



Haiti in Times of the Corona Virus

In January and February and up until March, Haiti suffered a tsunami of kidnapping. Nobody in Port au Prince felt safe, and nobody was exempt as a target by the kidnapers. Kidnapping in Haiti is part of a worldwide and age-old disgrace, the abomination of taking another human being into bondage. A good friend of mine, a Haitian veterinary doctor was kidnapped and a ransom of 300,000 US Dollars was asked. While negotiations brought the ransom down, it showed me that physically released was not a happy ending, but rather the beginning of a long and terrible internal bondage.

Coronavirus, a kidnapper of another name. There are currently 40 confirmed cases of the coronavirus in Haiti. So far none in the Grand'Anse Department where Jérémie is located. But we suspect that it's a tiny fraction as there's hardly been any testing. Haiti's healthcare system is in no position to deal with COVID-19. The only hope is prevention. But social distancing is a tough sell in Haiti, where millions must venture out to public markets each day to buy food.

As schools are now closed, teachers and other school personal are not getting paid. While the Ministry of Education is saying it will have some money for laid off teachers, the private schools will not get anything and they make up the majority of all schools.

As of now there is no word from the Ministry of Education on the future of this school year.

On March 19 the first case of corona virus was announced in Haiti, and food prices began skyrocketing immediately. A can of rice, the size of a can of green beans, cost 100 gourdes in December of 2019, and costs about 600 gourdes right now. The Haitian diaspora has seen their economic situation greatly impacted by the corona virus prevention measure in the US, and remittances have begun to slow and will even slow further.

Churches are also closed, and no funerals are permitted. 1,000 to 2,000 coffins are being manufactured, made out of card board in anticipation of lives lost.

Medical professionals have mentioned shortages of all equipment. When it comes to corona virus response, Haiti with a population of 11 million people, has about 39 physicians available for the management of infected patients. Haiti currently has 124 ICU beds with the capacity to ventilate 62 patients.

In the Jérémie area there is hardly any testing material available. A doctor friend of mine who sits on the task force let me know that he tested one person. The test had to be brought to Port au Prince for analysis and then it took 10 days to get the results. But with all public bust transportation closed down that will no longer be an avenue to send out tests.

The Haitian government has closed the border with the Dominican Republic and basically has stopped all flights going in and out of Haiti. The Haitian government has also asked that everybody wear a mask, and put a task force in place to monitor the situation. But it is woefully aware that whatever happens it will not have the capacity to fight the virus. Therefore, prevention is important. Many people are observing handwashing, but water is becoming a scarce commodity.

But there is also a lot of fear in the population, and desperate people act desperately. In one community the state tried to establish a temporary hospital for corona virus patients, and the

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population destroyed it. People who are rumored to have the virus, true or not true, are in fear of their lives, because attacks with machetes have been perpetrated.

The epidemic in Haiti is projected to explode in Mid-May and early June. Still time for prayer.

And all is not lost. We are currently working on some creative ways to use WhatsApp, face book and internet to establish regular communications with the people that we serve, especially with our scholarship students, so that they can continue to learn. We have scheduled weekly phone calls to check and see how everybody is doing. Construction is still going on with three houses, and we will be able to fulfill our goal of 5 new houses for this year. We also want to assure that our microcredit businesses are able to continue to have inventory, so monetary donations are always welcome.

In the community of Fondwa we have established a group of people with sewing skills who are sewing masks to be distributed in the community. We also just purchased 50 buckets with spouts to be distributed in the community of Jean Bellune, and in collaboration with Trees That Feed Foundation we will distribute 4000 konparets to orphanages and very poor people to supplement their nutritional needs.

In the newsletter that follows, you will see that for the first 3 months of this year we were busy and have accomplished a lot. We will continue our work and wish all of you peace and health in these strange times.

Much love,
Renate

Hand Washing Buckets Help Community During Coronavirus



With the mandate for frequent hand washing, Haitian Connection has purchased 100 buckets with spout as well as soap for the community of Jean Bellune to provide people the possibility to practice hand washing. Fr. Jean-Rony from St. Bernard de Clairvaux purchased the buckets in Okay and is now distributing them in the community of Jean Bellune.

Haitian Connection Increases Teacher's Salaries in Jean Bellune

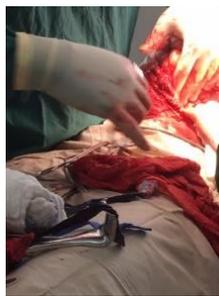


This year's Haitian Connection's emphasis on education led us to support teachers' salaries at the primary school at Jean Bellune. The six primary teachers make only 3,500 Gourdes (38 Dollars) per month. This is not enough, but the financial situation of the school does not allow for a higher salary. Therefore, Haitian Connection decided to double these teachers' salaries. We would like to expand that program next year for the secondary teachers. The scholarships we are providing to 11 students at Jean Bellune also help ease the economic situation at the school. Education is a portable gift that the students can take anywhere.

Medical Visits Offer Expertise and Hope



An American delegation of American surgeons from Connecticut came to work from January 19, 2020 to January 25, 2020. In all they did 58 procedures while here. The patients who had waited weeks and years for these operations were extremely grateful. GADHA (Grand'Anse Health and Development Association) invited the team, and Haitian Connection provided the translation. This visit, as so much in Haiti, came together through the efforts of many people. GAHDA provided 6 drums of gas so the generator could be used. Fr. Rick Frechette had oxygen shipped via boat to Jérémie, the hospital provided the operating rooms, and Dr. Azor, director of St. Antoine hospital, made sure all went smoothly. The local surgical staff worked alongside the visitors for those long days. They did breast surgeries, hernias, hydrocele, and removal of cysts and lipomas.



Focus on Breast Cancer

GAHDA also welcomed oncologist Dr. Marianne Fenton, to Jérémie. She was on an exploratory trip to see how chemotherapy can be implemented here in the Grand'Anse. Haitian Connection partners with GAHDA, and



Renate Schneider serves on the team as resident psychologist. On the right is a group picture of a focus group to learn what local women know or believe about breast cancer and its causes.



New Batteries Brighten Rectory

The St. Bernard de Clairvaux rectory had been in the dark for several months, because the old batteries were failing and it is too expensive to run the generator every day. Haitian Connection was happy to be able to help by purchasing six new batteries for the rectory. These new batteries help with electricity in the choucoune in the yard, as well as supplying electricity to the church. St. Bernard de Clairvaux in Jean Bellune is now lit up.

Foster Care Kids' Reunion



Our first meeting for 2020 with our kids from the foster care program took place January 25. The kids were happy to see each other, and they are glad school is back in session. The time during which the country was on lock down was difficult for these kids. And it is not easy to return to normal. The work load for them is enormous, because so much has to be crammed into a school day. The days are longer, and they have about 7 different pieces of homework to do each day. Also, it takes a while for all the students to acquire the discipline to concentrate on the studies at hand, since they have been out of school for 3 months. Nonetheless our kids have incredible inner resources, and they are moving forward. There is a lot of hope here.



Haitian Connection Supports Local Business and Feeds Children

Economic conditions in Haiti are dire. In January, FAO published its Early Warning Early Action (EWEA) Report on Food Security and Agriculture, and on page 8 they warn that in Haiti, "4.1 million people (40 percent of the total population) are projected to be severely food insecure during the period going from March to June 2020..." The reasons given are dry conditions that affected the 2018/19 main crop season along with last year's protracted political instability. Also cited is the impact of rising staple food prices, with annual food inflation at approximately 22.6 percent.



Haitian Connection is continuing to stand in solidarity with the Haitian people, in particular with the people of the Grand'Anse. Every month we deliver 1,800 konparets to Jean Bellune school. 450 students receive konparets once a week, making up for the fact that there is no state sponsored lunch program at this time. This effort is made possible through a collaborative effort between Haitian Connection and Trees that Feed. The kids love the konparets and look forward to their distribution. The konparets are baked at the Jérémie Breadfruit Flour and Nursery's bakery in Doudouch, about two hours' drive from Jérémie. They are then brought to Jérémie, and picked up by Fr. Jean-Rony to take to Jean Bellune an almost 3-hour drive from Jérémie.

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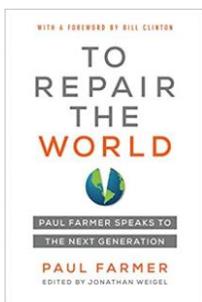
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450 students receive konparets twice a week thanks to the generosity of Haitian Connection and Trees That Feed Foundation. When asked if the students like the konparets all hands shot up, from preschool to high school. I was thankful that I had a chance to witness the konparet distribution. It was amazing how smoothly it all worked. During a special ceremony for the honor society students they all received extra konparets.



Book Corner



To Repair the World: Paul Farmer Speaks to the Next Generation

Here, for the first time, is a collection of short speeches by the charismatic doctor and social activist Paul Farmer. One of the most passionate and influential voices for global health equity and social justice, Farmer encourages young people to tackle the greatest challenges of our times. Engaging, often humorous, and always inspiring, these speeches bring to light the brilliance and force of Farmer's vision in a single, accessible volume.

A must-listen for graduates, students, and everyone seeking to help bend the arc of history toward justice, *To Repair the World*: challenges listeners to counter failures of imagination that keep billions of people without access to health care, safe drinking water, decent schools, and other basic human rights, champions the power of partnership against global poverty, climate change, and other pressing problems today, overturns common assumptions about health disparities around the globe by considering the large-scale social forces that determine who gets sick and who has access to health care, discusses how hope, solidarity, faith, and hard-bitten analysis have animated Farmer's service to the poor in Haiti, Peru, Rwanda, Russia, and elsewhere, leaves the listener with an uplifting vision: that with creativity, passion, teamwork, and determination, the next generations can make the world a safer and more humane place.

Introducing New Cash Without Condition Participants

Haitian Connection has taken on a third group of women for its cash without condition program. These women live in an area called Tasia, and as one can see they are extremely poor.



Nadrelle Philipe Age: 32

Nadrelle has 4 children, one girl, 3 boys. 6 people live in the house. The house has plastic tarp as a roof. This is still damage from Hurricane Matthew two years ago.

Furniture in the house one table, 2 chairs, one bed.

This is a family in extreme poverty. The house is almost empty. The kids do go to school, but they do not have decent clothes or shoes.



Guerda Michel Age: 31 5 children, 2 girls, 3 boys.

Number of people living in the house: 7

The house is covered with some old tin foil. Furniture in the house : 2 chairs, 2 beds that are broken.

Very poor family. Not all kids go to school, and they often go a day without having eaten. They have a small parcel of land where they plant, but it takes several months to grow a crop that can be eaten.



Guilene Etienne Age: 47 7 children, 4 girls, 3 boys

Number of people in the house : 9

The house is still covered with tarp since hurricane Matthew

Furniture: one table, no chairs, one bed

This is a family in extreme need. The kids go to a state school, but often there is not enough to eat, and their uniforms are old and they only have pair of worn out shoes.



Carole Alberie Age: 41 6 children 4 girls, 2 boys

Number of people in the house: 8

The house is covered with tarp since hurricane Matthew

One table, no chairs, one bed

Extreme poverty, nothing in the house, no income generating activity. Lots of needs, but they have faith that one day God will change their situation.



Danite Exavier Age: 32 3 children 2 girls, 1 boys

Number of people in the house: 6

The roof is made from tin foil, and some of the walls are made like that too. 2 chairs, one bed, no table

Very difficult situation, the father of the children left her, and she is responsible for everything. She would like to send the children to school, and give them something to eat daily, but that is difficult. She used to sell a few things, but now she has no money to stock anything for sale.

New Houses Give Women and Their Families a Fresh Start

We finally had a chance to visit 3 houses that were constructed in 2019, and never had a chance to see because the political situation made it impossible to surmount all the various roadblocks that were erected. Actually, the last house was just being inhabited 2 weeks ago, because there was a death in the family, and the daughter in law had to wait to move in.



Magdala Remy owns the first house. She is 30 years old and has two little boys. Their father is in Port au Prince and very occasionally send a little support for the boys. Magdala sells soap and detergent and toiletries, and she also goes to school in the afternoon and takes a sewing class. She shows a lot of initiative. Her little boys right now have a fungus on their heads, and she has some medication for that. She is sending both of her kids to school.



Esther St. Louis is 45 years old and is the most enthusiastic person I have seen in a long time. Her smile just radiates and is contagious. She has 8 children, 5 are from one man, and the other 3 have a different father. Her oldest daughter who is 20 years old is in Port au Prince. But her little daughter lives with Esther. Neither father helps at all with the children. Esther was in a very serious bus accident and was severely injured. She spent 4 months in the hospital. Some of the vertebrae in her back never aligned properly after the accident and she has a rounded protrusion on her back and also had a knee injury. She cannot really work, so only two of her children are able to go to school.



Marie Faude Antoine is 34 years old. She has 2 small daughters; one is 7 years old and the other is one year old. The girls do not have the same father. Both fathers are no longer in the picture. She does not have any income generating activity, but she would like to learn sewing. Her family helps her out with food and some clothes for the girls. But her house is almost empty. No furniture at all. But she is very grateful that she has her own house, and no longer needs to stay with other people.



For 2020 Haitian Connection is planning to build 5 new houses

Joint Scholarship Program Offers Students New Opportunities

With its 2020 emphasis on scholarships, Haitian Connection is pleased to announce a joint scholarship program between Fondase and Haitian Connection. Fondase is a microcredit organization in Fondwa, Renate's first home in Haiti. Moise Iraus is the founder and CEO of Fondase, and also teaches at the University of Fondwa. He was a scholarship student himself when he graduated in Management, and then went on to get his Masters in Belgium. Together Fondase and Haitian Connection are sponsoring two female students studying Veterinary Medicine at the University of Fondwa. We are impressed with these two young women and wish them all the best.



My name is **Tibert Francina**. I was born in 1998 in Fondwa. I have 2 sisters and 3 brothers. I am the first member of my family to attend college. I finished my high school in August 2019, and I had no possibility to enter a university or a vocational school. My parents are farmers with low income source. My older brother has been sick for two years and the whole family economy is focused on him. I met Mr. Moise two days before the UNIF scholarship competition. When he explained to me the possibility of applying, I was greatly hesitant because I saw only one chance, I would have to win the scholarship to be able to study at the university. He told me that there is only one way to know if I will be a winner is to participate in this competition. I hardly found the registration fee and I got myself registered. Now I feel very proud to have tried to give myself an opportunity to change my life and help my community to improve animal health practices with a view to increasing their production in order to have a better savings account. Thanks to Fondase and Haitian Connection for the scholarship in order to help me become a useful woman in my community and my entire country.



I am **Thomas Christella**, I was born in 1999 in Fondwa. I have 5 sisters and 6 brothers. I am the second member of my family to attend college. My parents are farmers. I grew up in Fondwa in a very modest family where their economy is based on agriculture and animal husbandry. My mother did small business occasionally in order to find some money to support her family. Each year, for back to school, I saw that my parents sold turkeys, chickens, pigs or kids to help some of us go to school. This caught my attention because it was a free breeding, which manages to support a family when it needs some more money or less important. since then, I have asked myself the question how I can help the farmers in order to make more profitable this production, which is considered as a guarantee fund for poor families. One Sunday after mass, I met Mr. Moise and he asked me what I am going to study. I answered Veterinary Medicine. He asked me why I did not register with UNIFI said that I have no money and I have no one to pay a University for me right now. Besides, my older brother who has in the last year of civil engineering told me to wait for 2 years, when he has a job, he will pay a college for me. I was afraid to start this process until Mr. Moise insisted on me. He said, don't wait all the light green to move. His motivation prompted me to register and participated in the UNIF scholarship competition. Today, I won half-scholarship to UNIF, and the rest will be paid by Fondase and Haitian Connection. I would like to thank you all for your support to help me accomplish my dream.

Additional Scholarship News

Starmeline LINDOR



Starmeline is one of our star scholarship students. She is now in 6th grade and consistently achieves the highest GPA in her class. She is disciplined and self-motivated, and helps the younger students. Starmeline is also a lot of fun and likes to dance and sing. She is from a very poor family, neither parent has a steady job, and life is a struggle. But Starmeline's mother is very concerned with her education and very supportive of her study time.

Joseph Edison GABRIEL



Edison is a new scholarship student that Haitian Connection is supporting. He came to our attention because one of his teachers asked if we could help him. He is an excellent student, always in the top 10% of his class. Edison is a junior in high school, and would like to graduate next year. The first semester of the school year when the country was on lock down, set everybody back economically. This year Edison's mother is unable to pay for his schooling. She sells things, but business is not good, and his father died when he was in 3rd grade. He is the youngest of five. His future plan includes studying civil engineering, and he is very grateful for the help that Haitian Connection is able to give him this year.

Shellekie MARS



Shellekie is in her 2nd year of nursing school. She writes that she likes nursing science because she would like to be useful to her family and her country. What motivates her is the fact that she does not like to see people suffer, especially people in her family, because they do not have enough money to go to the hospital. Her mother is a diabetic and is unable to follow up with a physician. That way if I am a nurse, I can help my mother. I would like to specialize in an area where I can help people who have no means of support to get medical help.



Haitian Connection

Haitian Connection is a 501(c) (3) tax exempt organization founded in 2005, which focuses on the needs of women, children and young adults in the Jérémie region of southwest Haiti. A variety of projects have already touched thousands of lives: houses have been built for more than 97 women and their children; a small microcredit program is providing economic opportunity for women in 2 communities; a potable water initiative is giving healthy water to one thousand families; and local school teachers have received training in the Child-to-Child method. Haitian Connection's Divergent Thinking Institute is providing Divergent Thinking seminars all over Haiti.

As a response to the earthquake in January 2010, and its psychological aftermath, Haitian Connection has established a mental health program in Jérémie to provide counseling as people resettle, tally their losses and adjust to a new reality. 27 members of the community have been trained in psychological first aid. This served the greater Jérémie area well after Hurricane Matthew in October of 2016. Our mental health agents were able to hold community meetings to give people an opportunity to debrief and receive some training in stress reduction techniques.

Support Us

Haitian Connection is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit corporation registered in Illinois and your gifts are tax deductible. Our projects depend on volunteers and the financial support of people who desire to help.

The cost of building a home for a woman and her family in Jérémie is \$2,000. The houses have three rooms and a latrine. You could contribute to a house, or even get your church/organization to sponsor a whole house. After Hurricane Matthew, this has become a priority for people in the region.

Scholarships for needy students from elementary to secondary schools.

Microcredit group: contributions accepted.

Mental Health Program: contributions to mental health center accepted (total cost for one year \$10,000)

Support for training programs in Divergent Thinking, mental health, Child-to-Child, and continuing education. For every program for 25 people we provide a meal for all participants and give the facilitators a stipend (about \$500 per training).

To support our projects financially, donate online by visiting our website at: www.HaitianConnection.org and clicking on the PayPal button.

If you would prefer to send your donation by mail, please address checks to: **Haitian Connection**
5300 South Shore Drive # 27
Chicago, IL 60615

When you order from Amazon.com, giving to Haitian Connection is easy! Simply go to <https://smile.amazon.com/> to get started!

Get Involved

We are looking for volunteers: English teachers, educators, specialists in various fields to give short conferences or seminars.

To volunteer, contact **Renate Schneider** at haitianconnection@gmail.com or by phone at **312/493-3719**; in Haiti: **011/509/3 463-7532**

