

## Holy Spirit Haiti Mission Trip Nov 5-12, 2014

Five of us went on this trip. They were Father John O'Donnell-OSB from St. Bernard's Abby, Cullman, AL, Jon and Tina Wachsmann from Atlanta, GA, Amber Kaderbek from Savannah, GA and Bob McCoy from Huntsville, AL. As a side note, Amber is the niece of Jon and Tina. Projects for this trip were:

1. Install the remainder of the solar equipment at NDC so they would be completely under solar power,
2. Install the roof rack on the Land Cruiser that Jon and I fabricated,
3. Check up on the English classes that were being attended by several of the Haitians,
4. Do a physical inventory of the LWW warehouse,
5. Attend the baptism of 18 of the girls at the orphanage,
6. Review the new well that was just dug at the St. Michael du Sud facility,
7. Visit with 10 destitute families in the Café Lompre area,
8. Inspect water systems in Fondwa and Jacmel,
9. Investigate automotive teaching opportunities at the technical school for Jon and
10. Finish the fire escape door at NDC.

This was a very aggressive schedule and I am pleased to say we got about 90% of the work done. We missed two site inspections because there was a protest that day in Jacmel and we avoid those things at all times if possible. However, the top three things that we accomplished are getting NDC under 100% solar power, understanding the needs of the 10 families in Café Lompre so we could begin to help them and putting a plan together for Sister Jeanne at St. Michael du Sud. And the last part of the plan was to leave Amber behind for a six month period at the monastery to teach English and to learn Kreyol hopefully in preparation to get accepted into the Notre Dame Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) program. Amber is on site now and you can follow her in her daily blog at <https://moutetoutmon.wordpress.com>.

Wed Nov 5 – All of us began our journey from separate airports, but due to a great travel coordinator (Kathy) all arrived in PAP within one hour of each other. Father John and I left Huntsville at 6a as did Amber from Savannah headed for Charlotte. Jon and Tina left about the same time from Atlanta for MIA. We met Amber in Charlotte and flew to FTL and then met Jon and Tina in the PAP airport mid afternoon. Bertone was awaiting our arrival with the Land Cruiser (LC) and it is off to the monastery to which we arrive about 6:30 that evening. It was the usual warm greeting by the brothers with dinner waiting. We lugged most of our 600 lbs of luggage up the hill to our rooms to get sorted out. Several meetings that night to try and finalize our schedule which had already changed 3 times and would change 3 more before the trip was over.

Thu Nov 6 – Fri Nov 8– Since we were privileged to have a priest on this trip we were able to not only begin the day with the brothers saying the rosary and Matins, but also have mass. Unfortunately Father did not bring an



English sacramentary since he figured they would have one. So this morning was the standard communion service. Amber managed to download a copy from the internet (a much harder job than in the US) on her computer and get it printed from Sonie's computer, so starting Friday Father said mass each morning. This is an incredibly beautiful way to begin the day. Breakfast was at 7 and for the next two days we spent at NDC installing, building and fixing. While Tina and Amber spent time getting the sewing classes and projects set up, Father, Jon and I got to work building the LC roof rack. This may not seem like a big deal, but when we go to Haiti we always carry two bags of luggage at 50lbs each plus another 30-40 lbs of carry on, so the back of the LC is full of bags which no place for people. With the 5 of us and Bertone, we fit in the front and back seats ok, but it was tight especially since we had 6' x 8" diameter tube with all the aluminum parts in it. Now all the luggage goes on the roof rack and we have more room for passengers. Jon and I are proud of this fabrication since he did part of it in Atlanta and I did part in Huntsville and when we got to Haiti it all fix together just as we had planned. Then we went to work on installing the solar inverters, batteries and disconnect box. Valdes was there to help us with some of this and in fact finished up the work that we could not get done. In the process a short was discovered in the original wiring of the NDC building. A nail had penetrated one of the PVC conduits in the concrete block. Once it was located all was fixed up and now the orphanage has constant power which means the refrigerator works. The things we take for granted in this country are amazing.

Sat Nov 8 – We are off early to St. Michael du Sud about 100



miles to the west of PAV to inspect two wells and visit with Sister Jeanne as well as inspect her water system. Of course we cannot escape without her serving us lunch. Before lunch we



were introduced to a rare treat called Komperant. I thought it was a loaf of hard bread but to the tongues surprise it tasted like a sugar cookie. Komperant is made in Jerome about 50 miles to the west and it was delicious. We had to get going though, because the big event for this day was the baptism of 17 girls and one boy at the orphanage. In addition Eliane added two other children to the list from the outside community. The ceremony was supposed to begin at 4:30 and Pere Jasman was supposed to be there by 4p, but little runs on time in Haiti and this event was no exception. As soon as Pere Jasman got there he welcomed Father John with open arms like



he had known him all his life. Father John anointed, and poured water over the heads of the children and blessed them and the parents. It was a beautiful ceremony in the chapel of the orphanage which was bursting at the seams with people. It didn't matter because I could clearly feel the Holy Spirit among all of us that day. Eliane had assigned some of the children in the team to be Godparents and it was indeed a rare privilege to be able to stand with them. The children were just incredible. First, they were all dressed in white. All



the dresses Eliane had made and/or I understand some of the older girls participated in their making also. When we arrived at 3p the girls were all sitting in the long hallway



being very good. These girls ranged in ages of 3 to 16 and there was not a peep out of any except very low tones. Then about 3:30 they went into the chapel to pray the rosary and await Pere Jasman's arrival; over an hour more and not a peep!! I have never seen better behaving



children in my life. After the ceremony was over and all the pictures were taken, Eliane and her friends had made a huge feast. We stayed as long as we could but had to get back to the monastery for mass at 6p. It was an incredible day with so many blessings. I think it was on this day that Father John really fell in love with Haiti and the children because from this time on he spent whatever time he could playing with them. However, we could not leave without Pere Jasman inviting Father John to concelebrate mass then next morning. That turned out to be beautiful event; more about this in the next paragraph.

Sun Nov 9 – While it is true we had fulfilled our obligation by attending mass Saturday night, none of us really view mass as an 'obligation' so much as another opportunity to be with our Lord. And this morning Father John was the concelebrant and we couldn't turn down Pere Jasman's invitation, so off we go. I thought I had left plenty of time to get there by 7:45 and knew the roads up to the last ¼ mile. You just have to know the correct cane field to turn at and I didn't. We ended up in a small village to turn around. I'm trying to ask directions to St. Michael's church to a bunch of young men and of course none understood me. Then out of their midst comes forward an older man who spoke better English than I did. The directions were a little tricky, so he loaned me one of their lads to ride with us and I provided him with some fare to return home on a motorcycle. Obviously



being Americans we stood out, but we take our seats in a center pew about 1/3 way back and just become part of God's family. Mass started at 8:30, so we were there in plenty of time and while I understood none of the homily, nor the mass, it was obvious to me that several references were made about us by Pere Jasman. In addition I find it most difficult to escape one of these masses without having to say a few words, which is an honor, but also very embarrassing. The singing and choir was just beautiful. There were 3 instruments that I am aware of, an electric keyboard, bongo drums (a must have at all Haitian masses) and a tambourine that a man used from the opposite site of the church from the choir. This is an open air church with a roof on poles and concrete block for an altar wall, so I would expect the noise to dissipate rapidly, but it didn't and the tambourine was very significant as part of the rhythm; hard to explain but beautiful to the ears. Father John was in his element and very much enjoyed being part of the celebration of the mass even though he understood no more than I did. While it is customary for the concelebrant to read a small part of the mass, Pere Jasman knew he could not and the opportunity never came up. It was after mass was over that was the most significant part of our day. Amber who loves kids and is working hard to speak what bits of Kreyol she can got in a conversation with a young woman probably not any older than Amber who had the cutest little boy. She needed help as many in the congregation did and invited Amber to her house. Fortunately some of

my 'Amber preparation' was beginning to pay off and she handled the situation very well. When your heart is crying I want to help these people, but you don't have the resources to do so, the struggle is great. It is this encounter that Amber would be left with for her stay in Haiti and how to deal with the situation. She and Tina ending up going to the LC and getting out some shoes and clothes for the little boy and I gave her some Haitian goudes to give to the woman. The invitation was still open to visit her home, but Amber would have to deal with that another day. We talked a lot about this encounter later in the day and I truly think it was God's test project for Amber to see what she could and couldn't do. Amber handled it beautifully and I know God was proud of her that day.



By this time it was almost noon and we were the last to leave the property. It was our intent to spend the afternoon at the orphanage because it would be our last time since the next two days were scheduled for other events. And we couldn't go without buying ice cream for the kids which we did. On the way into the orphanage from the main highway there was Guerline marching about half the kids



down the road back from mass in their white dresses they wore the day before at the baptism. They still had about a mile to go, so we piled them all into the land cruiser along with the 5 of us. I counted 18 getting out in the video that is on the website plus us which makes 23. It was just like the clown car at the circus. That afternoon we saw some incredible examples of the sewing training that Eliane has been teaching the girls. Kathy had designed a pattern of a simple clothes/shoes/belongings hanging bag for Tina. Kathy made the first one with instructions for Tina and then Tina passed it onto the girls. There must have been a dozen of the older girls around the table working on various stages of the pattern. It was just like crocheting on Friday. These girls are very smart and most only need to be shown once or twice and they are off and running. Not only do they learn but they are anxiously trying to pass the knowledge on to their younger sisters. It is something beautiful to watch the love of this small community in action. Father John in

particular really fell in love with the kids and had so much fun playing with them. He is a teaser to begin with and once they figured that out he just had the greatest time. It was sad to say goodbye but the time had come and we are back to the monastery as night descends on the mountain.

Mon Nov 10 – This day was dedicated to inspection of water systems in the Jacmel area and visiting the Cathedral of St. Jacques and St. Philippe which Amber wanted to see since we were in the area. This was to be a fun day as the drive along the mountain ridge at 3400' is spectacular and Jacmel is a bit of a

tourist town and more laid back than other parts of Haiti. As we were descending the mountain to Jamel we continued to run into rocks and tree trunks on the road that was obviously put there on purpose but why? Bertone inquired of a person by the road and she said that the government had just significantly raised the taxes on motorcycle license permits and the motorcyclists were not happy. That would be about 85% of the transportation users in that area and had done all of this road blockage just this morning. As we got into Jacmel and were navigating the back streets to the cathedral we were stopped for about 5 minutes to let a parade of motorcyclists through that were driving through the city en masse as part of the protest. That was all I needed to see. When trouble like this flares up I move in the opposite direction, so the cathedral is canceled and inspection of one of the systems as I wanted to get free of the town in case the situation degraded worse. So we got north of the town and visited the Sisters of the Holy Ghost who has one system in the Jacmel area which we visited and one in Lavoute which is a hard one hour ride up the mountain on non-existent roads. The inspection went very well and we had a good visit with sister. On we went to visit the Fondwa system only to find no one available that day, so we got back to PAV in time to take Jon and Tina to visit Pere Blot's technical school in Darborne. This facility was put up by the German organization Caritas who turned it over to the Haitians about 9 months ago and Pere Blot who is a very well educated man inherited it by assignment from the bishop. It is a very difficult job because there is no money to run the school and many of the young people going to learn a trade in auto mechanics, masonry, welding, metal fabricating or wood working can not afford the tuition, but somehow Pere Blot finds a way. It is a quality school with quality equipment if they can just get enough resources to do the job. This is why I wanted to bring Jon by as he and his brother own a garage in Atlanta and Jon wanted to find out how he could help. It turns out they do not know how to use scanning computers which are a must for diagnosing today's automobiles, so we are in the process now of setting up a special 3-5 day session that Jon will teach the next time he comes down on using scanners. This was also when poor Amber who has been the epitome of health said "Bob I don't feel so well", not words any leader wants to hear. I got her to the LC in the shade and she was hot and dehydrated, so we got that under control, but the nausea would not go away. We were scheduled to take a very bad road the next day and I did not want to leave Amber back in the monastery because this was to be the climax of the trip we had all been planning for quite a while. She came to the table that night and ate a little soup but that was it and off to bed early. In two days we are leaving and she is to stay behind – not a good sign I have to tell you.

Tue Nov 11 – Up at 5 and Amber has not slept too well, was tired and nauseated but did not heave either which I thought was a good sign. She actually skipped mass that morning, so I knew it was dicey because Amber never skips mass. Before breakfast she is a little better and gets something to eat. She and I agreed that she will go with us to Café Lompre. This is what I call our St. Vincent de Paul day because we are visiting 10 families that are in dire straits that Fre Jones has selected for us to interview. The road was even more brutal than I remembered and Father John now understood what we were talking about. Thanks be to God, Amber did OK. We were originally planning to go to each of their homes when we got there, but for their sake that would not be a good thing to do as neighbors get very jealous, so we met them at a church. Tina and Amber had been assembling care packages for two months that were ultimately given to each family. Inside each package we also inserted 4500 goudes (\$100). The package contains medicine, clothing, personal hygiene and numerous items only a woman

like Tina would think of to help these individuals. I could not believe how much stuff she squeezed into a 1 gal zip lock bag. We interviewed each of the families one by one from 10a until 2:30p. All the families were very patient. We had five questions for each which were:

1. Family name, first name of each spouse if they were married?
2. Children's name, sex, age (this was not an easy question for many) and grade in school?
3. Cost for the children to go to school, where did they go to school?
4. What is their greatest need right now?
5. How do they make a living?



Many of these people were of very poor health and the first lady, Ipolonne Desire could barely walk over to where we were interviewing each of the people. She had a stick to help her walk, but her left leg was all but useless. How she got there or home I have no idea. I have been visiting SVdP clients once a week for 12 years now and have never visited the severity of need we did that day. But the love in that room that they displayed for their children really caught me off guard. When question 4 was asked of each, all without exception said their children's education. Not one asked for anything for themselves and only two asked for annual rent which amounted to about



\$150 each. The interviews were all done in a circle with no table. We all faced each other. Bertone asked all the questions, Tina took the pictures and Amber took the notes. (The angel of mercy had cured her, at least for that morning.) At the end of each interview Bertone explained how to use the medicine that was in each bag and then based on their answers to the size and type of their family, Tina and Amber had brought a duffel bag full of clothes and shoes not knowing any sizes or needs. It was unbelievable that when we left everyone went away with what they needed and all the sizes were correct and there was very little left over. This is evidence of Divine Providence all by itself. It was a takeoff on the fishes and loaves story in Matthew, only we had the resources, but didn't know if they were the right ones. They were. We knew when we left that day God and

His angels were all over that place and would take care of these families until we could get some more resources into the hands of Fre Jones which we had committed to do. There were 10 families and 47 children among them all. We need about \$11,500 to send them all to school. So far we have raised \$3000 of the amount, so if you feel the need to sponsor one or more of the kids make out a check for \$250 for each child you want to sponsor and put '10 families' in the memo field of the check.

The trip home was no less brutal and was beginning to wear on Amber again. We arrived back about 4pm which was an early arrival for us. But we had a lot of cleanup to do and packing for tomorrow to

get ready to return home. Dinner was fun, but bittersweet as we knew one of our group would not be coming with us, but beginning a new journey in her life. But she was ready.

Wed Nov 12 – Up earlier this morning. We wanted to leave by 5:15. PAP is very unpredictable for traffic and the airlines do not wait. On a good day the drive is about 1.25 hours. Today it was a couple of hours. Amber was feeling poorly again when we got up, but she got a shower and a little food in her and she was ready to go. It made me feel better that she was there. The hugs goodbye were long and deep and then it was all over. Amber was on to her new adventure carving a new tomorrow and Father, Jon, Tina and I do our plane waiting. When we arrived in Miami we headed for the Fridays to get lunch and for me some iced tea. We had a great lunch together and each of us shared what ment the most to them during the trip. Father and I had 5 hours to hang out, so we hugged Jon and Tina good bye as they were going on to Atlanta and we to Charlotte.

God blessed us richly on this journey and we were grateful for His ever presence. Amber will be home soon for Christmas and then back until May. We will all be going back. Haiti is a part of us. We are family and we love them as much as they love us.