

HAITI JOURNAL JUNE 2020

It has been quite a while since I have sent out a Haiti Journal. I have not been able to return to Haiti for over a year for several reasons: security, health, and the virus.

Since I have received so many inquiries about Haiti, I decided to send one out. I usually try to write what I have personally experienced while in Haiti. This time I'll be depending on information shared with me by Haitians using emails, phone calls, and texts.

Now for a bit more about what has been going on there.

Security has never been all that great in Haiti, but for the past year and a half, there has been even more violence than usual. In over 20 years, I have never seen evidence of Haitians having confidence in their government but somehow this has gotten even worse. The people have become very angry and with good cause. Because of continued government mismanagement and possibly theft (There is a Haitian saying, "There are a lot of invisible hands under the table in Haiti."), the Haitian gourde has continued to devalue. Therefore, everything is more expensive, all while most salaries for those who have jobs have not increased. Gangs are causing trouble as well. Some are deported from the US and the Haitians tell me they shoot at each other and burn houses not caring who they kill or what they destroy. When times become so unstable, most schools and other institutions have to close because it is too dangerous to be on the roads. This has been the case on and off for the last year and a half. I've been in Haiti at other times that are insecure, but this seems far worse. I know that I stick out in Haiti and I could make things more dangerous for the Sisters if I was there. There is also little food available during these times of insecurity.

My Health was a bit of an issue earlier. I had some challenges that required some surgeries. All is well now and I am ready, willing, and eager to return to Haiti, but Haiti is not ready for me to come back yet. I dearly miss all of my friends there but cannot return if it means that I am putting them in danger. They also don't need me eating their food when it is very scarce. It breaks my heart to know that so many are suffering from starvation (I used to use the word malnutrition).

Covid19 arrived in Haiti about a month or two ago. The Haitians think a person from Europe brought it in first. They also told me that when Dominican Republic sends people back to Haiti, they think some have the virus. It is also believed that the US has deported Haitians who have the virus who are either released from prison or from immigration centers. I have also been told that they are trying to have centers where people can go when they have the disease. There are few respirators that I know of however. And here is another example of lack of confidence in the government some Haitians do not believe what they advise to stay safe. Shortly after the earthquake, when cholera came to Haiti, I saw an excellent program of posters with cartoon style characters educating what to do and teaching school students who then took the information back to their families. Many schools have not been in session during this pandemic so that resource is not available but I hope the posters and radio programs will be enough. While checking the virus statistics daily, the numbers affected go up each day for Haiti, I know that the accuracy is questionable. They still don't really know how many people died in the earthquake over 10 years ago. I'm told that people are using their homemade medicines with some success and people are afraid to be in or around city centers although the virus is also in the countryside. Some doctors at the general hospital in Port au Prince refused to work until they finally got a supply of PPE.

How are the Little Sisters effected and coping with all of this? A little review of the Little Sisters' facilities might help. They have about 40 missions with schools, clinics, hospitals, elderly programs, professional centers, agriculture, etc. Most of these are rural locations. They have remained out at their missions instead of coming back to their Motherhouse as they think they are safer

spread out and there wouldn't be enough food at the Motherhouse for all of them. Most of their programs have continued some of the time. When it gets too dangerous for students and teachers to be on the roads and mountain paths, they close the schools. When there is not enough food or money for supplies, they have to close. Now with the virus, they have had to close many of them. Sr. Leon, one of their sisters has Covid19. Another sister just died, but they don't think it was due to Covid. The orphanage for handicapped children had to close several months ago because of lack of funds. The Sisters have told me that this has been a very difficult time. Now I know it always difficult in Haiti and they are not complainers, so if they say this it's really bad! I also know that they do not give up. One sister has died and another is close, but they don't think it is from Covid 19.

Some good news. All of our scholarship students have survived so far and are still trying to learn even if their school is closed. They will be back in school as soon as possible.

There is a wonderful Haitian family who now live in the US. Years ago, this family gave the Little Sisters some land in Ti Riviere, northern Haiti. With this family's financial help, The Little Sisters have operated an orphanage for little girls there for many years. This is continuing to this day thanks to this family..

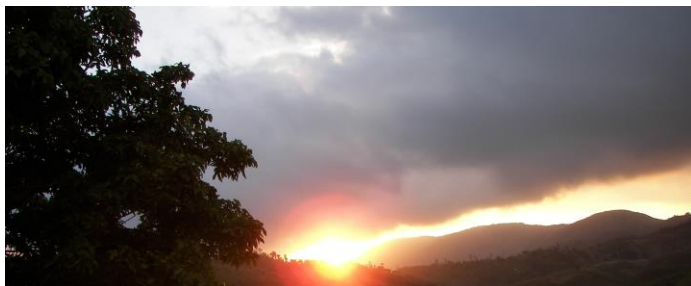
The Loretto Community still accepts and keeps donations safe for the Little Sisters in Haiti. This service has been invaluable. Their help and encouragement have kept many projects going in Haiti.

Derival, the Haitian stone sculptor, is now making pieces for a US architect to use with his clients.

Our donations have decreased due to the hard times here. This is certainly very understandable. Most of the donations this year have been used for student scholarships and the rest has helped to purchase food. The Little Sisters are always asking me how we are doing here in the US. They want you to know that they pray for us every day and the scholarship students have told me the same thing.

Summary: As we in the U S have been sheltering in place for quite a longtime, many Haitians are trying to do the same thing. The sisters are trying to take care of themselves and the peasants with whom they work although with no electricity most of the time, little potable water, and limited medicines or medical equipment. I know you're saying to yourself, this doesn't sound like good news, but they do have a little electricity, water, and medical help. Their cup is half full not half empty. They know that you think their lives matter. It is this positive attitude and everlasting Faith that keeps them going. I hope that my next Haiti Journal is written after I have visited there again.

I have used this photo to end my slideshow when I give a talk about Haiti. This Haitian sunrise helps remind all of us that no matter what, yes, the sun will rise again. Keep the Faith and remember we all have challenges but blessings as well if we just look for them. May we continue to care for each other. Thank you for your interest in Haiti.



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