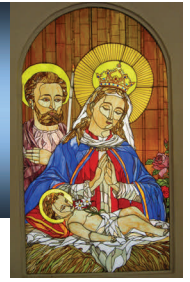




La Sagrada Familia



News from and about our family in the Dominican Republic .

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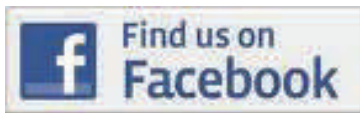
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OUR FIFTH ISSUE - JANUARY 2012

Happy New Year! or ¡Feliz Año Nuevo! as it is said at our sister parish. In this issue we have eight pages of updates and reflections on La Sagrada Familia. We hope you enjoy reading them.

We begin with a reflection by S Fran Cunningham on how our 30 year sister parish relationship has changed the lives of people both in the Dominican Republic and in our Archdiocese . [Here](#).



On pages 3 and 4 Dolores Puértolas informs us on new home improvement project which enhanced the lives of families at our sister parish. [Here](#).

One of the seven Corporal Works of Mercy is to visit the imprisoned. Fr. Martí relates the actions of 30 LaSF parishioners who brought happiness into the lives of the inmates of the prison located within the parish. Just below the article , we have the beautiful passage from Matthew on which these works are based. [Here](#).

On pages 6 and 7 Mike Wolf enlightens us on the Haitian Ministry program and gives us background on why this program is so desperately needed. [Here](#).

Deacon Wilson Shierk brings this issue to a close with an eye opening experience during his mission trip to LaSF in 2011. [Here](#).

Your reflections, your activities which support the parish, and your articles are welcome. Your feedback is always appreciated. E-mail your items to troeder@wi.rr.com. Thank you.

— Tom Roeder, volunteer newsletter facilitator

Changing our Perspective — S. Fran Cunningham

This year as I prepared to visit la Sagrada Familia in mid-November, I was aware that the year of the 30th anniversary was drawing to a close. A parishioner had asked me what difference this relationship has made in the lives of people in the Dominican Republic and in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. I quickly pointed out the growth of pastoral and social programs, noting the presence of two nutrition centers for children, a health center and pharmacy, a parish church and several chapels and a bakery, all staffed by Dominicans.

I cited the generous response of archdiocesan persons who have provided dental and eye care, assistance with water projects, and luggage- filled school supplies as well as diapers for babies. I described the annual visits of parishioners from our archdiocese to La Sagrada Familia, hospitality and friendship exchanged, and on-going financial support and the special collections in response to the aftermath of hurricanes and tropical storms.

And then it dawned on me that while all these responses were true I was not articulating the most important change I've seen. As a result of these 30 years of relationship persons in both countries are beginning to see each other as people with gifts given by God that have nothing to do with economic poverty or richness. Each person is created in God's image and entrusted with individual gifts that need to be nurtured and developed. Being in relationship gives them the opportunity to help nurture each other's gifts and to share those gifts with others. Thus, for example, when a student in La Sagrada Familia receives funds for a scholarship from someone in the archdiocese of Milwaukee it means that she or he has the opportunity to develop the gift for learning. Being in a sister parish relationship implies a commitment to share gifts rather than to respond to needs.

I now see Dominicans sharing gifts with Dominicans in the bakery that works for funds to provide scholarships for Dominicans. I experienced the joy of two young women who started a meal program for young children in their village that has now grown into a nutrition center. I see Dominicans holding literacy classes for those who have never had the opportunity to learn to read or write.

In the course of these 30 years I have seen close to 50 parishes in our archdiocese develop sister parish relationships in other parts of the world in an effort to nurture and develop each other's gifts. Perhaps the relationship with La Sagrada Familia influenced them to reach out to other parishes.

Thirty years ago it was easy to think in terms of giving to those in need when the relationship with La Sagrada Familia began. Today we are challenged to remember that our Dominican sisters and brothers have gifts and talents and skills rather than needs that they want to develop so as to share with others and that by sharing and exchanging gifts each of us has the opportunity to make our world a better place.



New Roofs for Galindo — Dolores Puértolas

Many of you that have come to visit La Sagrada Familia may not remember the names of the towns Galindo Adentro and Galindo Afuera. But if you have visited these towns, you'd most certainly remember the experience. Years ago, before cell phone coverage reached them, they were known as the place with the "random public satellite phone". And still today, they are known as the place where there are "more goats than people."

Another one of the most notable features of these small towns was their palm thatched roofs. These roofs took many of us almost on a journey through time and seemed quaint and made for some great pictures. But for the families living in these homes, they were a source of leaks and mold, dust and disease, rats and spiders. For years they have been asking the authorities and the parish for help to change the roofs. It doesn't take much time to look around and see that the inhabitants in these towns are in general not people of means.

Finally, in October 2010, we were able to begin to help them as part of a larger roofing and latrine project to provide better hygiene and dignity in the household. This project entailed the building of 54 roofs and 87 latrines. The project was co-financed by different Spanish organizations. The most benefited community was Galindo Adentro, where the initiative for the project came from, so I share of bit of the story of the project development there.

The first step was to meet with the community. Carmen is the parish's catechist and her house is a must stop for visitors in the town (she's the one who also has a medical cabinet in her home). She convened the entire town and explained that as part of the project, latrines would be built for homes that did not have one. But first each family must dig their own hole and provide the aggregate for the cement base. The parish provided a professional builder whose labor was also covered in part by the family's contributions. This is the same builder that the parish has used for years for latrines projects and has been trained to explain maintenance and basic hygiene to the families as part of the educational aspect of the project. With the outbreak of cholera in the country during the last year, this aspect is evermore important.

I explained then that the families identified to receive a roof made of corrugated steel sheets must own the house they live in, that they actually live in the house on a regular basis (some families are quite migratory between different towns), and that the structure of the house be strong enough to support the new roof.

The following meeting was to identify which homes would qualify for a new roof. I went with another professional builder that would be in charge of the roofs, and we received the surprise that many homes were actually not strong enough to withstand a new roof, an ironic, and sad, twist. Some homes were completely deteriorated.



A home getting a corrugated steel roof.

New Roofs for Galindo (continued) — Dolores Puértolas

With several owners, we were able to reach an agreement that if they could fix up and strengthen the walls, the project would support the new roof. Eventually, the homes were identified and the builder went to work, while other families began to fix up their homes.

One can imagine as is the case dealing with any group of people anywhere in the world, there was some jealousy from the people who for one reason or another did not qualify. But luckily there was no major conflict. With time, many families created a sort of “possie” that would follow the builder and myself as we walked through the town, explaining their different situations. Luckily, the town is not very big, otherwise we would have been overwhelmed!



However interestingly enough, some families, including single mothers that were renting, offered to put up walls on a plot they had in order to be able to take advantage of the new roof. This was a difficult and costly task for several families, but they did not want to lose the chance of the new roof. The roof is one of the most expensive (and important) parts of the home. Though it was not part of the original plan, we agreed as they were some of the neediest families. And, in the end, an unexpected outcome of the project is 10 completely new houses in Galindo Adentro.

The rest of the roofs and latrines were built in Galindo Afuera, Ganadero and Sabana Yegua, with the building finishing in September 2011. Of course, all the beneficiary families were very grateful for the help of the project and parish in helping them to have a more dignified home – a fundamental human right. On our part in the parish, we are grateful for the grants given through the aforementioned agencies, the community leaders here that help carry it out, and the continued support of many, especially in Milwaukee, whose support allows us to be here to carry out projects such as these.



Celebration in the Jail: God Does Not Forget Anyone

- Fr. Martí Colom

On September 24 the Church celebrates the Feast of Our Lady of Ransom, in Spanish *Nuestra Señora de la Merced*. She is the patroness of the Dominican Republic. At the same time, through history her memory has always been associated to those who are in jail and to the work of those who care for them. The *Mercedarians*, who place themselves under the guidance of Our Lady of Ransom, is an order that was founded in Barcelona in the early 13th century by Saint Pedro Nolasco. From their foundation, they worked to provide assistance to people who were incarcerated. And to this day, that is the service they offer as chaplains in prisons all over the world.

To celebrate this event, this year on September 24 about thirty parishioners from *La Sagrada Familia* organized a meal for the inmates of the awful “Cárcel del Km. 15” prison that we have within our parish territory. We went to the prison, celebrated a lively Mass which was well participated by the men who are in the prison, and afterwards the meal was distributed.

It was just a small sign of solidarity with the 600 men who live in deplorable conditions in that prison. Of the many distressing realities that unfortunately exist in this region and among the people of our parish community, probably none tops the sad state of the inmates in the jail. Living conditions there are appalling: the lack of hygiene and security, the corruption of the authorities and the absence of educational opportunities are, simply put, a scandal.

From the parish we continue our weekly visits to the inmates. We maintain a program through which two inmates teach another twenty inmates to read and write four mornings every week. This is done in a small cell turned into classroom that the prison authorities allow us to use. Our tiny “school,” as lacking in proper structure as it is, is the only educational program that takes place in this prison. As much as we try to bring some humanity to that context, the reality is that the only good thing that could happen to this prison would be that the government, seeing its disastrous state, would decide to close it down.

Since this is not likely to happen, we keep visiting the inmates, helping them in small ways, and organizing activities such as the one we celebrated on September 24. Our goal is twofold. First, to remind those in the prison that they are not completely forgotten. Secondly, to remind the rest of us that the Church cannot remain inactive or quiet when faced with such injustice and inhumanity. Thus, we consider our ministry among the inmates in this jail as a very important part of our efforts to build up the Kingdom in our parish.

Matthew 25:31- 45

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, *in prison and you visited me*.

Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’

Haitian Ministry Program Update

— Mike Wolf

In June of this year, the Haitian Ministry program at La Sagrada Familia Parish celebrated three years of growth with a big celebration that included formational talks, a Mass with music and dance, and a shared meal. Haitians came from the five different communities where there is currently active ministry or the beginnings of it: Sabana Yegua, Cañada de Piedra, La Guajira, Proyecto 4 and Tábara Abajo. Fr. Werby, who is in charge of Haitian Ministry in our diocese, came to join the parish in the event.

The program is mostly operated by the volunteers. “Polo,” one of the teachers at the school for Haitian immigrants in Sabana Yegua mostly leads the program. He considers the beginning of the parish’s Haitian Ministry as the first baptisms that he prepared in 2008. These baptisms were celebrated by Fr. Martí in the chapel in the barrio Los Cartones, where there is a large concentration of Haitians. Other important persons are Ronel, the director of the school for Haitian Immigrants, who is pictured at the right with Domingo, one of the Dominican catechists in the parish who most supports and participates in work with the Haitian immigrant population.



Like many things in our mission work here, people’s contact with the Church began through a social program (in this case the school for Haitian Immigrants) and then grew on its own to include an interest in catechism and celebration of the Sacraments. In fact, this year we finally hope to have some Haitians confirmed during Bishop Grullón’s pastoral visit.

To best understand these efforts, one must first understand the long and complex history of the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. At first glance they are two Caribbean cultures with similar influences. However, their colonial histories – Haiti with France and the Dominican Republic with Spain – have resulted in very different cultures. Though they share a small island (compare the island’s 29,530 square miles with Wisconsin’s 65,498), they do not even share the same language. Another part of the complexity of Dominican-Haitian relations is that the Dominican Republic celebrates its independence not from Spain, but from Haiti, which controlled the entire island for 22 years in the first half of the 1800s.

This history, together with what is in my opinion is a deep and simple sense of nationalism on both sides of the border, has created a great lack of dialogue. Today, the reality of the Haitian immigrant in the Dominican Republic, documented or not, has been called into question on international levels as violating fundamental human rights. In many ways, there is a popular sense of racism towards the Haitian that has become institutionalized.

My purpose here is to share with you the current socio-political climate in which we are working. With this, you can understand the importance of simple efforts like the school for Haitian immigrant or our Haitian Ministry program. These serve to create bases in which to form community, to build on their faith and to provide sense of security within the immigrant community. They give a bit of dignity to a population whose daily life is one of uncertainty, exposed to economic, legal, and physical abuse.

Haitian Ministry Program Update (continued)

— Mike Wolf

But we do not stop there. We are one Church and cannot fall into the trap of creating two separate communities. Thus, I believe that the most important work that we are doing with regard to the Haitian immigrants is to try to bring the two communities together, to overcome cultural and national identities that limit the level of Christendom. The motto for the Dominican Bishop's 2011 Pastoral Plan for October was from Mathew 28:19 – "Therefore, go forth and make disciples of all nations."

I am happy to share with you that throughout this year, especially these last few months, we have been able to continue to create situations for respected interaction between both Dominicans and Haitians. This way, we can begin to speak about persons with names and faces, instead of stereotypes. With the Haitian Ministry Program, we've been able to get more Haitians to come to regular masses and celebrations, to participate in the parish leadership and organization, and to help create situations in which Dominicans can learn about their neighbors.

In terms of Dominican-to-Haitian outreach, I was happy to see some Dominicans willing to share the celebration of the Third Anniversary in June. In the first weekend of November, we were visited by Fr. Berthony Georges, a Jesuit priest from Haiti. Besides celebrating a Mass in kreyòl in the chapel in Los Cartones in Sabana Yegua (close to where the school for Haitian immigrants is), he gave a talk the monthly General Assembly of the parish on the Church in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Also, he concelebrated the regular masses with Fr. Martí on Friday and Sunday morning, where he preached. Last year, he made parish history, not only celebrating the first Mass in kreyòl in Sabana Yegua, but by celebrating the regular Masses in Spanish, too.



Preparing for a dance during the celebration Mass of the their 3rd Anniversary of Haitian Ministry in La Sagrada Familia

Though of course Fr. Bethony was received with typical Sabanayeguan hospitality to visitors, a priest that was Haitian, and spoke extremely well in Spanish, gave many some food for thought. We are grateful to Fr. Berthony for joining us here in La Sagrada Familia.

Regardless of cultural and societal difference and prejudices, if there is one place people of all cultures should be able to feel at home together, in respect and love, it's in the Church. The second week of January 2012 has been designated National Migration Week by the US bishops: as you celebrate it there in Milwaukee, I ask you to also keep the migrants here in La Sagrada Familia (also part of our local Milwaukee church) in your thoughts and prayers.

Mission Images - 2011

— Deacon Wilson Shierk

In January of this year I was one of twenty people who traveled to our sister parish in the Dominican Republic, La Sagrada Familia, to work in an eye clinic. This was not my first visit, but it was part of an on-going commitment to reach out to the people of Sabana Yegua whom we had come to know on previous visits.

Each year there are a number of experiences that occur that are literally life changing. These encounters enlarge our vision, soften our hearts, and broaden our image of the interconnectedness of all people. This year was no exception.

One woman came into the parish center mid-afternoon of the second day of the eye clinic. She had been waiting in line like so many others and had finally reached the first of our pre-testing stations. Cycling through these preliminary tests, she finally reached the doctor and waited patiently for him to examine her.

I noticed her because she seemed so quiet and reserved. She gave the impression that she did not hold out much hope that the testing and the examination was going to change her poor vision.

After the diagnosis, she moved to the table where my mission friends were preparing to fit her with a pair of glasses. Somewhat reluctantly she sat at the table and handed the prescription to Patty who quickly searched for the correct pair of glasses for her. With a smile, she told the woman, "Here, give these a try," sliding the glasses across the table to her.

For a few seconds the woman didn't even touch the plastic wrapped glasses, and then slowly she removed them from the plastic envelope and held them in her hands. She looked at them and then slid them up toward her face. Again she paused and set them down on the table. After a few moments she picked up the glasses again and moved them toward her face---only to stop in midair and again set them down on the table.

Finally after another gap of time she picked up the glasses, took a deep breath and carefully placed them on her face. There was a quiet few seconds as she moved her head from side to side and up and down. Then she jumped up from the table shoving her chair behind her, lifted up her arms over her head like a referee at a football game and shouted, "Por fin! Por fin!" "It is over, it is over. Finally it is over and I can see!"

On that day, in that humid room warmed by the tropical sun, more than one person experienced renewed vision.

Connect to Your Sister Parish

- ⇒ Invite a speaker to your parish or school.
- ⇒ Visit the parish and meet the people.
- ⇒ Make a donation or hold a fundraiser.
- ⇒ Spread the word—ask us for prayer cards, buttons, or other materials to share.
- ⇒ Visit our website for stories, slideshows, and virtual tours.
 - ⇒ The link is <http://www.archmil.org/parishes/Sagrada-Familia.htm>.



NEXT ISSUE: WATCH FOR AN ARTICLE ABOUT ARCHDIOCESAN PARISHES' OUTREACH TO THEIR SISTER PARISH