

RENEWAL MINISTRIES REPORT ON HAITI 2009

Renewal Ministries was invited by Haiti Missions to add a “spiritual dimension” to their humanitarian work in Haiti—a kind of melting together of proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel. We flew from Texas to Miami and met the team who were mainly from Louisiana. We were here with a pharmacist, Deacon Lloyd Duplantis and his wife Faie who are the founders, organizers and initiators of Haiti Missions, Inc. After raising seven children, God called them to minister to the people of Haiti. They have been coming for ten years to help the Catholic brothers and sisters in need. It is an understatement to say the needs are great in Haiti and God is using them mightily.

Our team consisted of a radiologist and his wife and their two teenage sons. Their family donated money to build a Catholic school here as a memorial to their daughter who died of a very rare cancer when she was in the 2nd grade. We also had with us a retired dentist, and a piano teacher whose class collected enough money to purchase a donkey for a Haitian widow. She is also heading up a program to feed the children at school in this impoverished area. Our team also consisted of a retired businessman and chicken farmer, who brought his much needed skills to develop a poultry business, and an Iraq vet and graduate of a Renewal Ministries Evangelization School and youth leader from North Dakota who wanted to use his talents to further the kingdom of God.

We met at the Miami Airport and then flew on to Port a Prince, Haiti. We took a van less than a mile to a smaller airport, with our luggage plus 30 green duffel bags of supplies destined for the people of Jeremie. In his many travels to Haiti, Deacon Lloyd has been stopped cold by the customs officials, which caused days of delays. We prayed that customs wouldn't stop these much needed supplies, or make us pay exorbitant fees to bring them to the poor, and the bags weren't even opened!

We were picked up by the parish priest, Fr. Jomanas Eustache or just simply Fr. Joe, and taken to his parish, Our Lady of The Assumption Parish, which serves two villages, Numero Deux and Ravin-sab. We were fed a wonderful welcoming meal at his gorgeous rock rectory/retreat/guest house on a hill overlooking the blue and green Caribbean. Down the hill from the rectory is the very simple structure of Our Lady of Assumption Catholic Church.

The first day everyone was assigned a duty. Mostly the women divided the huge sacks of beans, flour, sugar and rice into smaller amounts. We also sorted cooking oil, soap and Albendazole, a medication for worms which the World Health Organization gives out all over the world. HM has been dispensing this medication for about 10 years and the doctor with us said the good health of the children was evident; they used to see discolored hair, protruding stomachs and skin spots. They also give a wide distribution of vitamins to the school children.

In the next few days there were four different distributions of these goods, plus \$18.00 for each family. Many neighbors pooled this money to buy a cow, goat or donkey for everyone's use. Since HM has been pouring this money into the economy they have seen many more cows, goats and chickens. As we divided the goods, different children, mostly boys, came to ask us for the one commodity prized above all: a soccer ball. During the coming days every one of us was repeatedly asked for a ball!

The men and teens went down the road to a few acres that were purchased to dig a well and to start digging holes for concrete pillars to support a sorely needed chicken house. Gary, the chicken farmer, has headed up this project since that is what he does in Louisiana. He comes more than once a year to oversee different projects of Haiti Missions. He is also an engineer and a jack-of-all-trades. This year they signed papers for Haiti Missions to own the property where the poultry project and the 11th water well site is located. They lovingly call it “*The Louisiana Purchase.*”

Ten wells in all have been dug by this group. The people of this area have to walk long distances to bring water for cooking, drinking and bathing, so the wells are a tremendous blessing. It seems that donkeys are the most common means for transporting water, but for most people they are too expensive. Few have hopes of ever having clean water, hot showers, paper goods, and basic medical care. It is shocking for us in the United States to have so much and to take it for granted.

The second night we began to hold sessions at the church and although the place is almost full, the people are reserved. Father Joe, a Canon lawyer who teaches at the seminary, canceled his teaching and stayed to listen; a good Shepherd watching over his flock. He was pleased and excited with the teaching on forgiveness and reiterated what we had taught. Some of the team helped pray over the people, walking through the crowd to as they prayed and even the teens joined in. Afterwards, many people testified that God touched and healed them. They were really excited!

Each day the crowd grew and soon people were standing outside the packed church. They were hungry for God! Now that the people knew and trusted us they began to sing and dance with enthusiasm! It was the first time anything like this had ever been done in Jeremie and the word spread quickly. We began with the basic Gospel message and continued with teaching about forgiveness and God's healing power. After each session we asked the Lord to heal and many people reported being touched by His healing power. It seems like wherever the needs and faith of the people are great, God always responds.

Fr. Joe is the Vicar General for the Diocese of Jeremie and the head of many commissions there. He used the time after our talks to underscore our message to the people. Each night after our sessions he reported back to the bishop and they want Renewal Ministries to come back to teach at the seminary. Occult practices are a way of life in this area and many people are in bondage and the Bishop and Fr. Joe want to see them walk in freedom!

On Saturday night we showed the film *The Passion*. It was a big event for Jeremie! We brought a small portable PA system with us and we hooked it up to the laptop for the movie. Due to the great needs, we left the system behind when we returned to the US and we will use it on future visits to Jeremie. We turned the foundation of the new church into our movie house under the stars. The place was packed and many saw a movie for the first time; this film is a great evangelistic tool.

Haiti Missions has started three new schools for the kids in this area where there had previously been none. While funds are coming in and the new school building is still under construction, classes are held in the small church and in sheds. Haiti Missions supports over 750 children total at three school locations. Here there are no walls, just huge blackboards separating the classes of all ages.

On this day the kids were excited and we had the privilege of bringing much needed shoes and supplies to them. This happens every year so the kids knew that everyone without exception would receive a new pair of shoes. In this culture the children will not come to school without shoes, nor will adults come to Mass without them. Deacon Lloyd's wife Faie is in charge of the children's shoes operation. The Shoe Share Project was begun after three years of attempting unsuccessfully to collect shoes, clothing, and other necessities. She said, "It was just chaotic. We felt that going through the schools and providing children with shoes would be the most productive way of satisfying the physical needs of the people, especially the children. So we decided that if we could bring shoes it should be done in an orderly fashion and in a 'one on one' personal way."

So in January of each school year they ask the teachers to trace the child's foot on a piece of paper. On that footprint they put the child's name, age, sex and the teacher's name. Then the original footprints are color coded according to the classes. Haiti Missions cuts them out, punches a hole and puts a string on them. Then they

bring them to different churches or schools and place these footprints on a giving tree. This year they had 775 footprints, including the teachers' feet. People take the footprint to the shoe store and match the footprint to a shoe and make it ½ size larger than the footprint. They put the footprint back inside the new shoes and HM picks them up and packs them along with goodies for the kids. Then the footprint, shoes and items are placed in a plastic bag with the owner's name showing and they are put in duffel bags to be sent to Haiti. For the last two years American Airlines allowed them to bring these free of charge, but now because of fuel prices they charge them half price.

HM also feed the 750 school children one meal a month. While we were there we had the privilege of helping feed all 750 children. The staff cooked huge pots of beans and rice and piled the plates high. It seemed like some of the plates were bigger than the kids! However, all of the students, including preschoolers, ate every bite of rice and beans down to the last grain without one word of complaint! HM is hoping to collect enough to provide one meal every day.

HM has many projects going. Pigs are bred in their "pig poucherie". Haiti Mission pays for the feed and the proceeds they get from selling the pigs to the villagers. At some point in time they hope that the poucherie will develop into a business so that it can make enough money by selling some of the pigs to also give some away.

The Chicken Farm will be a chicken egg laying business so they can have eggs for the school children. Right now the eggs are imported and they are very expensive. The World Health Organization says that if every child could eat two eggs a week, malnutrition would diminish. Gary projected that this will be a four year project before it will be self-sustaining.

Building houses for the poorest of the poor and destitute is another project that Haiti Missions has started. On this trip we were privileged to see a small cement house that was just completed for a blind man. Prior to this, his bed was on rocks barely raised above the rainwater that rushed though his "house" every time it rained. He now has a house, a new bed, and a much more comfortable life.

We distributed the food and money at four different times and locations to cut down on the turmoil. HM started out several years ago by helping a few people who had come to them with severe needs. Each year their list of "clients" grows and there are now hundreds of people receiving food and money. HM is truly transforming the local economy with their small efforts. All the distributions were orderly and the people seemed very grateful.

This year they brought 80 deflated soccer balls and it wasn't enough. They gave at least five to each of the schools and about 20 to the local soccer team, and we distributed some to the little boys who help around Father's house, and to children with special needs.

The ten water wells for drinking, bathing, cooking and washing have been life transforming. In the past, even if they walked for two miles to get water, supplies were limited or nonexistent, depending on the weather. When a drought occurs the town of Jeremie will shut off the water supply to any local fountains so they may not have water for a few weeks. The answer is digging wells, but it is a slow process and they are doing it one by one.

The dentist with us extracted 50 teeth in the few days we were there. Of course he gave a local pain killer to ease the trauma and amazingly the kids took it in stride. The lines for his services seemed endless!

The final Sunday we were there we had the dedication of the new school and the Bishop and several priests were there. Afterwards the parish fed the people and there was a pig and donkey auction. In addition, four donkeys were given away to widows and older women. One woman literally squealed and danced around when she was selected. It is a tremendous blessing not to have to carry heavy loads by herself!

This trip was a new adventure for us, but very rewarding. It is always amazing to see what people called and anointed by God, can accomplish with very little money. We are blessed to have the privilege of representing Renewal Ministries on this outreach.