

## “Focus on Haiti: A Continuing Response . . .”

written by Karen J. Scheer, RSM



As we celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the formation of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, we are embarking on a *Journey of Oneness*, an endeavor to acknowledge and strengthen the unity of the Institute through enhancing collaborative processes and presence.

As I reflect on my experience with *Focus on Haiti (FoH)*, I believe it embodies the spirit of that *Journey*. It embodies *Oneness* in its beginning when a small group of Sisters of Mercy from each of the Communities of the Institute gathering around a lunch table talking about how to respond to the Chapter question:

“God of Mercy, of Wisdom and Mystery, where do we need to be led now to come to both a deeper response to our Critical Concerns and a radical embrace of our identity?”

Our sharing led us to a dream of being Mercy in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western hemisphere. We were inspired by the legacy of Catherine McAuley to care for those in greatest need.

It wasn't long before the Sisters invited Associates and Mercy friends to join us, to become one with us in this journey. As planning continued, FoH began ministering with the Religious of Jesus and Mary and the people of Gros Morne in the northwestern part of Haiti. We began cultivating partnerships and oneness with the community of Gros Morne - trying through these relationships to create conditions for people to thrive. The Institute Leadership Team joined us in our discernment as FoH journeyed and endeavored to make mercy real in Haiti.



In 2016, being mercy in Haiti by FoH is concentrated in four areas: agronomy, care for poor elderly, empowerment of women and immersion experiences for others interested in being mercy in Haiti.

### **Support of the Agro-Forestry Program**

- Salary for two full-time Agronomists - Guy Marie and Teligene
- Providing “motos” for the agronomists to visit all areas of Gros Morne and providing community education programs to hundreds of residents regarding beneficial ecological practices such as weevil eradication, water control programs, worm composting, organic gardens, tree nursery and seed bank;



- Reforestation with planting well over 100,000 trees on the hills of Gros Morne;



- Training local Haitians in goat husbandry, raising chicken and fish, community gardens with a variety of fruits and vegetables.

**Support of *Maison Bon Samaritan* (House of the Good Samaritan)**

- Home to 23 formerly homeless, vulnerable and ill residents;
- Improvements in the physical space and safety including communal spaces, kitchen, latrines, and perimeter wall and addition of a courtyard pavilion;



- Salary for a full time nurse and administrator, Lulianne and her assistant Timothee;
- Improved access to health care, medications and nutritious meals;
- Salary for agronomy technician, Roselin who has transformed grounds and gardens into sustainable food source for the residents



**Support of Immersion/Service Trips**

- In 2015-16, four Mercy High Schools: Our Lady of Mercy for Young Women (Rochester, NY), Our Lady of Mercy (Syosset, NY), Gwynedd Mercy Academy (Gwynedd Valley, PA), and Mercy (San Francisco, Ca) were missioning in Gros Morne;



- Weeklong immersion in Gros Morne with the Haitian people in service to the community but also to be present with the most vulnerable of our time.
- Immersion experiences to Gros Morne include time with Mercy Beyond Borders Scholars who reside in Gros Morne. It's a great connection among mercy students from both countries. To view video of Gwynedd Mercy Academy's Immersion Trip connect to this link: <https://youtu.be/HX6JvKeHNDA> .



### Support and Partnering with Women



Famn Ibo, who are in need of markets for their beautiful, handmade embroidered cards. FOH is helping to provide a few markets though immersion experience 'graduates' who continue to want to be involved.

- Partnership with MPGN, a women's group who have a catering business for weddings, funerals, and other events. We supported their initiative to move away from using styrofoam plates because of damage to the environment and acquire dishes that are washable and look nice for catering. FOH has agreed to provide 1000 plates;

- Partnership with a women's embroidery group,



Currently we are exploring the possibility of bringing to Gros Morne a program called *Chemin Lavi Miyo*, (CLM) "a pathway to a better life". CLM is an 18-month program, with a 96% graduation rate, and is geared to women who are the poorest of the poor. Each woman is provided materials to build or improve her home, training to care for the enterprise activity (goat or pig) she has chosen, a case worker who visits her once a week for the duration of the program, free health care, and a graduation ceremony to celebrate and publicize her achievements.

With the expansion of our projects, our organizational structure has grown and now includes an Executive Committee which is comprised of all the chairs of the working committees. These are the Agronomy, Maison Bon Samaritan, Women's, Immersion, Development, Communications and Finance Committees. Sister Kathy Thornton, RSM serves Focus on Haiti Coordinator and spokesperson for the group.



Geri Lantham a RJM-Quest Volunteer who lives in Gros Morne is liaison to Focus on Haiti in Haiti. She works with our partners helping to facilitate communication and the smooth operations of all the programs FOH supports.

The Institute Leadership Team serves as the formal body that relates to FOH as an Institute-wide initiative. Sister Eileen Campbell, member of the ILT has become the liaison between FOH and the Institute.



The *Journey of Oneness* for *FoH* reflects oneness in working together by sisters of Institute communities, associates, and mercy friends and co-workers. But there is another oneness that is experienced. It is a oneness of human beings being attentive to one another. It is an exhilarating experience of solidarity and love for each as we go about creating conditions for each other to thrive.

If you are interested in more information about the work of *Focus on Haiti*, or would like to contribute to their work, contact Sister Kathy Thornton at: [kthornton@mercywmw.org](mailto:kthornton@mercywmw.org).

Pictures from top to bottom:

1. Picture of FOH Core Members, Annual Meeting 2014
2. Agronomist Guy Marie in tree nursery with over 60,000 saplings
3. Agronomist Teligene on brand new "moto"
4. Agronomist teaching 300 school children
5. Resident at Maison Bon Samaritan
6. Adult literacy classes at Maison Bon Samaritan in new outdoor pavilion
7. Our Lady of Mercy (Syosett, NY) student immersion participants
8. Mercy High School Student and Andrea Healy presenting a cake to Ms Lulianne- nurse administrator at Maison Bon Samaritan
9. Mercy High school Students presenting plates to MPG N
10. Handicraft of Famn Ibo Women's group- embroidered Mercy shield
11. A woman who is a participant in CLM in the central plains of Haiti
12. Adult service trip- FOH members with Haitian partners
13. Adult service group with Haitian partners after the completion of keyhole garden at Maison Bon Samaritan