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## Haiti

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who were kept in line by thugs linked to Haiti's dictators, and by the Haitian military.

In 1994, leading a multinational force, the United States intervened in Haiti once again, though this time it sent 20,000 troops to reinstall President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's first democratically elected leader.

Aristide had been deposed in a 1991 coup that ended his brief presidency, which had begun in 1990. March 15 will see most of the U.S. troops depart, having shepherded the first peaceful transition of political power in the nation's history. Aristide turned over his position as president to Rene Preval, who was elected last December and inaugurated in February.

And diocesan Catholics involved in Haiti wonder where Haiti will go now that U.S. troops are leaving and Aristide — arguably the most popular political figure in Haitian history — is no longer president.

"With the U.S. occupation, there was much less violence," commented Robert McNamara, a parishioner at St. Joseph's Parish in Penfield. "I think when they pull out ... there will be a little more risk to personal safety."

McNamara oversees New York Friends of the Orphans, which raises money on behalf of, among other projects, an orphanage and a hospice in Haiti run by Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos (Our Little Brothers). Run by a U.S. priest, NPH aids orphans in Haiti, Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua and the United States.

A stockbroker by trade, McNamara spends much of his free time attempting to garner sponsors for the orphans served by NPH. He outlined a number of means by which diocesan Catholics could help orphans in Haiti.

For example, for \$20 per month a donor can sponsor a "godchild" who would receive food, clothing, shelter, basic medical care and an education. Sponsors can write to their godchildren, and McNamara noted that for some of the orphans, a sponsor is literally the only family they have.

"They really don't have many relationships," he said of the orphans he had met in Haiti. "It's a great feeling to know you're really making a difference in someone's life."

In addition to funds from U.S. and international sponsors, McNamara said that St. Louis' World Hunger Task Force Com-



Courtesy of Robert McNamara  
Funds and volunteers in Haiti are combating slums such as this (above) in the Port-Au-Prince area.

mittee aids his work in Haiti. Last Christmas, the committee raised \$3,000 for the orphanage through a Christmas ornament sale, according to Marcia Mendola, the committee's co-chairwoman.

Meanwhile, along with Deacon Ecker and other St. Joseph's parishioners, Dr. Michael R. Mirwald, an obstetrician/gynecologist, has made several trips to Haiti since 1988. With other area physicians, Mirwald has helped organize shipments of medical supplies to clinics in Port-au-Prince, supplies donated by such institutions as Rochester General Hospital.

Mirwald added that St. Joseph's also helps out a girls' orphanage in Port-au-Prince, and Deacon Ecker noted that St. Joseph's tithing committee includes the parish's Haitian projects in its regular list of projects to support.

Mirwald pointed out that he travels to Haiti once or twice a year for the chance to change people's health care for the better.

"The reward is just seeing the need, and seeing the people use what we can offer," Mirwald said.

Like other diocesan Catholics volunteering in Haiti, Mirwald and Deacon Ecker welcomed the peaceful transition of presidential power in February, but feared that violence might escalate when the U.S. troops leave. But both men said they will continue to go to Haiti regardless of the level of violence there.

"If you waited for a real guaranteed safe

time, you'd never go," Mirwald commented.

To stem the potential for violence and political upheaval, Haiti and its international friends need to build the nation's infrastructure, according to diocesan observers of Haiti. That, in part, is what motivates Corpus Christi Parish to focus on rebuilding a health clinic in the countryside town of Borgne, explained Father James Callan, Corpus' administrator.

Since 1979, Corpus has donated more than \$200,000 to various efforts to help Haiti, and currently, Maureen Nielsen, a parishioner, works with orphan boys in Port-au-Prince.

Corpus even has a sister parish — Immaculate Conception — in Port-au-Prince's Cite Soleil, considered by many experts to be one of the worst slums in the world.

"Most people will tell you 'Not even God knows how many people live here,'" Nielsen wrote in a letter sent to the *Catholic Courier* last fall. "It is a place where poverty has reached unimaginable heights, a place where food, clothing and shelter are luxuries."

To prevent more such slums, Corpus is focusing on the Borgne health clinic project as a new way of looking at Haiti's problems, Father Callan said.

"The new thinking in the Third World is that it's important to keep the services out in the countryside," he said. "What's happening in the Third World is that ur-

banization is killing them."

Father Callan and other observers explained that rural people in poor nations often lack employment in their hometowns, so they leave for crowded cities, which also offer no jobs.

According to Rose-marie Chierici, a Haitian native and Corpus parishioner, after researching the needs of rural Haitians, the parish formed Corpus/Haiti, a committee of parishioners who seek to help villages like Borgne stem the flow of rural migration to urban Haiti.

Despite massive poverty-related problems, Borgne boasts a vibrant school system and an active Catholic community, Chierici said. Several committees have arisen in recent years to deal with the town's health, education and social justice questions, she added.

Corpus/Haiti has enlisted volunteers and donors from the University of Rochester, St. Joseph's Parish and the State University of New York at Geneseo, where Chierici teaches anthropology, to assist the rebuilding of Borgne's health clinic.

Corpus/Haiti will also send medical personnel to Borgne to train nurse-midwives, and will send a cardiologist in June, she said.

Projects like the ones supported by Corpus, St. Joseph's and St. Louis parishes are crucial to the future of Haiti, where most people are more concerned about the right to eat than the right to vote, observers commented.

Deacon Ecker added that Haiti must rely on its friends throughout the world, including the Diocese of Rochester, for some time if it is ever able to take its place among the world's successful nations.

"I don't know that the country is ready to be able to take care of the problems all by itself," he said. "It really needs some help from the outside. I think providing (Haitians) with jobs and food is as important as providing them with a stable government."

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**EDITORS' NOTE:** *Corpus/Haiti* needs volunteers with expertise in computers, construction, agriculture, engineering, teaching and teacher training, medical care, and other areas. For information, call Beth Robinson at 716/385-1025, or Rose-marie Chierici at 473-1373.

To learn about sponsoring a Haitian orphan, call New York Friends of the Orphans at 716/381-5952, or 1-800-528-6455.

For information on assisting St. Joseph Parish's Haiti efforts, call 716/586-0674.

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