

La Sagrada Familia Parish, Dominican Republic Group 4 Missionary Cooperation Plan 2020

Greetings! My name is Fr. Michael Wolfe, and I have had the privilege of being pastor of La Sagrada Familia, the sister parish of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee in the Dominican Republic, during 2019 and 2020. This parish is of particular importance to me personally because after many years of being supported in my consideration of the priesthood at my home parish in Waukesha—St. Williams—it was here that I finally said yes to my vocation to the priesthood, while I was on an immersion and service trip while studying in college at UW-Madison.

This parish is not only important for me personally, but I believe it to be important for the entire archdiocese. It has touched my life as it has touched the lives of many of you who have visited here or have even just heard the stories of the work that we have done here as a local church. With this, let me share with you the work that we do here with your support to carry out this mission in La Sagrada Familia.

Background and Parish Details

This parish was founded in 1981 with the presence of priests from the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and the support of the great archdiocese. To this day, it is supported by the World Missions Office and served by priests that are assigned by the Archbishop.

La Sagrada Familia is located in the southwest corner of the country, in the province of Azua, about one hour away from the border with Haiti. The parish territory covers 22 communities, with a population of around 30,000 people.

La Sagrada Familia is in a relatively impoverished area of the country, where most live off of agriculture. The vast majority work as day laborers, when there is work, earning between \$5.00 and \$8.00 per day, and sometimes the Haitian immigrants earn less. The area is prone to droughts, putting at risk the livelihood of many families.

It is difficult to find quality social services within the area, necessitating that families often have to go over 2 hours away to the capitol to seek out healthcare and other services. Education in the country as a whole is considered to be at a low level for Latin America, with our area being one of the worst.

Social Outreach

With these realities, the parish communities have many physical and social needs that the parish seeks to address with social development programs.

Ongoing health programs include a health center, with a doctor that sees patients daily; a pharmacy; a laboratory; and a dentist, who also receives patients daily. We also provide physical therapy in a nearby center.

La Sagrada Familia Parish has three Children's Centers, which together serve meals to 150 children daily and provide preschool education and regular health check-ups.

The parish also has three sewing centers where mostly women learn how to sew, as a means to support themselves. There is likewise a beautician school in Sabana Yegua.

Another ongoing program provides food, visits, and other services to the needy elderly who do not have family to take care of them.

The parish also oversees development programs such as: latrine building, home repairs, home construction, micro-loans, and water projects that have included some so large that they provide for water in the homes of entire communities.

The parish also has a program to tutor children who need extra help within the public schools, as well as an ongoing scholarship program.

Pastoral Work

Beyond these physical and social necessities, La Sagrada Familia of course also provides pastoral care in the form of Masses, sacraments, and catechesis, as well as other formation to the communities that it serves.

I am also proud that La Sagrada Familia is one of the few parishes in the country that has a regular and formal Haitian Immigrant ministry program.

We also have active youth and young adult ministry programs, and a jail ministry program that has grown over the last year.

As part of the Lenten Pilgrimage led by the World Mission Office in March 2020, we had a beautiful expression of unity in prayer and faith as the pilgrims prayed the Stations of the Cross together with the men at the KM 15 jail.

COVID19 Response

Of course, many of these ongoing efforts have changed in the light of the current pandemic. We have updated our procedures and goals to continue to provide these and new programs to support especially the most vulnerable populations within our parish territory.

Thanks to the support of the World Mission Office and from appeals like this one, we have been able to keep all of our staff in the parish office, Children's Centers, adult education centers, and health center. This has allowed us to be able to address the needs of the population in a fast and efficient manner.

Knowing that the elderly are those most at risk, we have extended our outreach to provide food kits to over 100 elderly persons in need within Sabana Yegua, as well as other aid as identified by our Social Outreach Director, Maya.

We prepare similar kits for the 150 families that are connected with our three Children's Centers, as well as providing them with activities for the children to do in their homes.

Likewise, we provide similar kits for Haitian immigrant families, as part of our Haitian Ministry Program.

In the recent months, we have been able to continue some of our building projects, such as latrines, a house for a family in need, and a large reservoir for farmers in Barrera.

In terms of Sacraments and prayer, during the full quarantine in the first months of the pandemic, Masses, prayer services, and spiritual songs from our cantor were posted on social media and broadcast on the local radio station. As things began to open up, we coordinated processions with the Blessed Sacrament and other outdoor efforts, and now are able to have public Sunday Masses with safety protocols. We continue to broadcast our Masses on social media (and you can check them out on the World Mission Ministries Facebook page).

As part of our jail ministry in KM 15, the parish has provided hygiene kits, food staples, medicines, and cleaning supplies for the 500 inmates. This is considered the “worst” jail in the country—but luckily, so far, with our help, they have been successful in keeping the inmates free from infection from COVID19. With this, we have had to be creative in the different ways that we can safely still offer some spiritual support to these inmates.

Storm Season

This year we are anticipating a very active hurricane season given our location between the mountains and the ocean. When we are hit by storms it leads to flooding that causes damages to homes and to crops. The organization of La Sagrada Familia and especially the funds available through the generosity of people like you make it possible that we can respond quickly in times of need.

How You Can Help

Let me share with you now a few ways that your generosity and support could be put to use here in La Sagrada Familia.

- Your \$25 gift can provide for the education, healthcare, and food for one child in our Children’s Centers for one month.
- Your \$50 gift can cover blood work for a person facing a chronic illness.
- Your \$75 gift can be used for the operating expenses of a program that provides education and training for new leaders in the communities of the parish.
- Your \$100 gift can help pay for one year of training for one catechist.
- Your \$175 gift can help pay a teacher’s stipend in one of our centers for a month.
- Your \$250 gift can provide one family with a new zinc roof.
- Your \$300 gift can help build a latrine or provide a year of elementary school education.
- And in this time of pandemic, a donation of just \$15 can cover a food kit for a family of four for a few days or an elderly person for one week.

Thank You

Relationships that are transformative and of true value take time. Thanks to your support, we have been united with La Sagrada Familia for almost 40 years now, as we strive together to be One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church. In these trying times, our solidarity and Christian charity with one another reflects for us more than ever our unity as brothers and sisters in a common origin in God. Again, I, and the people of La Sagrada Familia thank you for listening to our message and for your support of this mission and wish you many blessings.