. Bréné's sermon included statements of gratitude for our support. He said without our support, St. Jude Parish would not exist. For example, there would not be a temporary church for worship, more children would be hungry, there would be less water during the dry season, no security wall, no additional food for the elders, no nurse at the clinic to care for the sick and injured, and no power. I pray that our hearts continue to be touched by the people of St. Jude and I ask God to be with us as we continue our financial and spiritual support.

Devin Curda

MU Junior for 2011-12

Gesu Mission Team May 17-23, 2011

“If you don't remember anything that I told you, at least remember this.....

Relationships are the most important part of Haitian culture” -Julooki

Three hours after sitting down, this is how the man concluded. An inter-faith minister who has vast knowledge of Haitian voodoo, history, culture, and way of life, Julooki had just given our group a brief introduction to the country we were visiting for the week and about which my knowledge was minimal. As someone who embodies the warm

and ebullient temperament of the locals, Julooki left no question unanswered and no doubt in my mind that there was a lot more to this country than is commonly presupposed.

Haiti has a lot of reasons to be despondent. Just looking at the hard statistics, 80% of the country lives in abject poverty. The “education expenditures” are N/A due to the fact that there is no public education system. 40% of the population is unemployed. Half are illiterate. Yet the Haiti that I experienced was so much more than this. What numbers can’t capture is the fact that 100% of the children I met at St. Jude were smiling. What stats can’t explain is the way almost every parishioner tossed a few coins in the basket during gifts. Looking upon the congregation during Sunday morning mass, one would never know that less than half a mile away, many of these people lived in “homes” with tin roofs and tarp sidings. The fellowship, the colorful clothing, and the joyful singing made me briefly forget that I was in a country that most of the world has written off as beyond help and without hope.

A key part of our visit was fostering a bond with Gesu’s twin parish, St. Jude. From interacting with the schoolchildren to dialogue with the parish council, our mission team attained a greater understanding of the needs of our twin parish. Over the years, the various funds that have been raised in Milwaukee have gone to help establish a clinic for the community, build a wall around the church grounds and provide lunch for over 300 kids, amongst many other things. Looking forward, St. Jude’s needs to construct an entirely new church (the old building was destroyed in the earthquake) as well as continue its community health education programs, possibly through vaccinations.

I am most grateful to Gesu Parish for giving me the opportunity to go on this trip! I know I speak for the entire mission team when I say that traveling to Haiti is one of those life moments that I will never forget.

Katharine Braunschweiger

MU Junior for 2011-12

Gesu Mission Team May 17-23, 2011

A Reflection from MU Student Missioner about the Gifts of Language and Education

Upon my return from Haiti, my friends, family and colleagues all ask the most obvious question, “How was your trip?” When asked this, I find it difficult to formulate the words to describe what I saw, felt and witnessed during the six days I was blessed to spend in the beautiful but impoverished and devastated country of Haiti. As a junior at Marquette University, fortunately my only experience of sleeping in a tent has been in my backyard or within safely protected forest grounds. Nor have I had to carry a 30lb bag of mangos on my head or survive on less than a dollar a day. For many Haitians this is their life and at age 19 this was challenging to stomach. Driving through the bumpy, gravely and garbage-filled streets of Port au-Prince by mind was racing as I was trying to comprehend and grasp this strange but rejuvenating Haitian culture. I wanted so much to jump in and be apart of this vibrant and loving community but there was one problem; I do not speak Creole. The language barrier presented some difficulties. However many people, particularly young adults, spoke English or at least understand enough to respond with simple sentences.

St. Jude, our twinning parish, was full of parishioners eager to speak with us and learn more about the English language. I was moved by Gabriel, a 27-year-old parishioner of St. Jude, who taught himself how to speak English. He was more than willing to assist with the translation between the Gesu and St. Jude prayer partners, seeing it as an opportunity to grow in his knowledge of English. Gabriel explained he wanted to become an English professor but was forced to stop his school because his family had no money. This broke my heart; here was a man who was intelligent and desired to learn and yet financial constraints held him back. Meeting and speaking with Gabriel made me reflect on my own education and made me thankful for the doors and paths that have been opened and made available to me. Currently, I could not be happier that it is summer and I do not have to worry about group projects, tests and papers for three months. How I dreaded my 8 am classes, the bitter wind whipping winters and the blistering hot summer morning walks to class. If parishioners of St. Jude are privileged enough to attend secondary or higher level schools, they must walk two hours and then catch a tap-tap (taxi) to get to school; but they would gladly do so if given the chance. Gabriel made me realize, going to college and receiving an education at Marquette University is a gift and a blessing that I should not take for granted or complain about. Experiencing Gabriel’s passion and excitement renewed my devotion to learn and gave new value to my own education.

Erin Galvin

MU Junior for 2011-12

Gesu Mission Team May 17-23, 2011

Recognizing Christ's Presence

My experiences in Haiti, especially at St. Jude's parish, deeply impacted me and provided an opportunity to grow in my faith life. On our first full day in Haiti, a guest speaker came to the mission house to discuss cross-cultural issues. One component of his talk addressed the value that Haitians place on relationships. He explained that Haitians want to be friends with the world, and they place a large value on human relationships. At St. Jude's, we had the opportunity to be in relationship with the parish community. Through these relationships, I was able to experience Haiti more fully and recognize Christ's presence in our relationships.

Despite the language barrier, relationships developed between our group and the Haitians. Personally, the children stand out to me when I think of the relationships that I formed in Haiti. The children welcomed us with open arms and were eager to play with us or show us around the neighborhood. Also, they were willing to teach us some of their games and songs. For example, one child, Darlene, patiently taught me a game that involved clapping each other's hands and counting to four in Kreyol. She continuously tried to teach me how to count in her language and play the game even though it took me several attempts to learn the game. Regardless of how well I played the game, Darlene always offered me an encouraging smile. This relationship reminded me of the speaker's discussion on relationships. He emphasized Haitian's desire to exchange with others rather than just receive from them. My experience with Darlene embodies a genuine exchange, and this relationship gave me an opportunity to experience Christ's presence in our friendship.

A second relationship that deeply struck me was when we walked through the neighborhood to make some home visits. A group of children joined us and led us by the hand through the neighborhood. Five of the children led us to their home and introduced us to their mother. As we were about to leave, the mother invited Jean and I to come into her home. She asked us to take a picture of her in her home and to take a second picture with her. To me, this exchange allowed me to enter into friendship with a Haitian family.

These relationships gave me an opportunity to grow in my faith life by recognizing Christ's presence in our conversations and being able to participate in their parish community. Also, the people of St. Jude's inspire me to grow in my faith life, take time to be in relationship with others, and most importantly, to strengthen my relationship with Christ.

Janet Weaver, Mission Team

Gesu Mission Team May 17-23, 2011

Reflections on Returning to Haiti and St. Jude Parish

May 17th I made my 3rd trip to Haiti. My experiences at St. Jude have been very rewarding and causing me to realize the needs of the Haitian people and I was rewarded with developing new friendships.. As Father Brene said that without Gesu, St. Jude would not exist.

My first visit was in 2003 and was the 2nd trip for Gesu after their commitment to twin with St. Jude. At this time the commitment was to feed the school children a lunch and for some that was there only meal for the day. Parishioners were unsure of us and what our commitments would be.

Then later money was provided for a cistern so the people could have water, chairs were given for the church services in stead of sitting on broken wood benches

My next trip was cancelled because of the unrest in the country. But on Nov 2008, I made my 2nd visit. The relationship had been formed between us. We did foot care on the elderly women. Cleaned the health clinic and burned all of the old medications. Replacing them with new ones.

Then Virginia an Rn was hired as a nurse for St. Jude clinic. Virginia sees pts, delivers babies and has been an invaluable addition to St. Jude.

Also a commitment was given to have a wall built around St. Jude for safety and prevention of stealing food from the luncheon program.. People outside of the parish were causing the problems.

The 3rd visit was cancelled Jan 2011 because of the cholera but on May 17th, 5 adults and 3 marquette students visited St. Jude.

I was anxious to go but concerned about the damage to St. Jude. Our last mission house and St. Jude Church had been destroyed by the earth quake and some rooms of the school are damaged so there are less students.

The trip was a great experience and showed the resilience of the Haitian people and their faith in God.

The young people loved the MU students, more prayer partners were added, the wall was completed and the gates were placed. Now Father wants to put Gesu's name on the wall in appreciation.

Despite the people losing their homes and living in metal corrugated shelters they invited us to visit them. One man came up to me and said that he remembered me from the last trip. We have truly built a lasting relationship with St. Jude. The feeling between us now, was that we never were strangers but just renewing our friendships.

As Father Brene says that our visits and contributions tell the people of Haiti that we care enough to come and see them. This gives them hope that they are not a forgotten people in the poorest country of the world.

Thank you Gesu for your commitment to St. Jude.

Jean Kowalski, Mission Team Co-Leader

Gesu Mission Team May 17-23

May Mission Visit Brought a "sense of coming home".

This parish mission visit to Haiti brought us closer to the people of St. Jude Parish. Our guest Haitian speaker at Norwich Mission House on Wednesday evening addressed the Haitian culture. He said that it was appropriate to be intrusive in your interactions with Haitians. "Visit them in their homes. It is a sign of respect to be close. Haitians do not have what you call 'personal space.' There is no private space in Haiti. The more you want to be away, the more you are pursued." So, we were given permission to be with the people. And that's what happened on this trip. The Marquette students were sought after by the children - they had an extended recess during the school visit. The children were everywhere you turned - especially if you had a camera. They led us on a tour of the church area. Another day, they took us up the road to visit people in their homes. They enjoyed playing with us on the church grounds on Saturday.

Going to Haiti a third time had a sense of coming home for me. I recognized some of the St. Jude parishioners, especially the elders, parish council and regular attendees. Being able to speak a little bit of the language was helpful in establishing relationships and getting to know them better. Many people had their homes damaged in the earthquake. Several had tarps and temporary fixes to their homes. There is often no work for them. Several prayer partners asked for prayer for their families, their houses, and for work.

Like us, they want good things for their children. Despite their hardships, they came to church in their Sunday best and warmly greeted us with hugs after Mass. I hope that our presence gave them a sense of their value to us and our concern for them.

Thank you, Gesu, for establishing this relationship with our Haitian brothers and sisters. They show us true faith and hope. We walk with them on God's road.

Paul Kelly, Missioner

Gesu Mission Team May 17-23, 2011

The Haiti Corner: Mission Visit Reflection "...filled with faith, hope, and charity."

"How was it"? Many friends and relatives have asked me that since returning from my second trip to Haiti. Upon reflection, I found the Haitians to be filled with faith, hope, and charity.

Even though St. Jude's was damaged beyond repair and had to be demolished, at least 50 parishioners attend daily Mass in the makeshift church. Sunday Mass has a standing room only crowd. The people of Mon Opital have tremendous faith that God will be with them despite the earthquake, cholera, and floods.

Haiti's new president, Michael Martelly, was sworn into office three days before the mission team's arrival in Port-au-Prince. He hopes to bring stability to the country and provide free education for all.

Masseille Supryen is a 21 year old St. Jude parishioner. Of his 4 brothers and 3 sisters, his parents can only afford to pay tuition for 2 of his brothers. Masseille hopes to go to college and become a civil engineer and build schools for future generations.

Thanks to the Christmas Tree of Life at Gesu, the mission team was able to deliver over 450 pounds of soap, toothpaste and brushes, children's black shoes and underwear and some infants' clothing to St. Jude's. Father Brene, St. Jude's pastor, says that without the charity of Gesu, St. Jude's would not exist. There would be no lunches for the 300 school children, no security wall around the compound, no salary for the nurse and there would be no nurse, no

water for the cistern during the dry season, and no adult meal program.

In return, we were provided with more than adequate food and housing. Neighborhood families invited us into their homes, the children taught us their games, and the adults greeted us with kisses on the cheeks.

Marianne Sobkowiak, Missioner
Gesu Mission Team May 17 -23, 2011

Reflections on Haiti and St. Jude Parish

After my first visit to Haiti in May 2009, I was not sure if I would return again. It is a life changing experience resulting in reflections of how blest we are and how much poverty there is in Haiti. Then in January 2010, the devastating earthquake happened and I thought of all the people I had met in Haiti and was concerned about their survival. When the May 2011 trip came up, after much discernment, I decided to return.

In Port-au-Prince, the destruction remains with piles of concrete everywhere and people living in small tents, one right next to the other with no water or electricity. Volunteer groups bring in trucks of water and distribute it in the camps. It was heart breaking to see the total destruction of Norwich Mission House where we stayed on our last visit. I feel it's a miracle that the few people in the house survived.

Thanks to the planning of Fr. Bréné and the support of Gesu Parish, progress is being made at St. Jude's. During this visit, I spent time observing the children's lunch time and the school class rooms. I was surprised that lunch was being served from 9:30 am to 10:30 am. The teachers stated that so many children come to school hungry making it difficult for them to concentrate on their studies, so lunch is served earlier. The meal is rice and beans with a sauce over it which is the standard meal in Haiti. Occasionally, they might get some meat in the sauce. Water and sometimes juice is the beverage, Food remains in scarce supply making it more expensive, so it costs more to feed the children. There is some limited feeding for the children in summer. School goes through sixth grade and then students take a test in June to see if they can go on to seventh grade and eventually high school. However, these high schools are in Port-au-Prince and most people cannot afford to send their children, since the Haitian government provides no schooling.

Faith, hope and their religion help the people of St. Jude survive. When you meet them, they are smiling, friendly, and welcoming. Please keep them in your prayers and continue to support them though Gesu. Parts of the St. Ignatius Prayer for Generosity asks God to help us "to be generous... to serve...to give and not to count the cost". Please continue to reach out to the people and church of St. Jude.