

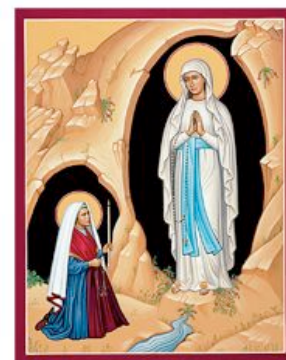


# St. Mark Church, Westbrook, CT

## WALK WITH HAITI

### 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

#### APRIL 2018



## Walk with Haiti: One Step at a Time



This past year there was a lot of conversation about the Camino de Santiago, the famous pilgrimage road spanning 500 miles across northern Spain. Fr. Greg and his friends undertook the journey in September and the movie, "I'll Push You," was screened at St. Mark in October. Having hiked the trail before, I know it's a daunting task, after all it's the equivalent of walking from Westbrook to Pittsburg. When faced with such a challenge, it's best not to worry about the seemingly unattainable endpoint, but rather, put your head down, complete the daily task day in front of you and chip away. Suddenly you find you have reached your goal.

A Haitian expression goes, 'Piti piti wazo fe nich li' ('Little by little the bird builds its nest'); such is the mindset for both the Camino trail and the Walk with Haiti Committee. Who could have imagined all that has been accomplished in twenty years! All we need to do is plan and complete the tasks set before us and let the Holy Spirit guide the way. But to state the obvious, none of these good works can be accomplished without the financial support of our benefactors at St. Mark, St. John and places far away.

To mark our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, we raised more than \$6,000 from Camino pledges. This money was used to give the parish in Haiti a special gift of an outdoor movie projection system, including a 16' screen, projector, DVD player and two speakers, plus about 150 DVDs. This will be a great educational tool, but will also provide entertainment for this impoverished community. This was shipped to Haiti and should arrive in Port-au-Prince in May.

On behalf of the committee, and our Haitian brothers and sisters, thank you for your kindness and generosity. It has been an amazing twenty years.



*Richard Higgins, Chairman*

### Food for Haiti



In 2008, after a tropical storm and 3 consecutive hurricanes ravaged Haiti, St. Mark's started a second collection on the first Sunday of the month to provide food for Haiti. For many years this money (approximately \$1,000/month) was given to Madame Samsan, who cooked a hot meal every day for 100 poor children in her neighborhood of Port-au-Prince.

In 2013, Mme Samson had a stroke and her son, Dr. Gilbert Wilkens, took over the program. It has since evolved into a complete nutritional program, including medical testing and provision of groceries for entire families at risk (a bit like St. Mark's Food Pantry). Our second collection is the sole supporter of this program.



Dr. Wilkens also opened a medical clinic in February 2013, with several generous donations, including money that St. Mark's parishioner, Robin Schreck, raised for him after she experienced the poverty on a parish trip.

Although small, the clinic has a triage room, doctor's office, examination room, and a small stock of medicines. Nearby he also has a room for taking blood samples, and a lab for analyzing blood and urine tests. His next dream is to get a 'spectrophotometer' to allow them to perform liver and kidney function tests. Dr. Wilkens is one of only 125 surgeons that serve Haiti's population of 12 million people.

The generosity of St. Mark parishioners cannot be overstated; time and time again St. Mark answers the call of the Lord, "I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me." (Matthew 25:40)

St. Mark's twinning connection with Haiti through Notre Dame de Lourdes has been uniquely valuable as a church project – bringing together two very different cultures and languages who can communicate in the language of love and mutual respect through the celebration of the Mass. We share in the one Eucharist, pray in solidarity with each other, and touch each other's lives in deep and lasting ways.



**Dr. Wilkens delivered 6 babies at his new clinic in his first 6 months**

# Major Milestones and Achievements

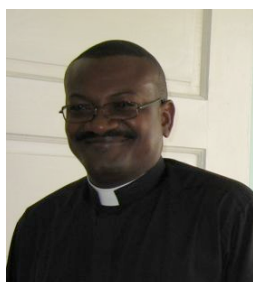
Pastors, Notre  
Dame de Lourdes,  
Haiti



Fr. Francois  
1999-2001



Fr. Madelon  
2001-2004



Fr. Geto  
2005-2011



Fr. Anicette  
2011-present

1996-1998: Visits by first parishioners, who witnessed the extreme poverty and hardships in Haiti and encouraged the rest of the parish to find a practical way to respond: Peg and Lou Patierno, Noreen Gibson, Cliff and Bette Gunnery, and Tony Persutti; then Fr. Rick Albamonti. Parish Council voted to sign a Twinning Covenant with the new parish of Notre Dame de Lourdes, in Cite Militaire in Haiti's capital city, Port-au-Prince. This covenant binds us to support our sister parish through spiritual, educational and financial activities, to visit each other whenever possible, and to educate St. Mark parishioners about Haitian people and their culture.

1998: Parish of Notre Dame de Lourdes is founded. Land cleared, security wall erected and rectory is started. 10 scholarships are given.

1999: Rectory is outfitted Church/Parish Center is designed. Pere Francois visits St. Mark. "Tea" Fundraiser. 16 scholarships.

2000: Construction of Church/Parish Center begins; musical instruments and fabric for choir robes provided. 20 scholarships.

2001: "Tea" Fundraiser. Parish children sent to summer camp. 20 scholarships.

2002: Church/Parish Center construction continues, grocery gifts cards start selling. Wine-Tasting and Silent Auction. Parish trip to Haiti. Bishop Serge visits from Haiti. 32 scholarships.

2003: Church/Parish Center construction continues, fundraising for church outfit of pews chairs, audio system, solar power with invertors for electricity, computers, photocopier. 33 scholarships.

2004: Pews purchased for 500 seating. Fr. Madelon visits St. Mark. 33 scholarships

2005: Church/Parish Center nears completion, electrical generators are purchased; money sent for food and medical relief during a political uprising. Fr. Peter and Fr. Geto installed as pastors on the same day! Parish trip to Haiti. 33 scholarships.

2006: Partnered with German firm to purchase truck. Haiti dinner and auction. 33 scholarships.

2007: Parish trip to Haiti for Palm Sunday and video shoot. Fr. Geto visits St. Mark with Fr. Jerry Kirby. 33 scholarships.

2008: 3 hurricanes and 1 tropical storm hit Haiti; St. Mark starts first Sunday Haiti Food collection for Madame Samsan. Parish trip to Haiti (Oct); icon of St. Mark and Our Lady of Lourdes given as a gift which was attached to altar. 33 scholarships.

2009: Spaghetti Dinner. Prayer Partners established. 40 scholarships.

2010: Earthquake levels Port-au-Prince, all our scholarship students survive, parish had some structural damage. "Taste of Haiti" fundraising dinner. 40 scholarships.

2011: Haitian Fellowship Dinner and craft sale. Parish trip to Haiti with video shoot (Nov). Start of Water Purification Project. 40 scholarships.

2012: Haitian Fellowship Dinner and craft sale. Fr. Anicette visits St. Mark for 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the parish. Parish trip to Haiti (Nov). 40 scholarships.

2013: Two parish trips to Haiti (Feb and Nov). Haitian Fellowship Dinner and craft sale. Water Purification Project (\$17,000) completion; Student College Loan program started. Laptops, software and flash drives sent. 40 scholarship, 3 Student Loans.

2014: Fr. Greg becomes pastor of St. Mark in addition to St. John's in Old Saybrook. Haitian Fellowship Dinner and craft sale. Money sent for musical instruments to be purchased; English class starts. Fr. Anicette visits (Dec). 40 scholarships, 9 Student Loans.

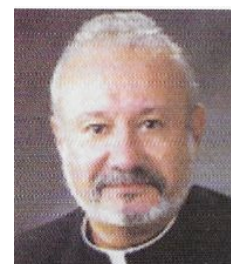
2015: Haitian Fellowship Dinner and craft sale. Money sent for musical instruments, and wall repairs. 40 scholarships, 8 Student Loans.

2016: Haitian Fellowship Dinner and craft sale (Lenny & Joe's), Haiti Bingo. St. Mark/St. John Hurricane Matthew relief collection. 40 scholarships, 13 Student Loans.

2017: Parish trip to Haiti (Feb). Haitian Fellowship Dinner and craft sale (Lenny & Joe's). Pledge drive for 500-mile Camino pilgrimage. 40 scholarships, 9 Student Loans.

2018: Pot Luck and Movie screening, "I'll Push You." 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Outdoor Theater given. 40 scholarships, 8 Student Loans.

Pastors, St Mark,  
Westbrook



Fr. Rick  
1994-2004



Fr. Peter  
2005-2013



Fr. Greg  
2014-present



# EDUCATION

There is very little public education in Haiti and is why the 'Student Scholarship Program' has been the focus of St. Mark/St. John fund raising for many years.

Starting with just ten students in 1998, the number of scholarships we provide has risen to 40 students annually. We have an additional 15 students in the College Loan Program. The total cost is approximately \$35,000 for both programs.



Fr. Guetchine Anicette (parish priest of NDJ) chooses each new student to start the program, usually in first grade. The criteria used is how active the family is in the church, financial need and other special considerations, such as for orphans.

Fr. Anicette's assistant, Marjorie Paulo, co-ordinates all students enrollments into school and monitors the academic results. Marjorie speaks English and is an invaluable asset. She also runs the English Program, which is open to all parishioners. This has always been the goal: helping Haitians help Haitians.

## Student Profile: Marie Noel Franchelle

Marie has been in St. Mark's scholarship program since she was a child, in 2003. After she completed her schooling in 2014, she took advantage of the student loan program and is set to graduate from the University of Haiti with an Economic and Political Science degree. Marie has worked hard to move herself and Haiti forward.



2003



2018

## Student Loan Program

One of our overall tenets is that all the students are treated equally. So when the first of the sponsored students graduated from high school we were at a cross road – they had dreams of continuing their education and we were concerned about the financial impact. Tatiana had obtained a full government academic scholarship so she was all set, but Francine and Stephanina wanted to study nursing and Lorenza wanted to pursue a business degree.

This was when the idea of the student loan program as born. Walk With Haiti had just received a very generous pledge for the next 5 years, which we could use as the 'seed' money for a new educational loan program. We pitched the idea to Father Anicette as 'paying it forward'. The students would pay back to the fund after graduation, enabling more students to pursue further education.

Those first students have since graduated in 2016 and two more waves are realizing their dreams. Aside from nurses, economics and business degrees, the students are learning computer science, hospitality, car mechanics, medical technician, and hotel services. Offered to them through Notre Dame de Lourdes, \$600 is available to the student per year for a maximum of four years, which has to be paid back when the student acquires a job at a rate that each can handle. Not all students use the Student Loan Program, it's up to them.

## Sponsoring a Student

The annual scholarship drive 'kicks off' in October and lasts throughout the year. It costs \$650/year for grade school scholarships and \$600/year for the College Loan program and individuals and organizations pledge to provide partial and full scholarships. The easiest way to support is to buy the grocery gift cards (see included article) because it doesn't cost anything – the local store is the donor. Sponsoring a specific student can be arranged. Some benefactors are now making donations from special retirement charity IRAs.

For more information or to make a donation, visit [www.stmarkstjohn.org](http://www.stmarkstjohn.org) or mail checks to "Walk With Haiti", St. Mark Church, 222 McVeagh Rd, Westbrook, CT 06498.

## English Program

In 2012 the government of Haiti announced that an initiative was being made to attract tourism to Haiti. To assist this, Walk with Haiti arranged to have English classes available to any parishioner that wanted to learn. Marjorie (the student coordinator) is the teacher. The program started well but has languished lately, and we hope that it will soon take off again.

Thanks to St. John's School, grammar school reading books were shipped down in April. Also sent down was a second-hand digital projector and DVD player donated by a parishioner. There is an internet link at the church that can be used to provide videos to assist the program.

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**"There are, indeed, many different members, but one body. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members share in its joy."  
(1 Corinthians 12:20, 26)**

# FUND RAISING

## ANNUAL FELLOWSHIP DINNER

Since 2009, the Walk with Haiti Committee has been hosting an annual “Haiti Fellowship Dinner,” as part of our Covenant “to enrich the lives and faith of our people.” This fun event provides an opportunity to educate the parish about Haiti, give feedback to St. Mark’s about progress in Haiti and answer parishioners’ questions. The dinner is held in April/May, and includes entertainment (eg. music, a speaker, short slideshow) and fund raising activities like raffles or Haitian crafts for sale.



## SPECIAL PROJECTS

From time to time, we have held extra fundraisers for special projects requested by our sister parish in Haiti. A key aim is to “help Haitians help Haitians,” and from the beginning, everyone has been extremely generous, raising many thousands of dollars to build/supply:

- Parish center (\$54,000), roof (\$33,000), benches (\$10,125)
- Church sound system, musical instruments and choir gowns
- Solar system and inverter (\$8,790)
- Truck (\$22,000)
- Water purification system (\$17,000)
- Hurricane relief (\$9,461)

## GIFT CARDS – A WIN-WIN-WIN!

We are grateful for everyone’s support of our supermarket Gift Card program which, all on its own, pays for 12 education scholarships!

Parishioners buy gift cards for their grocery shopping and our local stores donate a percentage to Walk With Haiti.



**5%**



**10%**



**5%**

## RICE AND BEANS

During Lent, bags of rice and beans are assembled by religious education classes and sold after Mass. This staple meal in the Haitian diet is offered as a simple substitute for the usual dinner, providing families with an opportunity to share a tasty meal, experience the Haitian culture and talk about poverty in Haiti and round the world.

## CHRISTMAS – GIVING TREE, COOKIE SALE

Every year St. Mark’s Christmas Giving Tree includes some cards asking for monetary donations and this usually supports the education fund.

St. Mark’s Garden Group has also made many generous donations for education scholarships from the proceeds of its annual Christmas Cookie Sale.

## “STUDENTS HELPING STUDENTS!”

Faythe Papp’s third graders at St. John School know what this means to the Haitian children in Port-au-Prince. Every year, while learning about Haiti and getting inspired by videos and parishioners’ experiences, her class sets a goal for Haitian education scholarships. Each year is different, with collections ranging from \$500-\$1,579.28 (2016 record) in coins, totalling more than \$5,000 since 2009! In 2015 the class was excited to meet Fr. Anicette and ask him what school was like in Haiti.

Congratulations students for all your hard work and reaching out your hand to “Walk with the students of Haiti.”



| CARD VALUE | 10% REBATE | TOTAL AFTER 52 WEEKS | 5% REBATE | TOTAL AFTER 52 WEEKS |
|------------|------------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| \$10       | 1.00       | \$52                 | 0.50      | \$26                 |
| \$25       | 2.50       | \$130                | 1.25      | \$65                 |
| \$50       | 5.00       | \$260                | 2.50      | \$130                |
| \$100      | 10.00      | \$520                | 5.00      | \$260                |

**“My brothers, what good is it to profess faith without practicing it? Such faith has no power to save one, has it? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and no food for the day, and you say to them, “Good-bye and good luck! Keep warm and well fed,” but do not meet their bodily needs, what good is that? So it is with the faith that does nothing in practice. It is thoroughly lifeless.” (James 2:14-17)**