



MERCY
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PRESENCE

Distinct Voice: New Foundations in Mercy – Mercy Focus on Haiti

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The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas envision a just world for people who are poor, sick and uneducated, and we take action to help make it happen. In 2011, Sisters of Mercy from across the United States, Belize, Guyana, Honduras, Panama, Argentina, Peru, Chile, Jamaica, the Philippines, Guatemala and the territory of Guam gathered at our Chapter meeting. The meeting was committed to creating a response to this question.

“God of Mercy, 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?”

A simple notice posted on a message board at Chapter invited Sisters to participate in a lunchtime discussion regarding the Chapter challenges as they pertained to Haiti, which in 2010 had suffered a devastating earthquake that killed more than 200,000 Haitians and sunk a suffering nation into even deeper anguish. Sister Dale Jarvis who was at the lunch table said: “It made sense to all those gathered ... that Catherine McAuley, the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, would be present in the poorest country in the western hemisphere – Haiti”.

Prior conversation and this lunchtime gathering led to action -- the formation of Mercy Focus on Haiti – A New Foundation! This partnership of Sisters, Associates and friends of Mercy committed themselves to do all they could to address the needs of the ultra-poor in Haiti.

The MFOH team determined that the most significant impact would come from partnering with a religious community already in Haiti. In November 2011, a group of three committee members traveled to Haiti to visit six potential partners. Ultimately, three stood out.

In January 2012, a delegation of 12 Sisters and friends traveled to Haiti for deeper immersion and discernment. After spending time in Gros Morne, a remote town in northwest Haiti, and meeting with the Religious of Jesus and Mary (RJM) the delegation came away with the hope that they would be our partners.

The ministries of the Religious of Jesus and Mary tied in with the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy: primarily, care of women and earth. They focused on medical care, education, agriculture and socio-economic development in the area. Our team believed we could support the work that was already occurring.

Over the next several years, Mercy Focus on Haiti began work on its four current mission areas: agronomy, care for the poor elderly, immersion experiences and empowerment of women.

MFOH contributes to the Religious of Jesus and Mary salary support fund to help pay the salary of two full-time agronomists and two agronomy technicians. The agronomy team trains local Haitians in goat husbandry, raising chickens and fish, and community gardening. And they are known for their good sweet potatoes. Their reforestation programs have seen the planting of over 100,000 trees on the hills of Gros Morne!

Maison Bon Samaritain, or House of the Good Samaritan, houses 23 formerly homeless individuals who may have physical or developmental challenges. With the support of MFOH, the home now includes communal space, kitchen, latrines, perimeter wall, and gardens, which provide a sustainable food source for the residents as well as salary support for a full-time Haitian nurse-administrator and assistant who help the residents daily.

Week-long Immersion trips began in 2015 and include either adults or students from Mercy high schools and universities. The participants spend time in-country learning about the culture and history of Haiti, engaging in service activities, interacting with the residents and the staff members of Maison Bon Samaritain, the Agronomy Program and the Religious of Jesus and Mary school as well as the Chemin Lavi Miyò (CLM) program.

In 2017, Mercy Focus on Haiti brought CLM, or “Pathway to a Better Life,” to Gros Morne. Pathway is an 18-month empowerment program created by Fonkoze, Haiti’s largest microfinance institution, to create conditions for women and their families to move out of ultra-poverty. Pathway leads women to self-sufficiency through education, skill development, microfinance, and health care.

The first group of 200 women sponsored by MFOH graduated in 2018, with a **98% success rate!** And listen to what success means. They now:

- feed their children every day
- have no untreated malnutrition in their households.
- live in a house with a metal roof.
- drink filtered water and have their own latrine.
- send their children to school.
- have two sources of income and \$185 worth of assets.
- have a plan for the future.
- have the confidence to know they can succeed!

As word about this program grew, donors responded, allowing a second group to begin their 18-month empowerment program in 2019 with a third planned in 2021 for a total of 600 families moving out of ultra-poverty!

How are all these missions directed? The Mercy Sisters have one of our own, Sister Jill Weber, RSM, living in Gros Morne. She is MFOH’s eyes and ears and energy on the ground in Haiti. Meanwhile, a geographically diverse and exceptionally talented group of Mercy Sisters, Associates, and friends support Sister Jill and the Mercy Focus on Haiti initiatives.

Mercy Focus on Haiti is one response to the Chapter question!
**Through one mission,
in one tiny country,
in the corner of the Western hemisphere,
the charism of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas is
radiating brilliantly outward.**

Postscript:

New Foundations in Mercy are ever new. Mercy Focus on Haiti was founded the year after the Earthquake in Haiti in 2010. Much like Catherine McAuley in March 1840 who responded to a typhus epidemic in Carlow, we women and men of Mercy Focus on Haiti are again responding to a new need in Haiti. We now are responding to the Corona Virus Pandemic, as it hits the shore of Haiti in 2020. The Global Pandemic is calling us to address the ever growing and immediate needs by engaging in a Humanitarian effort to address in particular their needs of food, water and medical supplies.

Mercy Focus on Haiti grew out of a prophetic vision from a few sitting at a table in 2011. The vision at that table is still alive and calling us on. Like Catherine McAuley, we continue to respond to the greatest needs of our time . And for us they are in Haiti. We are truly blessed as the needs of the people of Haiti call us to continue to respond to the Gospel of Love.

***To learn more or to support MFOH go to mercyfocusonhaiti.org
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