

I feel that I must apologize in advance, as this edition of Haiti Journal might be somewhat lengthy as there is much to explain.

There was a general feeling of mistrust and anger toward the government. The latest insult to the people was that the government is trying to raise the price of gasoline. This is rather significant as it really affects just about every part of life. There has never been a lot of electricity while I am there, but this time there was none. The government tried to say their supplier, Venezuela, raised the price of gas but that was not true. The truth is that the money from the government run sale of gas has been misused and therefore Haiti cannot pay for the gas that is sitting in tankers in the harbor. When there is a gas station open, there are usually long lines. To try to put this into perspective let me try to tell you how it affects various parts of the country. People who grow food in the countryside cannot get their produce into the cities, therefore they cannot sell them and don't have money from the sales to pay for things like education for their children. There is not as much food in the cities for sale. Cell phone companies are having problems continuing service. It is questionable how long the Port au Prince Airport can continue to remain open.

To compound the problem, the Haitian dollar has devalued even further. When I was there in September, it took about 13.4 Haitian dollars to make one US dollar. Now, in January, it is 15 to 1. Of course, all the prices have raised but the salaries have not. Our driver, Jean Deni always knows the places in Port au Prince to avoid when there are demonstrations or violence so I know that I will get to my destination. I saw no evidence of improved conditions in the cities or countryside.

The shortages were more pronounced than ever. I really had to plan carefully to keep my cell phone charged when the generator was running a little (if there was money for fuel for it) or in a car. They need a new well at Riviere Froide (the cost is \$8-9,000) so I was even more careful than usual using water. They are paying 6,000 gourdes ((\$100) per week to get a truck of non potable water. It rained several nights and that helped to put water in the old cistern. This can be used for washing, cleaning, etc. when drawn up by buckets.

We arrived at Riviere Froide about 5 hours after my deplaning. There were many stops to make while we went through Port Au Prince. This is normal since you always want to get the most out of every gallon of gas.

It was a hard year for The Little Sisters of St. Therese as 7 Sisters died in 2018. Two died in a car accident and the others of illnesses. I am sure that at least 3 of them might still be alive if they had modern medical treatment in a more developed country.

I visited The Little Sisters' little infirmary and it is really full to overflowing with very sick sisters. Sr. Helene who has Alzheimer's, and with whom I used to get to dance and sing with me over the years is now bedridden. Another Sister has a broken hip and the other seven are doing the best they can to help each other. It will be a wonderful thing when the new infirmary is completed. At present it is about half finished. The Sisters are also looking for some sort of ambulance. Right now, they cannot get the Sister with the broken hip down the mountain side as they do not have a safe way to transport her to a hospital.

The new infirmary is being built in a typical Haitian way: build a little and then add more when you have the money. While I was here, they were putting on the ceiling for the first floor that is also the floor for the second story. There were about 5 craftsmen working to put the rebar down and then Saturday morning around 6 AM the amazing work began. About 90 people who lived close by came



the boss), the whole project was finished by about 3:30 PM. I was shocked to see the progress and also saddened to hear that the 90 workers were each paid 100 gourdes (about \$1.50 US) for their day's work.

My main reasons for coming this time was to get a better understand of where The Little Sisters get their funds, do a workshop on grant

writing for them, and of course check in with our many scholarship students.

SCHOLARSHIP STUDENTS

They are all doing pretty well. One had died but the rest continue. Our scholarship money has decreased so some of our university students have to take turns, attending one semester and then taking the next one off so that someone else can attend. We have a wonderful young woman who is waiting to go to university. She wants to be a lawyer, so if anyone knows of someone who would like to sponsor her, please let me know. Another girl has finished her secondary school. She lives at the handicapped orphanage and only has a deformed hand. In Haiti, you also have to pass a government exam to progress to the next level (primary to secondary, secondary to university). She did not pass the government exam and has tried twice (Her mother died days before her second attempt). When I talked with her she was pretty downcast. I asked her if she wanted to try again, and with the encouragement of a friend from the orphanage who came with her and told her that she thought that she was intelligent she agreed to try one more time. Then she asked if she could take a class in computers in the morning and study for the exam in the afternoon. First I said no – she needed to study. Then, thank heavens I had the good sense to pause and think and listen to her and then said yes. She needed to get her mind off things for part of the day.

MONEY SOURCES FOR THE LITTLE SISTERS

Sometimes, when I am giving a talk about Haiti, I call The Little Sisters, the “Loaves and Fishes Sisters” and after gathering information about their sources of income, it is an appropriate name. Their main source of income is from the productions that they make and sell: peanut butter, jelly, a bread called casav, candy, cake, clothing, candles, wine, liquor, natural medicines, fish, embroidery, vestments, polmade, communion hosts, school supplies, and good drinking water. Private donations and grants would come next. These of course are sporadic but greatly appreciated. Organizations like Food for the Poor, Hope for Haiti, Help for Haiti help with some food, equipment, and security for a few schools. The Haitian government pays for some teachers,

students, and hospitals but these payments are sometimes promised but not given. The Catholic Church helps with some food at times through Catholic Relief Services and the schools that are connected with a Haitian parish church (parochial) get some funding from the priest. Some schools have twin parishes or schools in the US and their help is invaluable. Each of the Sisters’ Missions tries to send money to the Motherhouse to be used for all the work and members of the Congregation. In reality, about 25% to 35% of the missions are able to do this with the remainder either breaking even or in debt.

As a result, often teachers are not paid and food is scarce for the Little Sisters. I have often seen the older Sisters giving their food to the younger Sisters who are going out to their missions. They always tell me “they will need the energy to do their work in the countryside”. Some programs have to close early due to lack of funds.

WORKSHOP ON WRITING GRANTS

I felt really good about these sessions. The Sisters were open to new ideas and eager to learn how to write grants. First they learned about gathering statistics. We decided on a form and they decided that the month of December is the best month to gather this information from every mission. This will give us time to perfect the form and for those that were at the workshop to explain the need for carefully filling it out to the Sisters who were not able to attend. Then they learned about a site description and each tried to write one about her mission and to positively critique it to each other. Then they learned about writing goals and then objectives. The practice in writing objectives was really kind of fun making sure that it was observable and measurable. They called it finding the holes.

Finally they tried writing a proposal using estimated statistics. Their questions were excellent, like “can you change how you use the \$ after you get it?” My response was “NO”, unless you have written permission by the funder. We stressed the importance of sending reports ON TIME to the funder. They learned how easy it could be when you use objectives.

Some people have donated new equipment for making communion hosts. The problem is that they need a generator to adequately run all of the equipment. This business is an important source of income for the Sisters. When it is up and running, they will be able to almost double their output and therefore increase the income from this business. We were able to help with some of the money needed but they are still \$8,000 short.

For those of you who have been following Michkaina (I call her Mishi) - She has grown several inches. She looks more like 10 than the 14 years that is her age, but she is maturing. She had her 14th birthday while I was there. I'm sure her strong will helped her survive her many years of abuse, but now that she is in a safe place, her strong will is not always appreciated. Someone had tried to give her some not too nice clothes and Mishi rejected them saying that they looked like the food goats eat. (Goats in Haiti eat the weeds and everything that no one else wants.) A woman from the US who read about Mishi in one of my past Journals sent me a donation and asked that part of it be used for Mishi. It was providential, as



with that money, Mishi got a beautiful new dress as you can see. The Sister who took her down the mountain made sure that Mishi got everything new – dress, socks, shoes, hair ribbons, and underwear.

This was probably one of the only times in her life that she had such an experience.

They must be doing something very right at the Professional School at Riviere Froide. So far, graduates have started a chicken project where they raise chickens and sell them to mothers of students. Then these mothers can sell them in Riviere Froide and have money to send their children to school. In the past, people had to buy most of their chickens from far away,

Now another graduate has come to me and told me about a club he has started. He has about 50 boys and girls that he teaches about environmentally sound agriculture, and how to do

some crafts. He is hoping to attend the university to complete his agricultural studies when we find the funds.

Professional Schools are some of the most difficult schools to keep open. The expenses are high (not only teachers but also materials) and therefore the tuition is high although usually shorter in duration (1 or 2 years). This school teaches: tiling, masonry, carpentry, agriculture, and secretarial. I've tried to find help with unions but have not been successful thus far.

Those handicapped students living at the orphanage capable of attending school are still doing well. We have a delightful challenge now. Several are continuing to progress to upper grades. These of course are more costly. We also have to pay motorcycles to transport some of them down and back the rocky mountain road to school. Thanks to the Milagro Foundation, we are able to keep up with most of these expenses. The question came up if the boy with a heart condition should continue in school or lead a more sedentary life. My response was "ask him". He enjoys school and for me, quality overrules quantity.

I was able to go up to Gros Morne that was the hardest hit community in the October 2018 earthquake. The three Sisters that operate this mission have done a remarkable job. Much of the school buildings were destroyed and the rubble was quickly hauled away. There is a building that held 12 classrooms which is still standing and the bottom floor is being used but soon those students will join the others in temporary classrooms made of wood and metal.



That building has been red-tagged. Oh, did I mention that it is 162 years old? I had gone up there after the 2010 earthquake which took away a little of the new part of the school. If my memory serves me correctly, I was told that an engineer from the US had come and inspected the columns and found railroad ties in them. We will see when

the building is torn down. There is damage in some of the walls but the columns look really good. The school reopened in mostly temporary classrooms a month to the day after the earthquake thanks to hard work and donations. Every one of the 740 girls who attend the K-8 schools has returned. I asked a seventh grade class if they had learned anything after living through this experience. One said that she learned that if you get too scared, you just make things worse. The other said she learned that she could be strong. I am sure the example of the Little Sisters inspired such answers. Their convent of 4 rooms is not safe with only partial walls remaining. Right now the Sisters are living in one room that serves as their sleeping quarters, eating area, and praying area. Since the temporary classrooms can last for several years. We know this by how long they lasted at Riviere Froide. so rebuilding a house for the Sisters should come first. A rough estimate would be \$30 to \$40,000 to achieve this. Later we are hoping for a large funder to help with the school. What these three women have done is a miracle only overshadowed by the fact that none of the students or teachers lost their lives because the school was empty at night. I only hope that soon help can be found to put their mission back together again.

We left at 5AM to reach Gros Morne and returned to Riviere Froide at almost 8:30 PM. Usually we try to be back to the relative safety of one of the Sisters' missions by dark, but this was not possible due to many police roadblocks and terrible traffic. Port au Prince is quite different at night. There are still people selling things but with more adult tastes in mind: food, liquor, and prostitutes. Many groups of adults were gathered there relaxing and talking.

I know that I have had to share some difficult information with you this time. I'd like to point out what I dwell on:

- The hundreds of students I saw working so hard.
- The teachers who continue to work with their students.
- The Little Sisters who work so hard every day to improve the lives of the poor in Haiti.
- I celebrate all the time I have been able to spend with those who have died.
- The thousands of good people who care about the poor in Haiti.

- I continue to have enormous respect with the Haitians with whom I work for their ability to lead their best lives.
- The Haitians have much to teach us about their ability to continue no matter what has happened.
- I know that there are so very many good people in this world doing their best to make this world a better place. This can be easily overlooked in today's world. We must remember and rejoice in this every day.

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