

# Haiti Reflections 2017



St. Francis Xavier Parish in Barassa

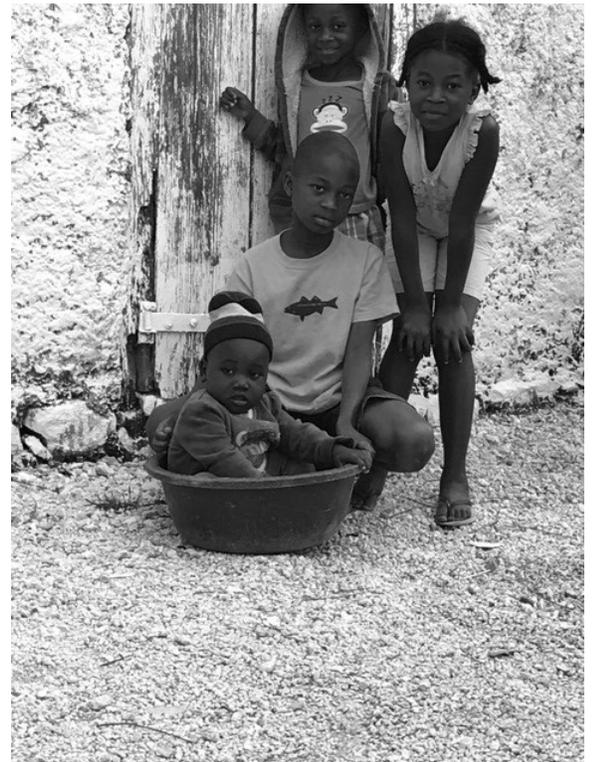
**AFTER GOING ON LAST YEARS TRIP TO HAITI** with an amazing group I thought I knew exactly what to expect going into this year's trip. That's where I was completely wrong. This trip taught me that this trip is not one you can prepare yourself for. Not only is it at times physically demanding but also very emotionally demanding. The people, the kids, the faces, are something you will remember for the rest of your lives. In going to Haiti you get to be in the presence of the most genuine people you will ever come across. You'll teach them and they'll teach you more than what a lifetime of schooling could teach you... all this while not even speaking remotely the same language.

One thing that I really enjoyed during this trip was getting to hand out the shoes the we collected at Beckman the past year. If you have ever been to Haiti, you know what they classify shoes as. They're usually barefoot or wearing shoes that don't fit them and are almost ready to fall apart. The look on the faces of the people who walked through the doors and saw the rows and rows of shoes made the trip completely worth it. After going to Haiti and walking on the terrain that they travel on every day, you truly appreciate what a pair of shoes can do.

A thing that struck me both years was when we went to Mother Theresa's hospital. When you walk in you just see rows and rows of cribs with little babies and children. When you walk through you grasp what the essence of the word simplicity means. These children don't want anything from you. They don't understand the situation that they are in. All they want is to be held and to feel loved. These past two years have dramatically changed my life and changed how I look at things. So if you never are able to make the trip to Haiti, please say a prayer for our friends in Ayiti. Merci! ~ **Justin Wolfe**

**THERE ARE SO MANY TIMES IN OUR LIVES** when we are touched by the Holy Spirit, and this trip to Haiti was definitely one. It began with the incredible team, especially Cookie, Jim and Joan, to the beautiful country of Haiti, and the life changing experience with the people. My heart has been truly touched after spending 8 days in Haiti! It was very inspiring to listen to Cookie, Jim and Joan as they expressed great excitement in the positive changes there as we arrived at the parish, especially the electricity that was provided to homes that did not have it a year ago. And heart wrenching when they reflected on the devastation and tragedy that they saw in the past. There is great gratitude in the people of the Holy Cross parish and school from the years of our care and provisions given to them, and the reminder from Cookie, Jim and Joan that there is joy in their hearts when we leave because they know we will not forget them, we will be back. Graces abound!!!

~ **Theresa Chapman**



**I STRUGGLE TO PUT INTO WORDS** what a great experience the trip to Haiti was for me. This trip has made me more grateful for the blessings the Lord has bestowed on me but also an increased desire to do more for those who live in poverty. The people of Fond Varettes seem to have an amazing spirit and deep belief in the Lord. It was humbling to watch them pray and sing out loudly at Mass in thanksgiving for simply the gift of life and family. It seemed that our group brought great joy to them, gave them hope that we have not forgotten them, and that we truly want to continue to help them enrich their lives with slow but steady progress in their living conditions. It was amazing to me the services offered by the medical clinic with the very limited resources they have. The clinic is run by a doctor, 2 nurses and a pharmacist who do the best they can to meet the medical needs of a large community. These 4 people give tirelessly of their time and talents 24 hours per day, 7 days a week. I saw great love, strength and hope in all the people I encountered. I was reminded that God lives in every individual, rich or poor. I will continue to pray for the people of Haiti, that God will shower them with his grace and blessings so they may feel his love and presence in their everyday endeavors.

~ **Kathy Harris**



**GOING TO HAITI WAS A LIFE EXPERIENCE** that I will never forget. The sunny warm climate, the beautiful mountains, and of course the gentle and loving people of Haiti. We went to 6:00 AM Mass daily at Fond Verettes and the participation was refreshing and inspiring. The singing and harmonizing was amazing. The school children are very well behaved in the classroom. I was impressed that all the children were learning with very few books, no computers and only 1 teacher. They do need our support for the church, school and clinic to keep them all going. We make a big difference in their lives. We also got to see Mother Teresa's Hospital for sick and orphaned children in Port-au-Prince. Sweet children whose parents need help taking care of them. The parents are only allowed to visit 2x a week for 3 hours. I am glad I had the opportunity to experience this eye opening trip.

~ **Doris R. Wessels**

**EACH TIME I PREPARE TO RETURN TO HAITI**, I catch myself feeling apprehensive at the thought of making that hard journey one more time. I truly love the opportunity to visit old friends there and seeing the progress and results of the generous support that the people of Eastern Iowa offer. But it's the logistics of getting from point A to Point B that always gives me trouble!

Thankfully due to the help of Dramamine, and some very wise people on the team, I was able to see this difficult part of our trip as a pilgrimage rather than just a long drive on an almost non-existent road. I remember reading somewhere that a pilgrimage can be described as a "difficult journey to a holy place". And in spite of its remoteness and lack of modern amenities, Fond Verettes is surely a holy place.

I am always in awe of how the people look out for one another with a total dependence on God, giving thanks and praise to Him for everything, especially for all of the people of Iowa who have made such a huge difference in their lives.

Our time there this year was very productive, with very little "down time". Between the usual visits to the school and clinic, we spent a lot of time sorting out supplies, delivering school and medical supplies, visiting homes to test water, and a visit to the Fonkoze Bank. we still found the time to visit all the people we have come to know and love over the years.

I am often asked if things are "better over there", and in many ways it is, but it is still a very poor country with a degree of poverty that most of us can only imagine or see in magazines or on television. But having seen the progression of the area over the past several years I can say that the best thing we have given to the people of Fond Verettes is hope.

With the presence of the Fonkoze Bank, the Saint Claire Clinique, and the school full of children the people do have a reason to look forward to a better life, if only in a small way. Several new small businesses, new homes under construction, gardens beginning to grow along the stream bed and many more goats and pigs tell me that indeed, things are improving ever so slowly, and that anyone who has ever donated their time or treasure to the cause of the Haitian people have a right to be proud of all that has been accomplished.

Perhaps one day I and Joan will be able to experience one of the great pilgrimages in Europe that I have heard about since I was a child. But even if I never make it to any of the other "Holy Places" around the world, I know that I have truly been graced by my visits to our blessed Sister Parish in the mountains of this tiny country only a few hours away.

~ **Deacon Jim Steger**

**AFTER MANY TRIPS, TRAVELING TO HAITI IS LIKE GOING HOME AGAIN.** When you go home, you see the people you love, feel comfortable being in known situations, and yet at the same time notice and sense the changes! It is wonderful to see and renew friendships with Fr. Luberman the pastor, Gaspard our interpreter, Rodrigue a community activist, and all the people we have grown to love. But we also met new people, many whom we will never know. But their lives and example of living has changed me more into a person of compassion that I will continue to work on until I die.

I have seen much improvement through the years! The School has many more students, who are learning at an amazing pace, including learning foreign languages, and physics in 7<sup>th</sup> grade! The Clinic is getting busier and has become a place of healing in an area that sorely lacked medical treatment! We saw solar power being installed, and electricity coming! The Fonkonze Bank is doing so well, that they added onto the building with additional meeting areas. As the Bank official there said, "Fond Verrettes used to be a place of darkness, but since the opening of the clinic and the Bank it has become a place of light!"

But this is still a place of poverty and malnutrition. Life there is hard. It is difficult for me to go and live without running water, see the cooks working over a fire instead of a stove, no plumbing, watch people going to the river bed to wash clothes, and the lack of comforts that we take for granted. But, in the end we leave and come home. THIS IS their home, and THIS IS their way of life. I was brought into one house about the size of my office, where the floor was dirt and rock, a place where we wouldn't have our pets in; and she raised her family of 5 there. I came away thinking that no-one deserves to live like that. But this lady had her home neat, swept up, and was proud of what she had. So every time I turn on the faucet, flush a stool, or turn on my stove, I REMEMBER, give thanks, pray, and act on behalf of those people there that I love.

On Sunday after Mass we had the opportunity to hand out seeds of corn, cabbage and carrots to the people of Fond Verrettes and the outlying chapels. Along with this we handed out boots for the farmers, shoes for people who needed them, and health packets including vitamins, peanut butter and toothbrushes all donated by loving people back here in Eastern Iowa. As I was in the middle of the craziness and the crush of people everywhere, I remembered what a wise priest said to me once, "Look each person in the eyes and see the eyes of Jesus." He said it would change how I treated each person I met. And so, I did, and I saw the eyes and face of Jesus in each person I came in contact with while I was in Haiti. The challenge is to see Jesus in everyone we meet no matter where we are.

There is still so much to be done. When asked if things are better, I answer "Yes, but we have to judge by Haiti standards, not by ours." Change comes slow, and many times natural disasters like hurricanes, flash floods and even earthquakes destroy everything that they may have worked on for years to achieve. But with a total dependence on God, the people will thank God for what they have and will start to rebuild once again. There is much that we can learn from them. ~ Joan Steger



**BEFORE I MADE THE TRIP TO HAITI,** I had always heard of the good things we were doing down there. I had never actually seen those things, and when I was fortunate enough to see the impact we have made on our sister parish I was incredibly proud. It's one thing to hear that we're doing good, but to actually see it was so fulfilling. I have seen pictures and heard stories about Haiti for the past couple years, some of which actually prompted me to make the trip. Let me tell you that while there I saw things that I will never forget. Things that have truly touched my heart forever. I would like to say that I made an impact on the people of Haiti but in reality they were the ones impacting me. I can't say

enough about their attitude toward life and the gratefulness they had for everything, the smallest things were a big deal to them. They have taught me to appreciate the things I have, especially the things I take for granted. Things like running water, electricity, and paved roads. The thing that shocked me the most was how happy everyone was. These people were literally living in tin shacks with dirt floors and they were the happiest people I had ever met. I strive to one day be as happy as they are. I would like to thank everyone who kept our team in their thoughts and prayers, and to anyone who has donated to Haiti over the years. I can honestly say you have made an impact on those people. Another big thanks to Beckman for collecting shoes to send there. I was fortunate enough to help distribute the shoes and they were greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank Cookie, Jim, and Joan and the rest of our group for making the trip a memorable one. Please continue to keep Haiti in your thoughts and prayers. God Bless.

~ Ben Palmer

**MY TRIP TO HAITI** was more than I had ever imagined. Before I began this journey, I tried to imagine what this trip would be like, tried to prepare myself for the immense poverty of the world's second poorest nation. I focused on what our group would be doing/bringing for them. I tried to prepare for the less than ideal living conditions we would deal with. I wasn't really looking at this excursion as a vacation but it ended up being one of the greatest trips of my life.

It does take several days to wrap your head around the kind of poverty that exists in Haiti. There are barely any resources and very few opportunities for the Haitian people. Still, babies are born, they grow up, they go to school, they work hard, they laugh and they cry and they love. On so many levels, they are exactly like we are. It was admirable how much they sacrifice to get their kids into the school and so sad to see those children who came to school every day and sat outside because they cannot afford shoes or school clothes. How they passionately respond and sing at Mass and come forward to drop their money into a collection for the poor. How they walk miles up mountains in their finest clothes to attend Mass on Sunday. These people who have so few opportunities still feel hopeful – and you can feel it!

The children in Haiti fill your heart. The language barrier seemed non-existent with them. They want to touch you, hold your hand, play or laugh with you and their smiles are as bright as sunshine. Spending some time with the babies at Mother Theresa's was so special, but so very hard when it was time to go.

The Spires of Faith cluster should be very proud of what they have accomplished in Fond Verettes. Our presence there has truly changed lives. The school has around 900 students. Some months 15 babies are born at the medical clinic. Sundays find the church packed for a Mass lasting two hours. Many people in the village are learning how to have clean water. The gardens are starting to be planted again and green is showing up along the river beds. Progress is slow in Haiti but they are moving forward.

~ **Janet Stelken**



**MY TRIP TO HAITI WAS LIFE CHANGING.** Nothing could have prepared me for what Haiti was really like. I've heard many stories and experiences from past trips, but my idea of it was nowhere near reality. Even after returning there are still things I can't begin to wrap my mind around. I wouldn't consider the trip a relaxing one, but it was extremely rewarding in so many ways. I was lucky enough to have my mom by my side on my journey, making it all the more special.

The people of Haiti are truly unique. Despite all of the suffering they go through, they are the most joyful people I have ever met. They might not have much, but they do have their faith. These people give everything they have to God. It was so powerful to see them in their best clothes for Sunday Mass. You could just hear the energy in their music. Even at collection time, they all brought everything they have to support those in need.

The highlight of the trip for me was the children. From the moment we got there, the children were clinging to us. They are filled with love and have no problem showing it. Everywhere we went there was a child by your side hoping to hold your hand even just for a short time. The children just wanted more than anything to be shown some sign of love. The moments spent playing, laughing and learning from these children are some that I will never forget.

No stories or reflections will ever truly explain how incredible Haiti and its people are. I am beyond grateful I was able to experience this trip. I was blessed with a fun loving team, who were formed into a family. The people of Fond Verettes are grateful for our continued support. Thank you for all of the prayers and donations. The simplest things can make a world of a difference to them. God bless!

~ **Madison Stelken**

**THERE IS NO GOOD WAY** to prepare for a trip to Haiti as our lives compared to most Haitians are anything but similar. Yes, they are similar through the Mass, corn, and school uniforms but everything else has no comparison to the comfortable lives we live here. The Haitians have a unique spirit that runs through their veins that makes them anything but ordinary people. Their eyes always give off the gentle vibe of a child and their constant smiles and “Bonjou!” make your heart fill with an immense amount of love. Anywhere we went, we always had what looked like a mob of children following us, holding our hands and leading the way. Even in 80 degree weather and sweat trickling down our faces, they were still latched on to us at the arm or hand tugging us along.

The parishioners of Fonds Verrettes truly considered us as part of their family as they readily opened their homes to us and cleaned if they knew we were coming. We witnessed one woman sweeping the dirt free of footsteps and debris as we were approaching because she wanted to make her home look nice for us. How humbling that was to watch as most of us wouldn't even sweep our wood floors before company came over yet this woman swept dirt for us.

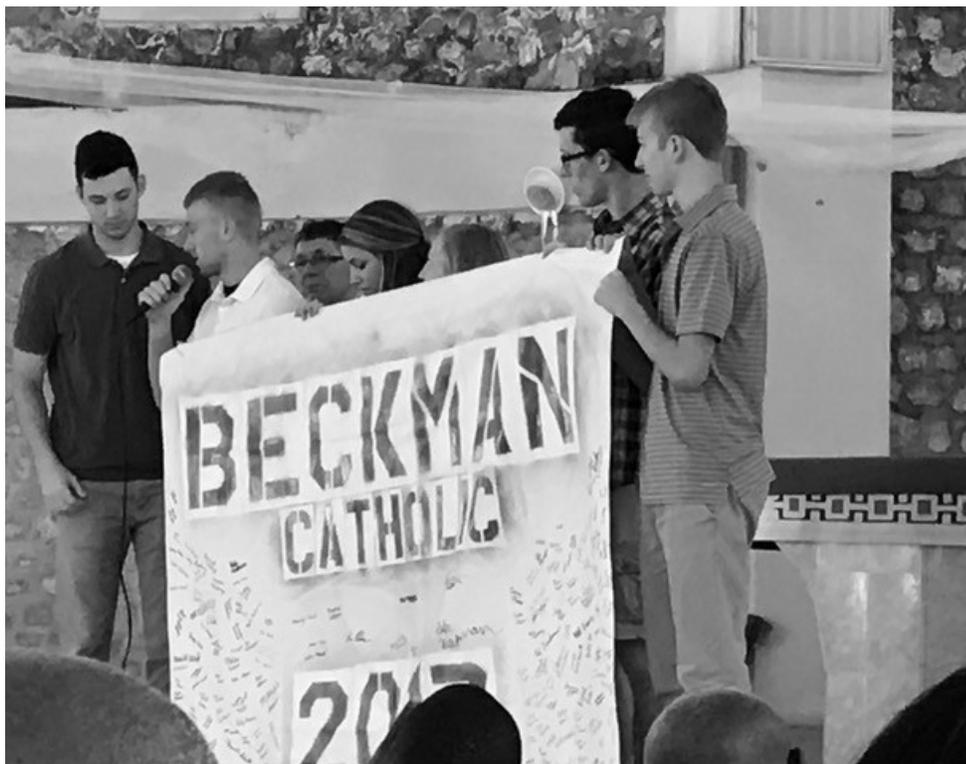
One moment that I've been reflecting over immensely was when we visited Mother Teresa's Hospital. When we walked into the room I was immediately overwhelmed with a sense of sadness as many of the babies that were surrounding me had their arms stretched out, longing for someone to hold them in place of their mothers who, for many different circumstances, could not. Being given the honor of comforting and cuddling the small-beings from 5 days to 1 year old was the most humbling thing I've ever experienced. These babies were given a sense of dignity when we took our time to caress their cheek or change their diapers. Realizing this, my sadness turned into something else. This place that I thought was filled with sadness is actually filled with hope. Hope for overcoming illness, hope for a brighter future, and hope for love.

I ask that you continue to keep our family in Haiti in your thoughts and prayers as they continue to overcome burdens from natural disasters, lack of medical supplies, and inadequate homes. Even though these issues are prominent, the Haitians are still rich in faith for the Lord and gratitude for what they have. I know that one day I will return to see the growth of this humble country as their hope and hard work is enough to know that they will have fruitful growth now and in the future.

**Merci! ~ Emily Heiderscheit**

**THE TRIP HAS HAD A GREAT IMPACT** on my views of the world around us. I feel as if sometimes I have been a little too sheltered, but going on this trip put me right there in front of people in need. One thing I will always remember from the trip was witnessing all of the poverty around us, yet seeing people dress nicely. Even though many Haitians have nothing, they still dress nice and take pride in who they are. They keep a positive attitude, and more importantly they keep their faith alive.

**~ Matt Schmitt**



**IT WAS LIFE CHANGING** for me to see how people with so little could still have so much joy. Before I started this trip, I thought that it would be very depressing to see all of the poverty and pain in such a poor, ravished country. However, that was not the case, I was filled with joy the whole time, and it surprised me a lot to experience something like that when you take into consideration the place that I was in.

**~ Luke Chapman**

## 2017 HAITI REPORT FROM COOKIE

On February 14<sup>th</sup> the 2017 Haiti Team including Janet and Madison Stelken, Emily Heiderscheit, Theresa and Luke Chapman, Doris Wessels, Kathy Harris, Deacon Jim and Joan Steger, Matt Schmitt, Ben Palmer, Justin and Cookie Scherrman embarked on a pilgrimage to Haiti. Team packed 23 – 50 pound bags of supplies for the visit along with extra items in our own carry-ons. Gaspard, our friend and our interpreter, had lined up a painted Haitian bus to carry us and our supplies up the mountain to Holy Cross Parish. The ‘old bus’ was minus a door and it shook all of us as we climbed the mountain. It is a special time during the trip when we know people are praying us. We arrived after dark and carried our bags up the last steep hill. It is such a relief to know we have made it safely and so have the 23 bags of supplies for our Haitian friends. Alleluia!!

During Hurricane Matthew in October 2016, the farmers’ crops in the area were washed away. Their seeds and their means of survival were gone. Before our visit we sent Gaspard \$6,000.00 to purchase seed corn, carrot, onion and cabbage seeds and 50 pair of boots for the farmers. Gaspard had the seeds and the boots with him on the bus for us. The team filled hundreds of small bags with these seeds. It was an honor and a privilege to distribute the boots and seeds to well over 1000 grateful farmers. It will provide them with food for their family and income from selling their produce. Your donations made their future a whole lot brighter!!

Sainte Claire Clinique has become an important part of the village and surrounding area. Villagers share how the Clinic has helped their families in times of need. With help from the monks at New Melleray Abbey, we support the staff of 1 doctor, 2 nurses, a pharmacist and 2 support persons. Kathy Harris, our nurse, spent time with the staff to determine clinics needs that we could send in the spring sea container. Our plan is to send 4 to 6 beds for the hospital. We brought \$1,300.00 worth of medications and many bags of supplies and infant and children’s clothing for the staff to distribute as needed. We brought 4 buckets of powdered milk and baby bottles and hope to send 7 more buckets in the sea container. Kathy was amazed to see what they could accomplish with very limited equipment and testing materials. Two babies were born in the clinic during our visit. Many patients were helped everyday, including a man who had a deep cut across his forehead. Cluster donations are saving lives.

Visiting the classrooms is always an eye opener. With very limited materials, the students are learning French, Creole, Spanish and English; advanced math; calculus, physics and more. It is evident that the students want to learn. It is a hope for the future. Father has 900 students and 36 teachers at Holy Cross School; 125 students and 6 teachers at Soliette; 130 students and 6 teachers at Palmiste Tempe; and 120 students and 7 teachers at Plasir. We gave each of the 55 teachers a photo card w/ \$30.00, a 2017 calendar and a jacket. We also distributed composition books and pens and pencils to the students. We greet them with ‘Bonjour ‘ and they respond ‘Good Morning’. We also gave the school a banner made by Xavier Grade School. Father tells us that the schools could not operate without our support. Your generosity makes a difference in their lives!

There are always signs of hope. Fonkose has expanded the bank. The number of accounts increases as does the interest that the bank pays out. 4.5% on a loan – 6.5% on a savings account. Driving up the mountain we saw new gardens growing along the tiny stream. That is a livelihood for many families.

Father drove us to visit the chapels and also to see Saturday Market at Forest-de-Pins. We bought avocados, tomatoes, onions and lime for guacamole. The drive in Father’s vehicle makes all of us realize that it is really in terrible condition. Our hope is that Father will be able to get a new vehicle from Avanti, a German org that provides vehicles to priests in 3rd world countries. A goal of our Haiti Com is to raise \$10,000.00 to pay the duty and taxes on the vehicle. Vehicle is worth over \$70,000. Transportation is a must with so many areas to cover; we hope we can help him!

We begin each day with 6:00 am Mass followed by a hearty breakfast. At the end of 7:00 am Sunday Mass, our Beckman students presented a Banner from Beckman Catholic High School and give a warm greeting to the Holy Cross Parishioners. Voices fill the large church with beautiful music. It is a wonderful two hours celebration! After Mass we distributed seeds, boots, shoes, hats and 744 health packets (vitamins-toothbrushes-peanut butter-soap) to hundreds of people from the area.

The people know we care because we always return. Items we give to them will help, but I believe that the greatest gift we give to them is our love and respect. The smiles from both our team and their parishioners is a powerful visual of the love that connects us to each other. Those smiles remain in my mind and in my heart everyday. It helps me see that it is love and respect that connect us wherever we are and that it is just as important here as it is in Haiti. Your generous donations are your way of sending your love and respect to our family in Haiti. It is so important and it gives them hope to know you care. God bless all of you for your generous hearts!

~ **Merci! Merci!**