

The Haitian Project, Inc.
Community Update: The Heart of the Matter
September 14, 2011



This morning, I had the uncomfortable responsibility of apologizing on behalf of "men" in general to a woman close to our family. (Out of respect, her name has been omitted--unfortunately it could be replaced by several in our neighborhood.) We have known this woman, a mother of seven, since she was a young girl--she is now only 31. The man who fathered her last three children has been found to be the father of another newborn baby in the neighborhood.

This woman has worked hard to keep her family together. We are working with her to improve her family's housing. One of the next homes we build from resources provided in our Renovation Campaign will be for her--unfortunately, she will now not live in it with the father of her youngest children.

Anyone who discusses the "issues" of Haiti without acknowledging the lack of unified familial structure in Haiti, which exists at every level on the economic scale as the most injurious issue and biggest obstacle to advancing as a nation, is not being intellectually honest. If they are not aware of this issue, regardless of what sector they are working in, they must be blind or heartless. If they ignore this issue or suggest Birth Control is the answer, they are willfully contributing to it. In any of these cases, their assistance to Haiti, especially if they are in a leadership position, will be woefully impaired, misdirected and, possibly, even contributory to the problem.

Women are not entirely innocent in this matter. Mothers in Haiti do not deter--and in some cases even facilitate--this misguided approach to life. Until education, meaningful work and legal identity are ubiquitous in Haiti, we will have this self-damaging, repetitive cycle of seeking personal security, especially among women.

I can assure you that a woman with a job and an education is far less likely to fall into this trap, and her children--male and female--are protected as well. Our graduates, male and female, appear to have largely avoided this issue. Many of our graduates have solid marriages from what we can discern. This is our biggest and quietest victory.

A friend told me about a visit by a deacon to his parish who spoke on behalf of an organization working in Haiti. The deacon spoke of a woman with leprosy, which, fortunately, is not common in Haiti, and talked about the "dirt cookie" that has a complex place in Haiti's diet and social circumstance. (It is likely that the existence of the "dirt cookie" in Haiti says more about the lack of education than it says about economics.)

The deacon presented these issues without context or proportion. My friend says that he was impacted emotionally by the presentation. But it was not clear that he was able to comprehend the significance of the issues presented or discern what help is actually needed.

Intended or not, this leaves the listener with one of two choices: do nothing or give money.

Haiti is not a country of poor people. It is a country of impoverished people who need the same basic opportunities found in countries which have less of a problem with poverty: education, employment and social security through proper civic institutions. This need would not seem well presented by the deacon's focus. Although his work is admirable for his charity, he seems to have not gone to the heart of the matter.

Haiti needs more than a simple emotional response and money. Large global organizations obscure this point by presenting the poor of Haiti, especially since the earthquake, as refugees in need of urgent relief--not citizens in need of a stronger nation. Other organizations cloud the issues by presenting only the destitute trapped in abject poverty without mention of the underlying cause or the complex web of individual and societal responsibility involved in Haiti's socioeconomic situation.

While those in need appreciate advocacy, they also know what they actually need. It is not pity or emergency rations or chaotic medical relief--it is a country where their children will be able to find a different path to personal security. They need us to want that too.

Above are pictures of women at work in Haiti--men work here as well. But this is the second part of my apology: Pictures in Honor of Women.

A note on progress in our community: Sybille Fleischman from Inveneo, a non-profit organization that focuses on information and communication technologies, visited us this summer thanks to connections through Adrien Brisson, Director of the Voila Foundation, and our Board Chair Patrick Brun.

He came with the proposition for Inveneo to set up a new computer lab for our students but agreed to fund a learning resource center for our teachers instead after learning from those on the ground and observing the real needs. Our teachers will soon be equipped with six work stations with solar installation to better prepare lesson plans that will enrich our students' academic growth. In collaboration with Inveneo, Voila will provide free internet to the school for one year.

This grant is a perfect example of a supporter listening to the actual needs of the mission.

Finally, while my brief words here cannot do it justice, we had a wonderful community gathering last Friday at the 10th Annual Big Get Together in Rockford, IL. It was amazing to see so many faces in one room -- people who have touched the work of our mission in such meaningful and significant ways. The purpose of the Big Get Together is to bring our Rockford area together as a community (newcomers and longtime supporters alike), and community is exactly what happened. A special thank you to Fr. Jerome Koutnick for speaking on his experience at LCS, and especially to Dick Kunnert, our honored guest, who spoke eloquently on the spiritual formation of our school that is educating future leaders for Haiti. While historically this event has not been a direct fundraiser, more than \$4,000 was raised that evening---a tangible sign of the deeper success that was found in the evening.

Peace, Patrick

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"What you receive as gift, you must give as gift."
"Se gratis nou resevwa, Se gratis tou pou nou bay."

---Matthew 10:8