

A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWO COMMUNITIES

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Lori A. Nord

Thesis Advisor

Elizabeth Bremigan

Elizabeth Bremigan

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

April of 2001

Expected Date of Graduation

May of 2001

SpColl
Thesis
LD
2489
.24
2001
.N67

Abstract

This thesis explores the Haiti Parish Twinning relationship between St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Muncie, Indiana and St. Michael's Parish in Plaisance, Haiti. A description of the origins of this relationship is included, as well as a description of the relationship itself. Also included in this thesis is a comparison of the two communities involved in this twinning relationship. One part of this comparison is a description of some aspects of life in Plaisance. An appendix of pictures is attached to help illustrate some of these aspects. Finally, there is a discussion of the importance and impact of this twinning relationship on every person involved.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Dr. Elizabeth Bremigan, my thesis advisor, for your patience and enthusiasm in helping me to focus and fine tune this project. Thanks to Fr. John Kiefer, Leanne Mengelt, Pam Forgille, Leslie Hildenbrand, and Fr. Andre` Sylvestre for providing valuable contributions and insight for this thesis. Thank you also to the people of St. Francis and St. Michael's communities for touching my heart and inspiring me to share the twinning experience through this thesis project.

A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWO COMMUNITIES

In May of 1999, I was blessed with the opportunity to spend a week in Haiti as a part of a mission trip. During the week in Haiti, our group from St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Muncie, Indiana learned much about our sister parish of St. Michael's in Plaisance, Haiti. I would like to describe the Haiti Parish Twinning Program that paired the two parishes, the twinning relationship between the two communities, a comparison of the two communities, and the importance and impact of this relationship on every person involved.

Origins of Haiti Parish Twinning Program

The idea for establishing relationships between parishes in the United States and parishes in Haiti was first cultivated by Harry Hosey and Theresa Patterson in 1978. Harry Hosey and Theresa Patterson were both members of St. Henry's Parish in Nashville, Tennessee. Harry and his wife spoke at church about the needs of the Haitian people, and this is when Theresa Patterson became interested in helping. Harry and Theresa discussed the possibilities about parish outreach with Haiti. They thought that if their parish, St. Henry, would make a commitment to help the Haitian people, then it was possible that many other parishes would too. This was when the Adopt-A-Parish Program began. The Adopt-A-Parish Program was a program that paired parishes in the United States and Canada with parishes in other countries that might be less fortunate. This program was administered on a strictly volunteer basis.

It was decided in June of 1992 that Theresa Patterson would direct the Haiti effort through the Haiti Parish Twinning Program (HPTP), a newly created non-profit organization. The Haiti Parish Twinning Program facilitates and supports linkages of parishes in the United States and Canada with parishes and projects in Haiti. The mission statement of the Haiti Parish Twinning Program is to serve those in need in Haiti by:

- Encouraging linkages between Catholic parishes, institutions and individuals in the United States and Canada and parishes and institutions in Haiti.
- Developing models for parish actions.
- Encouraging prayerful solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Haiti.
- Providing resources and support in religious, educational, medical, and economic areas.
- Promoting awareness among Catholics of the injustices present in Haiti and our Gospel call to respond.

When a decision to twin is made, a viable and loving relationship is established. Parishes can then decide what they want that relationship to entail, whether it be sending money, prayers and letters, or sending supplies and/or people to visit their twinned or sister parish. This is a unique way for Catholics to become directly and personally involved in acting on their faith to help their fellow Catholics in the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere (HPTP pamphlet).

Origins of St. Francis Twinning Program

The seeds of the relationship between St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Muncie and St. Michael's Parish in Plaisance, Haiti were planted many years ago in the mind of Fr. John Kiefer, long before he was pastor at St. Francis. When Fr. John Kiefer was pastor of a small parish in Monterey, Indiana, he had his first encounter with Haiti. Fr. John and one of his parishioners traveled to Haiti in 1986. The two were there to try to establish a connection with a parish that their parish might twin. However, since they were in Haiti during the time of the revolution when "Babydoc" Duvalier was being overthrown, there were soldiers in the streets. Travel in Haiti was very difficult because of this and the two never made it to the parish they were trying to visit because the soldiers wouldn't let them through. Despite their failure to establish a connection with the parish while in Haiti, the parish in Monterey, Indiana started a twinning program. However, due to the lack of support available in such a small town with a population of only 200, the program did not continue for long.

In 1996, Fr. John returned to Haiti with Bishop William Higi and several other priests from the Diocese of Lafayette. When the priests arrived in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, they all went in different directions to meet with various parishes. At this time, Fr. John Kiefer had been pastor at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Muncie for almost five years. Fr. John was still very interested in the idea of his parish reaching outside of themselves to twin with another. So Fr. John traveled to Plaisance, Haiti to meet Fr. Andre` Sylvestre and the parish of St. Michael's.

Fr. Andre` presented Fr. John with a list of the needs of his parish. (See Appendix A.) Fr. John and the Haiti Parish Twinning Program coordinator thought that this would be a good twinning match so Fr. John returned to his parish in Muncie and told them about the people of Plaisance. Fr. John wanted it to be the parish's choice to twin (Kiefer, personal interview).

After learning of the needs of the people of Plaisance, one of the major needs being medical assistance, there was talk of possibly sending a medical mission team down to visit and work in Plaisance. Some of the doctors and nurses who were parishioners at St. Francis became very interested in the idea. When these medically minded parishioners started talking about helping in Haiti, they had three stipulations. They wanted to make certain that whatever they did, they would do no harm and not give any false hope. The physicians stated that they wouldn't participate in the project if there were not going to be a continuum of care. Lastly, none of the members of the team would pay out of his own pocket because they were already making huge sacrifices to be on the team and go to Haiti for a week (Mengelt, personal interview).

As serious plans started to form in 1997 for the first medical team to go to Plaisance, it became clear that this relationship was going to be a big commitment. Therefore, a core committee formed to make decisions on how the parish should proceed. The core committee consists of various student and resident parishioners of St. Francis. The core committee oversees all activities of the twinning program at St. Francis. This committee approves all decisions

related to mission teams traveling to Haiti, the collection of items and funds, and all other outreach and feedback to the parish and community. (See St. Francis twinning calendar of events, Appendix B.) The Haiti core committee soon decided that since St. Francis is a university parish, perhaps there could be ways to get more students involved in this Haiti twinning relationship with St. Michael's Parish. The committee decided that St. Francis should send a student group down to St. Michael's as well. This student group, labeled the service team, would assess the needs of the people of Plaisance and try to find ways, other than medical, that St. Francis Parish can help. The service teams would also have much more time for cultural exchange and connecting personally with the parishioners of St. Michael's Parish.

Comparison of Two Communities

Perhaps to better understand why St. Francis Parish would even want to develop this relationship or send people to Haiti, one should look at both communities to see how they are connected. Plaisance is a city in the mountainous northern region of Haiti. (See map in Appendix C.) The parish of St. Michael's serves a geographical area of about an eight-mile radius. For the 45,000 parishioners of St. Michael's, walking is the only form of transportation available. Because of this and the large area covered, St. Michael's has nine smaller mission churches or chapels in addition to the large church in the middle of Plaisance. This allows parishioners to go to church that is a much shorter walking distance. However, Fr. Andre` and his associate pastor Fr. Joseph do

not travel to each mission church every Sunday, so many functions or needs are met by trained lay people in the church (Sylvestre, letter to author).

From my observation, most, if not all, of the parishioners of St. Michael's live in very small homes constructed of wood, tin, or possibly concrete blocks. These homes consist of one or two rooms with dirt floors. These homes have no electricity and no running water. The children usually walk several hours each day to fill up a few jugs of water for their families. This is why clean water is too precious for them to think of using it to wash their hands. This clean water is to be used only for drinking and cooking, and never to be wasted. Cooking is primarily done over a charcoal fire.

St. Francis Parish is a personal parish. This means that it is defined not by the geographical area it serves, but by the people who are its members. St. Francis is also defined as a university parish because it serves primarily Ball State students, faculty and staff. Thus, most of St. Francis' parishioners are dedicated to lifetime learning. It is therefore understandable that there is much to learn and teach each other in this relationship. St. Francis is also considerably smaller with approximately 4,000 parishioners if you include all the Catholic students at Ball State University. A number of Ball Memorial Hospital employees are also members of St. Francis Parish. The city of Plaisance has a medical clinic, but up until this past November, there was no doctor and only one nurse to work at this clinic. This is one of the reasons that medical concerns have always been high on the parish's list of needs.

The average parishioner of St. Francis is college educated, or working towards that goal, and lives in a house or apartment with at least five rooms. These homes also probably contain many of the modern conveniences like microwave and conventional ovens, televisions, phones, washer and dryer, and many others that most people take for granted. The people of St. Michael's have none of these. When asked, Fr. Andre` said that the average parishioner of St. Michael's had at most 4 years of schooling. They wash their clothes in the nearby river. When I visited Plaisance in May of 1999, the city had only four phone lines. These phone lines were located in one building where one could come and pay incredibly high rates to make a single phone call. Since then Fr. Andre` has installed a phone in the parish rectory. The average yearly salary of the resident, or working, parishioners of St. Francis is estimated at \$40,000 (Kiefer, personal interview). Ninety percent of the population of Haiti earns less than \$150 a year (HPTP pamphlet). (See Appendix D for more facts about Haiti.) The pictures included in Appendix E might help to paint an image of some aspects of life in Haiti. However, the most incredible thing I witnessed in Haiti, the spirit of the people, can never be captured on film.

Importance of the Twinning Relationship

Through this comparison you can see that these two communities are quite different. Yet, maybe we are not so different. The purpose of the relationship between these two communities is not that the rich help the poor. Perhaps that may have been a thought in the beginning, but once teams from

St. Francis started going to visit, the parishioners of both parishes learned very quickly that it was much more than that. Each community has much to offer the other. When Fr. Andre` was once asked if St. Francis should send more people to visit or just send the money, he said that our presence there was much more important than any money. This shows that the relationship between St. Francis Parish and St. Michael's Parish is most important because it is a friendship and a sharing of ideas, feelings, and gifts. It is not the material goods or money that we bring, but the human encounter that is real and meaningful. As Fr. John Kiefer said when I asked him how we, the two parishes, help each other, "We give them hope, they give us faith, and we give each other love."

After reflecting with others about our experiences with Haiti, I have a better understanding of why the twinning relationship between St. Francis and St. Michael's Parishes is so important. The community of St. Francis can do much to share its medical knowledge and supplies to improve the quality of care for the people of St. Michael's Parish. St. Francis Parish can also share its material wealth by providing supplies for the schools and money to help pay teachers. Donated money has also helped to build a radio station for St. Michael's Parish, which Fr. Andre` uses to get various information out to his people. On the last service trip, the St. Francis team helped some of the parishioners of St. Michael's build a latrine that would serve two families who lived next to each other. St. Francis has also sent down various tools, clothes and other supplies that Fr. Andre` distributes to his people. While these things

are all needed gifts, the relationship is also very important for the spiritual gifts the parishes give to and receive from each other.

The people of St. Michael's Parish are a people of great faith, who truly trust that God will provide for them. They are a people of great sickness and great poverty, but also of great hope. An expression that many Haitians use often is 'Bon dieu bon', which we were told means that God is good and tomorrow will be better. What a great attitude of faith and hope!

They are a very generous people. Each team that has visited St. Michael's has had a party thrown for them at the end of the week. The parishioners of St. Michael's throw this party and give the team gifts as a way of showing their appreciation for what we do. They are even more generous to readily welcome us into their lives, their homes, and their hearts. In the crazy, hectic world we live in, I think the people of Plaisance provide a wonderful example of living each day with simplicity and joyful hearts.

When Fr. Andre` and his parish were asked why they think the twinning relationship between St. Francis and St. Michael's Parishes is so important, many of them responded in the same way. They said that we remind them that the Catholic Church is really universal. They also said that the relationship helps them to understand that our God is the same God and we are all parts of the Body of Christ. They said that the relationship helps us all to have a better understanding of what it means to be Catholic, what it means to care for other

as Jesus taught us (Sylvestre, letter to author). I think these are the most important things we learn from each other.

Impact of the Twinning Relationship

I think that this relationship between two communities is also important because of the impact it has on both communities and the world. I asked Fr. Andre` Sylvestre how he thought the relationship between our two communities impacts the community of Plaisance. He responded by saying that his parishioners feel that they are not alone. He said that his parishioners pray every Sunday for their sister parish of St. Francis and that when they speak of St. Francis' Parish, they feel united to their brothers and sisters who live in a country that is different from their own. Fr. Andre` believes that the impact has been great. The relationship helps his people to have better health, clean water, materials for school, and a broadcasting radio for the parish. This radio impacts his parishioners a great deal. It allows the sick people to hear the Sunday masses on the radio. Fr. Andre` also broadcasts educational information and spiritual formation on the radio. The relationship helps the people of Plaisance hope that the future will be better. It also helps them to work together for the sake of this future (Sylvestre, letter to author).

Medical Impact

The impact on the community of Plaisance from a medical standpoint is incredible. Three wells have been dug to help provide the community with clean

drinking water. We pay ten salaries to staff a couple of the Plaisance area medical clinics. St. Francis supplies two of these clinics with medicines quarterly. The medical team has performed multiple surgeries, sent an unbelievable amount of supplies and equipment, and even brought one patient to Indianapolis for heart surgery. They have established some ongoing relationships with patients and provided thousands of people in the Plaisance area with needed medication and treatment. The medical team sends 14 boxes of medication prior to their February trip each year. Twenty bags, totaling 1400 pounds, of medication and supplies travels with them. Another 600 to 700 pounds of medicine is sent throughout the rest of the year, not to mention soap and other medical supplies that travels with the service teams. While this is a huge help, it seems only to make a small dent in the great need for medical assistance (Mengelt, personal interview).

Impact on Muncie and Larger Community

The impact of this relationship is as far reaching if not farther reaching in our community. At this time, three medical teams and four service teams have visited Plaisance. That means that more than thirty-five people from our community have experienced Haiti first hand. Each of the team members who were part of the service teams was asked to write letters to friends and family asking for prayers and support. Many of them also spoke at their home parishes to ask for prayers. This has involved countless others in the relationship through prayer, support, and understanding. One also has to imagine how many more

people will become involved in some similar twinning relationship when these students, on fire for Haiti, move on to another new parish after graduating.

Numerous people from Muncie have become involved in the twinning relationship without actually traveling to Plaisance. People volunteer to help collect, count, sort, and pack various supplies we take to Haiti. Many also donate money various times throughout the year to help the people of Haiti. Several area businesses have become involved in the twinning relationship as well. Knapp Supply learned about the twinning relationship when asked about wrenches that might help to fix some broken water pipes in Plaisance. Fazoli's has participated in fundraisers for the service teams. Area schools have become involved by collecting and donating school supplies that have been sent to St. Michael's Parish. Each fall, the medical team has a golf outing to raise funds. Many area businesses provide great support to this event. It also has a large impact by simply raising awareness throughout Muncie.

Impact on Ball Memorial Hospital

Another large impact of this twinning relationship between St. Francis and St. Michael's Parishes is the impact on Ball Memorial Hospital. Ball Hospital supports two medical missions, one led by a retired physician who travels to Mexico each year, and the medical mission that is part of the twinning program at St. Francis. The medical team from St. Francis orders most of their drugs from Europe and receives donations from Catholic Charities and various pharmaceutical companies. However, Ball Hospital provides them with anything

they can't find elsewhere, and allows them to buy it at cost. The hospital also donates any old equipment and any supplies that are leftover from boxes opened in the hospital. People throughout the hospital staff talk openly about what the St. Francis medical team does. Each department does what they can to collect old or leftover supplies to take ownership in the mission. Many people also donate their time to help in various ways. The medical team has also started taking a medical resident on the trip with them. That student learns a great deal about compassion and missionary importance that hopefully he/she will carry on into his/her medical practice. After the first medical resident came back this year and talked about his experience, the medical team now has a long list of residents who want to go with them to Haiti (Mengelt, personal interview).

No matter how each person is involved in this relationship, we are all greatly impacted by it. The connection between the two cultures through our twinning relationship helps us all to learn more about God's people. The universality of the Catholic Church becomes apparent to all when we can celebrate the mass together. Our spirit and faith are things that we share with each other, and we may not even be aware how these gifts affect each other. The awareness this relationship brings helps us to reevaluate what we need and want, and more importantly, who we are. As a parish, the people of St. Francis are beginning to understand what the twinning program is all about. There has been a shift from asking what can we do to looking at what God is doing. The

beautiful lesson that we are learning is that we are only the instruments used by God to bring about miraculous things. This is much bigger than we are.

The relationship between St. Francis of Assisi Parish and St. Michael's Parish began only a few short years ago. It began only as a small seedling of a thought in the mind of one, but in these few short years, the relationship has grown and blossomed very rapidly. The impact on both communities is so far reaching that it can never be fully realized. The ripple effect has caused this impact to spread beyond these two communities and will no doubt involve countless millions around the world. This twinning relationship is very important because it touches many, many lives. In the touching of many lives, hearts are imprinted and people are changed forever.

APPENDIX A

The List of Needs of the Parish of St. Michael

- 1) Medical Problems: need for doctors, medication for the St. Henry-Rose Thomas Dispensary, and money to pay the aid nurses of St. Henry-Rose Thomas Dispensary.
- 2) Money to buy broadcasting radio (\$1500).
- 3) Salary for the professors of the St. Vincent de Paul School (\$12,000/ year).
- 4) Supplies for school (pens, pencils, paper, books, etc.).
- 5) Money (a contribution) to build a school for the 'children of the streets'.
- 6) Financial rewards for the catechists.
- 7) Sponsors for some students.
- 8) Clothing for the poor.
- 9) Materials for the young women who attend school for sewing, cooking, and artisan things.

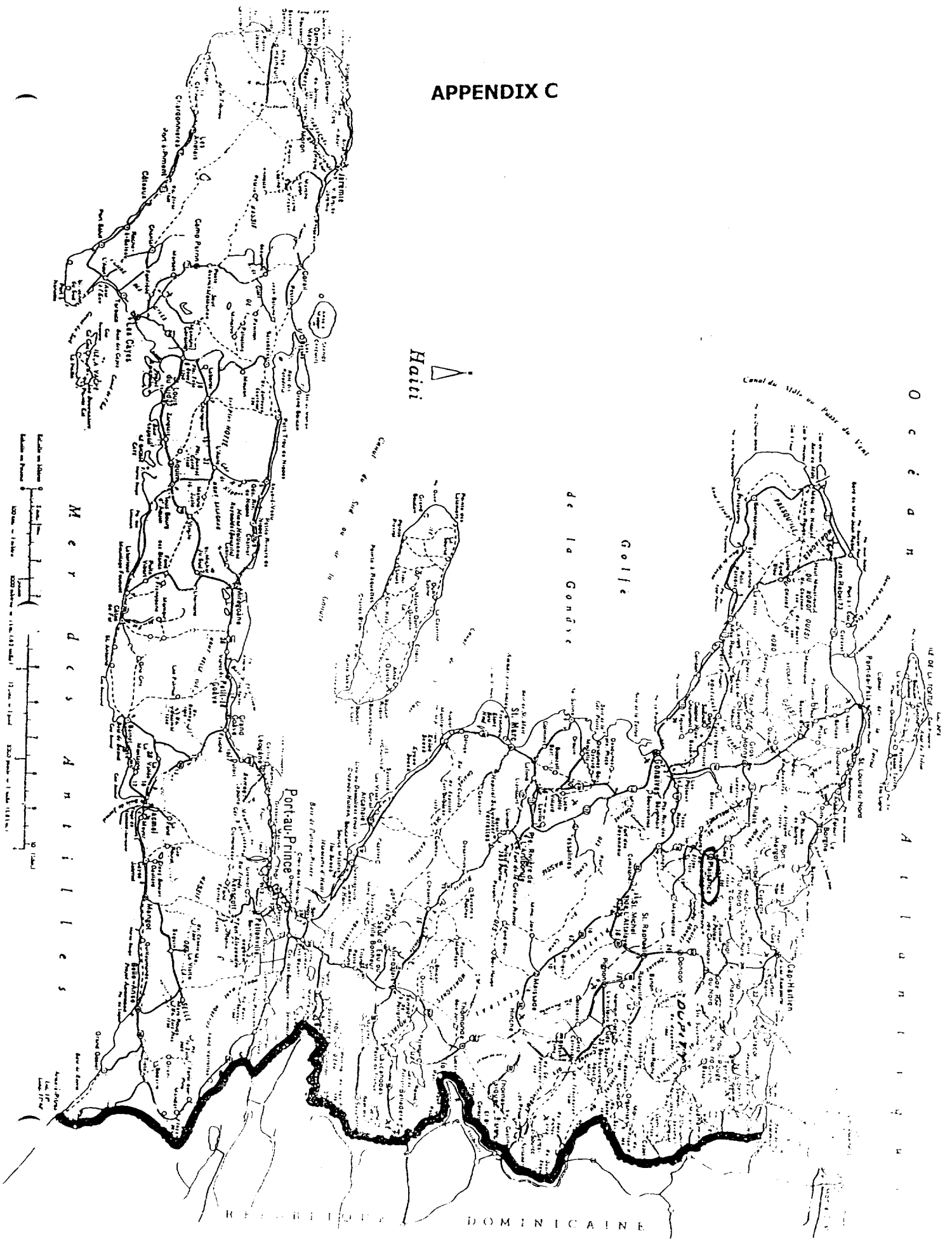
APPENDIX B

St. Francis Twinning Program Calendar

- January: Knights of Columbus fundraising dinner
Second collection to be delivered by the medical team
- February: Medical Team trip to Haiti
Knights of Columbus fundraising dinner
Lenten soup cans passed out (Same idea as Operation Rice bowl-
Money goes to Plaisance)
- March: Soup cans collected
Service Team spring break trip to Haiti
- April: Holy Thursday collection
- May: Mother's Day vitamin collection
- June/July: Sale of Haiti stock by confirmation students (every other year)
- August: Collection of school supplies
- September: Medical Team golf tourney
- October: Trick or Treat bags (fill bag with toothpaste, soap, antacids, etc.)
- November: Service Team T-shirt signing fundraiser
- December: Advent tree (parishioners pick up an ornament and bring whatever
item was listed on their ornament)

The first two service teams traveled to Haiti in May of consecutive years, but the general plan is that the service trip will align with Ball State spring break. Also note that this is a general list of events that may be revised or updated in the future.

APPENDIX C



Haiti

Golfe de la Gonave

Océan Atlantique

Antilles

Mer des Antilles

REPUBLIQUE DOMINICAINE

APPENDIX D

Facts About Haiti

Population: 6.8 million (Urban, 27%; Rural, 73%)

Percent under age 15 = 40%

Capital, Port-au-Prince – 1.2 million

Language – Creole and French

Religion: 80% Catholic; Voodoo widely practiced

Economy: 90% of the population earns less than \$150 a year

70% unemployment

Average daily wage \$3.00

Health: Infant mortality rate – 123 per 1,000 births

Life expectancy – 54

27% of children die before age 5

One Haitian child dies every five minutes from malnutrition, dehydration, and diarrhea.

One Doctor for every 50,000 people

Education: 80% illiteracy rate

3% of Haitian rural children finish primary school

5% attend high school

APPENDIX E

Pictures from Haiti



Without running water in the homes, children walk miles to a broken water pipe to fill a couple of gallon jugs with clean water for their families.





Women spend hours washing their families' clothes in the river. The clothes are then laid on the river bank or hung on bushes to dry.



Above is the principal of one school in the mountains outside of Plaisance. Below is one of the school's open classrooms with a dirt floor and a tin roof that shields the children from the hot sun.





Other area schools borrow meeting space. (Above) The St. Vincent de Paul school borrows the school building where some monks hold classes in the mornings. (Below) Another mountain school holds class in one of St. Michael's mission chapels.





A solar powered generator supplies energy to St. Michael's radio station which broadcasts mass as well as many informative and educational programs. Those parishioners lucky enough to have a battery powered radio can listen from their homes in the mountains.



WORKS CITED

Haiti Parish Twinning Program. Nashville, TN.

Forgille, Pam. Personal interview. 28 March 2001.

Hildenbrand, Leslie. Personal interview. 25 March 2001.

Kiefer, Fr. John. Personal interview. 21 February 2001.

Mengelt, Leanne. Personal interview. 30 March 2001.

Sylvestre, Fr. Andre`. Letter to the author. 11 March 2001.