



**CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY'S
OPERATION STARFISH®
NEWSLETTER
MARCH, 2009**

Dear Friends of *Operation Starfish®*:

Let us begin with a brief meditation...

"I am always asking God to give me and maintain in me what He promises in the Bible – a heart of flesh to replace my heart of stone. Because only such a heart can truly love – and without this love, it would be worse than a waste of time to try and help the boys. Better I should take up some kind of manual labor – build chairs or something – than try and build men without relying on god's love."

--- *Fr. Attilio Stra, a Salesian Missionary in Haiti,
who runs an orphanage for homeless boys
rescued from the streets of Port-au-Prince*

SHELTER FROM THE STORM – PAYING IT FORWARD

Nativity parishioners often ask "What do the people in our Nativity Village developments say about our work?" "How have their lives changed after they move into a new house? Here's a particularly poignant message from a woman in Nativity Village at Prolongé, near Cap-Haitien...

Chris Frosch, a writer with Food For The Poor, was in Nativity Village II this past December, talking with residents about the effects of the hurricanes last Fall. He was visiting families who live in the new houses built by Food For The Poor with funding from Nativity's Operation Starfish®. He also visited some of the many families still living in an adjacent swamp.

According to Chris, Adinine Jean lives in a Food For The Poor house in Nativity Village. As storm conditions worsened, she walked over to the swamp to see if she could help anyone. "Conditions were very bad," she said. "On this side [Nativity Village] there was no flooding. But on the other side, the water was rising. Before the water got too high, I

went over to the swamp to look for people. I recognized five people and invited them back to my home.”



Chris asked Adinine why she did this. She replied simply, “I’m a Christian just like you.” She continued, “They stayed about 8 days. I shared my food with them, and also Father Duken [the local priest] helped us out.”

Chris asked her about her faith and she said, “My faith in God directs my every move in life. When I have a problem, I pray to God and He helps me out.” She said that other people in Nativity Village took in their neighbors from the swamp as well.

Chris then asked her what she would like to say to the people who made Nativity Village possible. She responded, “I would like to tell them, ‘thank you!’ Father Duken helped us out, and now we are saved. I would like the people in the swamp to get out of their situation and have an opportunity like we do in Nativity Village.”



Another woman, standing nearby, had this message for the parishioners of Church of the Nativity: “I thank you all from the bottom of my heart. I thank you — if not for me — for my children and grandchildren. I keep you all in my prayers.”

With the proceeds from Operation Starfish® during Lent, 2009, Nativity will build another 80 houses, provide more wells and pumps for clean drinking water, and install sanitation systems. In addition, working through Food For The Poor, Nativity will begin development of a 30-acre farm to provide locally grown food and create more jobs for the community.

LENTEN STARFISH BEGINS AT NATIVITY

One evening just before Lent in 1998, Fr. Dick Martin took a walk with his dog and wondered “*What if...*” What if our parish could add meaning to the Lenten sacrifice by giving up a topping on a pizza or an order of fries, and use the money saved to do something for the poor? What if each family could save 50 cents a day during the 40 days of Lent? Could we create a miracle just like the wedding feast at Cana? The parish thought it was a great idea. Fr. Martin put out a simple wicker basket during Lent, and by Easter, each family’s small sacrifices had yielded \$67,000! What a miracle!

With Food For The Poor, Nativity built houses at Canapé Verte, Haiti, that first year. The following Lent, parishioners wanted to do it again. But first, Fr. Martin wanted to see what had been done with the previous year's gift, so he took 12 parishioners to Haiti to visit the families living in their new houses. "While our people were happy that some lives had been changed for the better, they were depressed by the depth of poverty they saw," observed Fr. Martin. That's the moment when he told the "Starfish Story:" [See story in box on last page]

At that point, a parishioner spoke up and said, "Let's keep doing this, and let's call our work 'Operation Starfish.'" Everyone agreed. Eleven years and \$2 million later, Operation Starfish® has been trademarked by Food For The Poor, and the concept has spread to hundreds of churches, schools and organizations across the country.

This year, Nativity's Lenten Starfish project will be the development of a 5th Nativity Village project in Haiti - **Nativity Village at Caracol**. Located near Cap-Haitien, on the north coast of the island, this site was selected for the 2009 Operation Starfish® campaign. One of Nativity's two fishing village co-op's is located nearby at Madras. The Caracol development will include 80 houses, sanitation, water wells and a 30-acre farm.

Nativity Village at Caracol will also include a community center with a sewing co-op honoring Mrs. Georgette Martin. Here, young adults will be taught dressmaking, pattern design and production of school uniforms and table linens. The funding for this vocational training component comes from donations in memory of Fr. Martin's Mom. The Martin family designated Operation Starfish® for gifts in honor of Mrs. Martin, who was an accomplished dressmaker.

The same wicker basket is now sitting at the entrance to the sanctuary in Nativity Church. And the same simplicity of the Starfish concept is at work. One person at a time, Nativity will continue to make a difference.

For more information, or a fact sheet on Operation Starfish®, contact jim@starfishmission.org or go to www.starfishmission.org. For information on Food For The Poor, go to www.foodforthe poor.org.

LETTERS TO FR. MARTIN

Dear Fr. Martin,

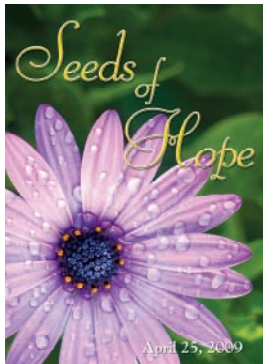
My family and I are dedicating our 2009 Operation Starfish to your mother. Just as mothers positively influence their children's lives, what we do as a community of God can also have an influence on others. And, God knows that the people of Haiti certainly need and deserve the support of all of us who don't face poverty each day of our lives.

My Dad was the Methodist in the family & years ago he & my mother went on a cruise that stopped in Cap Haitien & when he relayed the details of the trip, the words "overwhelming poverty" punctuated his conversation. He visited an old Colonial fort during the afternoon stayover, but it was the poverty that he always remembered.

Thanks for continuing this mission of hope.

*Sincerely,
Kathleen & Phil*

"SEEDS OF HOPE" – A GALA EVENING PLANNED



Nativity parishioners Melinda Engelbrektsson and Kathryn Scully are hosting a Gala Benefit for Food For The Poor's Housing Program at Waterford at Fair Oaks, Fairfax, Virginia, on Saturday, April 25, 2009. Ann Curry, of Dateline NBC and Anchor of the "Today Show," along with Chris Matthews, Anchor of MSNBC's "Hardball," are serving as co-chairs. A 5-night trip for two to Los Cabos, Mexico is being given away, and there will be a silent auction with many delightful arts, crafts and gifts. Dinner and dancing is included in the evening. For more information, <http://www.foodforthe poor.org/virginia>

BOOK REVIEW: FEEDING AND BEING FED

Following her husband's untimely death, Margaret Trost visited Haiti to heal her broken heart through service. Struggling to make sense of the extreme poverty, and touched by the warmth and resilience of those she met, she partnered with a local community and together they developed a program that now serves thousands of meals a week to those in need. On That Day, Everybody Ate tells the story of her remarkable journey.

I read this book on a recent flight from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C. Margaret Trost's first trip to Haiti took place, like mine, in 1999. Also like my first journey to Haiti, Margaret's trip came as a result of a suggestion from a friend. And she, like me, was filled with apprehension and second thoughts. So I was hooked on the story – it felt very much like my own pilgrimage to the poor.

Margaret Trost's story of her 10-year relationship with the people of Haiti is a compelling journal of making friends, seeing needs in each other, and filling those needs with love and action. She shows engagement with the poor and destitute to be a two-way street.

We all have gifts for each other – we have ways of healing each other – we can lead each other to faith and fulfillment.

For anyone who has traveled to Haiti, and for those who are thinking about making a mission trip to this land, I recommend this book.

Trost, Margaret. On That Day Everybody Ate. Koa Books, Kihei, Hawai'i. 2008. (Available at booksellers, at Amazon.com, and at your public library)

--- Editor

LAZARUS SEEKS TEACHERS

Our friends at the Lazarus Project, a partner of Food For The Poor, are looking for teacher volunteers to spend a week in Haiti this July teaching children hands-on skills. The **July Enrichment Program at Village of Hope** runs from Saturday, July 25th until Saturday, August 1.

Classes may include: Art (many different types!), Cross-Stitch, Woodworking, Crochet, Simple Robotics, Music, Solar Oven (building and cooking), Dance and Metal Working, Sewing and Basket Weaving.

Do you have a talent or skill you are willing to share with the children at Village of Hope? Teaching them a skill will bless them not only this summer but for years to come. And, as always, you will receive so much more!

If you are interested, please contact Marni Maree mmaree@cox.net or Pastor Larry Bollinger villageofhope@hughes.net. For more information on the Lazarus Project, go to: <http://www.lazarusprojecthaiti.org>.

STARFISH EXHIBIT AT L. A. CONGRESS

Food For The Poor sponsored an exhibit booth at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress in February. The Congress is sponsored by the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles and it is the largest catechetical and liturgical gathering in the world. More than 40,000 participants enjoyed 3 days of presentations, exhibits and liturgy. At Food For The Poor's booth, the Operation Starfish® concept was featured. Nearly 200 additional churches and organizations expressed interest in follow-up contacts by Food For The Poor. Nativity pastor Fr. Dick Martin and



Nativity CCD co-directors Sr. Mary Attilia Todaro and Sr. Donatella Merulla, along with Nativity catechists Pat Attiliis and Terri Baker visited the booth, staffed by Wendy Bourgault and Jim McDaniel from Food For The Poor.

ONE PENNY AT A TIME, YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

How often do you go to Google or Yahoo! to do an internet search? Do you realize that these search engines generate billions of dollars in advertising revenue? Well now there is a way to direct a small amount from every search toward your favorite charity. Powered by Yahoo!, the new search engine www.GoodSearch.com will split 50% of its ad revenue with non-profits. This works out to about one penny per search.

We have listed Nativity's Operation Starfish as a benefiting charity. All you have to do is go to www.GoodSearch.com; find the "Who Do You GoodSearch For?" Box; type "Operation Starfish"; and start searching. After you do this the first time, *Operation Starfish* will automatically become your default charity. It's easy to change, however, if you prefer that another good cause receive your search pennies. For example, our friends at **Food For The Poor** are also listed.

If you have any questions, please let us know. Meanwhile, good searching!!!

MARCH PRAYER REQUESTS

Our readers have submitted the following prayer requests for this month:

† For Fr. Jean Printemps and Fr. Duken Augustin, and those they serve in Haiti, that God grant all of them strength, courage and the resources they need to continue their mission work;

† For the repose of the soul of Fr. Jack Hughes, of McLean, Virginia, and for his sister and his friends, who will miss his kindness and humor and especially his St. Patrick's Day rendition of "Danny Boy;"

† For Smiley St. Aubin, of Washington, D.C., whose young life was cut short by a stroke, and for his family and friends who grieve the loss of this positive and happy man;

† For Bishop George Nkuo and Fr. Daniel Ache and those whom they serve in Cameroon, that God bless them and their people with encouragement;

† For individuals who are hurting, families that are divided, and nations at war, may the peace of Christ be felt by all those who struggle;

† For Sr. Francis Annice, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, that her recovery from hand surgery be swift and pain free;

† For Pauline Girard, of Tewksbury, Massachusetts, who has kept our work in Haiti in her prayers, may she now be in our prayers as she deals with serious illness;

† For all our friends at Food For The Poor, and for all those who work here and abroad to alleviate suffering;

† For the people of Haiti, who struggle against all odds to get back on their feet and to bring their land back to life;

For these and all our intentions, hear us, Oh Lord...

HAITIAN WISDOM

“Piti, piti, na rive!”

Little by little, we will arrive.

CLOSING THOUGHT...

“When my mother was pregnant with me, six doctors tried to convince her to have an abortion. ‘You’re too poor to have another child,’ they told her. ‘You won’t survive; your health isn’t good enough. And don’t you know there are too many people in Jamaica already?’ But my father objected. ‘Doctor, there is a soul at stake here, and it belongs to God. And what if this baby were to become a preacher some day? I would never want to think that I had destroyed a preacher’s life.’ And so, because of my parents’ faith and reverence for life, I came into this world.”

--- Bishop Herro Blair

OPERATION STARFISH: MAKING A DIFFERENCE, ONE PERSON AT A TIME

As a young boy walked the beach at dawn, he noticed an old man ahead of him picking up starfish and tossing them into the sea. Catching up with the man, the boy asked why he was doing this. The old man explained to the boy that the stranded starfish would die if left in the morning sun.

“But the beach goes on for miles and there are millions of starfish,” exclaimed the boy. “How can your effort make any difference?”

*The old man looked at the starfish in his hand and then threw it safely into the waves. He turned to the boy and said, “**It made a difference to that one.**”*

--Based on the writing of Loren Eiseley

NEW SUBSCRIPTION? If you have a friend who would like to receive this newsletter, go to www.starfishmission.org to sign up, or send a note to Operation Starfish, Church of the Nativity, 6400 Nativity Lane, Burke, VA 22015.

CANCEL YOUR SUBSCRIPTION? If you no longer wish to receive OPERATION STARFISH NEWSLETTER, send an email to jim@starfishmission.org or send a note to the address above.

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Edited this month by Jim McDaniel (jim@starfishmission.org)