PARTNERSHIP HAITI

40 YEARS OF MISSION AND MINISTRY IN CANGE

A SUMMARY BY HAROLD G. MORSE, M.D.

Early Cange church // 1985

INTRODUCTION

In honor of the 40th anniversary of our diocesan partnership with the Haitian community of Cange, and on behalf of our World Missions Committee, is here written a brief history of our shared mission. In laying the foundation for this history, one is struck by how much our state of South Carolina has in common with Haiti, her Caribbean neighbor. Both areas were colonized and developed in the 17th and 18th century by European settlers searching for a better life, sponsored by European investors searching for greater riches. The two colonies also established their independence from their European overlords a mere 28 years apart (1776, 1804. Another very significant shared history is that of slavery. In both colonies the lion's share of the hard labor needed to settle and cultivate the land was done by enslaved Africans. Port-au-Prince and Charleston housed two of the largest slave markets in the New World. When the Republic of Haiti declared its independence from France after a slave revolt in 1804, there were still well over 100,000 enslaved Africans in South Carolina. The Episcopal Church was established in Haiti in 1861 by an African-American missionary two years before the Emancipation Proclamation was signed by President Lincoln. Our bonds are historic, complex, and deep.

Father Fritz Valdema, Madame Yolanda Lafontant, and Father Lafontant // 1981

BEGINNINGS

The modern connection of our own diocese to the Diocese of Haiti began in 1979 with a chance meeting in Port-au-Prince. Our newly ordained Bishop William A. Beckham was there attending a House of Bishop's function when Haitian Bishop Garnier, unsure how to entertain the young South Carolinian, assigned him to a young priest and age contemporary, Father Fritz Lafontant, for their free afternoon. Father Lafontant, a native of Port-au-Prince, had been assigned as priest-in-charge of St. Peter's Church in Mirabelais, so the two men set out on the challenging Route National 3 up to the Central Plateau. The bond was instant, strong and lifelong.

Father Lafontant was eager to share with his new friend a particularly impoverished area near Mirabelais. In the late 1950s, Haitian President Francois Duvalier secured an international development grant for a hydroelectric project which involved building a dam on the Artebonite River above Mirabelais. The Peligre Dam provided power to the cities of Port-au-Prince and Mirabelais.

However, with the creation of Lake Peligre, some of the most fertile farmland of the river valley was flooded displacing hundreds of previously self-supporting peasant families. They became landless in a subsistence agrarian economy creating an intense resettlement pocket of extreme poverty. The village of Cange was established high above Lake Peligre by these displaced squatters who were working hard to survive on the rocky hillside along Route National 3.

In 1979, infant mortality there was over 50% and life expectancy under 50 years. Childhood illnesses, particularly diarrheal illnesses and typhoid, were very common. In addition, access to water was very difficult requiring a hike down a steep trail that descended 800 vertical feet to a spring near the edge of the lake.

Despite these difficult conditions the community had already organized an open air school where they were attempting to provide education for their children. The two Episcopal priests, both family men, were touched by the industry, resilience, and determination evident in this community. They vowed to do something about it.

Lake Peligre near Cange (2nd largest lake in Haiti; formed by a dam on river) // 1954

The first day of Cange's running water system // 1985

WATER CANGE

Returning to upstate South Carolina Bishop Beckham shared with his flock what he had seen and began to solicit technical and financial support for addressing these desperate problems. Access to potable water was identified as a particularly important public health need. He invited a team of creative engineers from Greenville lead by Pierce Williams and John Page to visit Cange and address this priority. They quickly identified the spring at the bottom of the hill as a very valuable water source and designed an ingenious system. They would cap the spring to provide hydro power to a turbine connected to a piston pump which would raise water the 800 vertical feet to a cistern in the village. The diocese then organized a capital campaign, "Water Cange", to raise funds for this system and to build a better primary school building in the village for the children. They also laid the foundation of an Episcopal Church in the village. Response of parishes to this appeal was enthusiastic quickly exceeding the $500,000 goal. These three visionary, life-changing projects (water, school, and church) were completed and blessed in 1984, a short five years after the chance Lafontant-Beckham meeting and their visit to the community of Cange!

MEDICAL MISSIONS

Most of the early visitors to the village of Cange described their experiences as “life-changing”. As they returned home and shared with others what they had seen, it became increasingly clear that addressing primary health care needs of the community would also become an essential building block of our partnership. Volunteer doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals as well as interested lay people worked together to organize "medical work trips."

These medical teams brought with them basic diagnostic equipment and essential pharmaceuticals to address the common infectious diseases, nutritional deficiencies, and basic primary care needs of the community. Clinics were organized in primitive school or church buildings using the benches, desks, and even the alter in the church for examination of patients.

During these early visits, they encountered a young Harvard Medical School student name Paul Farmer who had also been very moved by his recent visits to Haiti.

Since he was an MD/PhD candidate at Harvard, he was required to do six months every year of “bench research” and was able to convince his chief of medicine that as a medical anthropologist, he should do it in rural Haiti. During his last three years of schooling, he spent half of his time in Haiti. All of his models of community health worker-based care, “accompaniment”, and directly observed therapy which were later successfully applied in rural settings around the world were developed in Cange. Also his dream of establishing a broader US-based and endowed organization to provide ongoing support for our work was born in Cange. Working along the same lines, the year he established Partners in Health in Boston was the same year we established our Partnership Cange Endowment in Columbia!

Medical clinic under the trees // c. 1981

Engineers installing running water system // 1985

HOSPITAL & CHILDREN'S PAVILLION

Now that Paul Farmer was in residence in Cange six months of every year, it became increasingly clear that the need to provide for some inpatient care was critical. During those years, healthcare was only available to the more well-to-do Haitians as cash payment was usually required in advance before service was rendered. This left the rural peasants of the Central Plateau with no access to care other than what we were able to provide in Cange. Forced to care for an increasing number of critically ill patients on mats on the dirt floor of the clinic, the dream of a hospital was born. Again with Bishop Beckham's guidance and leadership, a second ambitious capital campaign was launched in the diocese to raise funds for a hospital with a pediatric wing, the Children's Pavilion. Response to the campaign was spectacular again exceeding our $1 million goal as interest and support of our work continued to grow. The opening and dedication of the new hospital in 1995 was quite a gala for the community with four bishops in attendance: recently retired Haitian Bishop Luc Garnier and his successor Zache Duracin, along with our recently retired Bishop Beckham and his successor Dorsey Henderson. Over the next 20 years our hospital became the best in the Central Plateau and one of the best in the entire country, attracting patients from all around including many from the capital city of Port-au-Prince. Our medical work trips during these years focused more on general surgery and equipping and upgrading facilities and care in the operating room and inpatient facility. All of our work in Cange during this time continued under the watchful and loving eye of the Lafontant family. Father Fritz and his wife Yolande were now spending much of their time in Cange and their daughter Marie Flore was beginning to take a more active role.

Father Lafontant // 2008

CAMPAIGN FOR BREAD & WATER

During the decade of the 90's, as the community of Cange grew and prospered, the school was also expanded and gradually added secondary school level training leading to a baccalaureate degree. It was when these bright and talented graduates of our secondary school learned that there were limited job opportunities for them that Father Lafontant approached us with his dream of a vocational school.

As we entered the 21st century with significant community population growth, our beautiful 1984 water system was visibly aging and could no longer provide sufficient potable water for the growing complex. Road conditions along Route National 3 also continued to worsen until Haiti was awarded a European Union grant to pave the road all the way to Hinche. Since many of our water pipes were being exposed by the deteriorating roadway, we realized that with heavy equipment coming through our community something urgent would need to be done for the water system. Further study in consultation with engineers from Atlanta and Clemson also revealed that the turbine's impeller, in continuous use for over 20 years, had far exceeded its life expectancy. In addition they discovered that the earthen dam built to cap the spring had not been excavated

Lake Peligre, as seen from Cange

In 2006 the Diocese decided to launch the Campaign for Bread and Water to repair and upgrade the water system and to build Father Lafontant's vocational school in nearby Corporant. Despite the significant economic downturn of 2008 we exceeded our campaign goal of $2 million and completed the project by 2009.

In coordination with the Italian road construction team, our new water pipes were safely embedded in the roadway. Two new cisterns were built in the village, a new dam constructed with excavation to the clay layer and two new turbine-piston units were operational allowing for back up when one needed repair.

Project management and on-the-ground implementation of this project was increasingly done by engineering students and faculty at Clemson University and the newly formed Clemson Engineers for Developing Countries (CEDC), which was born in Cange! The new water system and vocational school, Centre de Formation Fritz Lafontant (CFFL) were blessed and dedicated in 2009 with Bishops Henderson and Duracin both in attendance.

EARTHQUAKE

At 5pm Tuesday afternoon on January 12, 2010, a catastrophic magnitude 7.0 earthquake with epicenter only 15 miles from downtown Port-au-Prince rocked Haiti to her core. Some 250,000 people died instantly with many more seriously injured. To worsen the crisis, much of the administrative and medical infrastructure of the capital city was destroyed including the largest hospitals, government buildings, and United Nations headquarters. Among the dead and injured were many of the daily administrative and healthcare professionals so desperately needed to coordinate the relief effort. . The village of Cange, located some 60 miles from the epicenter was unharmed and our Hopital Bon Sauveur in Cange was one of the best hospitals left standing in country. Refugees from the capital flooded the community along with homeless friends and family of village residents.

Despite the significant stress on local resources, Cange rose to the occasion and became a major center in the relief effort. Our diocese sent a large surgical team down in February to work tirelessly for two weeks providing desperately needed medical and surgical care. The church building itself was transformed into a medical triage and were moved to the external clinic. Much of the medical relief effort after the earthquake was coordinated by the struggling Haitian government along with Partners in Health. Resources were stretched thinner and thinner with the outbreak of cholera along the Artebonite River Valley, quickly spreading to the capital city. Despite Cange's location near the epicenter of the cholera epidemic, no cases of cholera were contracted within the bounds of our water system! However, we treated hundreds of cases contracted in the surrounding areas.

CANGE AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

The devastating impact that the 2010 earthquake had on our small, impoverished Caribbean neighbor could not be overstated. The ripple effect experienced by our village of Cange over the next 10 years was also substantial leading to a decade of painful growth and transition. As previously mentioned Partners in Health took on a larger national role and was given responsibility for administration of a new university teaching hospital built in nearby Mirabelais. Their resources were stretched very thin and their support for the village of Cange, particularly for the school, was by necessity greatly diminished.

The village of Cange also changed politically with the addition of many homeless refugees from the capital city who remained there since they had nowhere else to go. Support from our diocese was again desperately needed and again we rose to the occasion.

Travel may be local, regional, national (domestic), or international. In some countries, non-local internal travel may require an internal passport, while international travel typically requires a passport and visa. A trip may also be part of a round-trip, which is a particular type of travel whereby a person moves from one location to another and returns.

EDUSC welcomes a new Bishop, Andrew Waldo, consecrated in May 2010 only four months after the earthquake. Under his leadership, we launched yet another successful capital campaign to keep the school open and provide critical salary and administrative support during the first four years of this difficult transition. With the help of the Clemson students and engineers we maintained and improved the public health and economic infrastructure in Cange and in the surrounding villages.

The beloved Madame Lafontant died in the summer of that same year 2010 and Father Lafontant retired five years later at age 88. There followed a series of interim priests with very difficult shoes to fill. With the opening of the new teaching hospital in Mirabelais, our Hopital Bon Sauveur became less busy and our diocesan medical focus shifted somewhat, gearing more towards providing primary care services to the more remote villages in the

Dr. Reg Booker of EDUSC seeing a patient

Cange catchment area. Father Lafontant's daughter, Marie Flore launched an educational initiative, Summits Education, with its headquarters in Calusa, closer to the vocational school in Corporant. The vocational school is focusing primarily on agriculture and food security and Partners in Agriculture has become its own entity separate from Partners in Health.

Our current diocesan focus continues to be:

- Public health infrastructure, primarily maintaining our waste system and expanding access to portable water to surrounding villages.
- Provision of primary medical core coordinated with community health workers in the area's more remote villages.
- Support of education through scholarships (primary, secondary, and University) for students from the Cange area.
- Close involvement with Partners in Health, Partners in Agriculture, CFFL, Partners in Literacy, and Summits Education.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this brief summary has provided a useful overview of four decades of our shared diocesan mission in the Central Plateau of Haiti with our brothers and sisters in Cange and the surrounding area. We have been blessed by this opportunity and through the leadership of three bishops of Upper South Carolina and sequential Diocesan Executive Committees have maintained our focus there.

Through this mission we have been given the opportunity to share in the lives of thousands of Haitian villagers and families, learning from them and realizing with them a substantial improvement in health in body, mind, and spirit. It is the hope with our World Missions Committee that we will rededicate our efforts to this most worthy venture and opportunity to "Act in the World as the Body of Christ."

The Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina

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