

It was a warm fall day with a group of people from an eastern diocese and six persons from the Diocese of Haiti gathered for training in Evangelism ministry at a local hotel. Work began and at the first break, those from the hosting Diocese went out to buy cans of soda from a vending machine, while those from Haiti stayed in the conference room. Upon the resumption of the training, it was obvious that those with cans of soda all sat on one side of the room and continued to drink their sodas, while the Haitians sat on the other side of the room with no cans of soda or even glasses of water in front of them. The woman coordinating the event was approached and asked if there could be pitchers of water and glasses placed on the tables and her response was, "There are soda machines and a can only costs \$1; surely if anyone is thirsty, they can buy a can of soda!" So much for hospitality! ("Contribute to the needs of God's people and practice hospitality." Romans 12; 13)

At the next break, the management of the hotel was asked to provide pitchers of water and glasses for everyone at the tables, (which they gladly did) so that all could drink. A simple act...."whoever gives to one of these.....even a cup of cold water.....he shall not lose his reward." (Matthew 10; 42)

Life is a series of connections, sometimes remarkably obvious and other times rather obscure, but connected nonetheless. In what ways would water, the University of Kansas, the Baptismal Covenant, the Gospel, mutual respect, a Bible and a carving weave together an unforgettable journey? How would lives be touched and changed?

Near the end of the training, the attendees were to present their plan for Evangelism ministry in the diocese from whence they came. When it came time for our Haitian brothers and sisters to outline their plan, it came as a complete surprise to me,

their trainer, that they said they were inviting me to come to Haiti and train their people to be evangelists!

For a number of years, I had been a contract trainer for the Episcopal Church Center and had been assigned to a variety of opportunities across our Church, even sometimes in other countries. These six people, their Bishop, clergy and a nun, wanted to share their experience with their Diocese. Their training would intentionally be replicated. And so, in 1994 I left Alabama, where I was living at the time, and flew into Port-au-Prince to begin my work. Sister Margaret Mary, who had been at the training, met me at the airport and helped me through customs. I had taken my largest suitcase with the larger side completely filled with over-the-counter medical supplies, which was carefully scrutinized by the authorities. Each item was inspected to make sure the packages were sealed and the expiration dates stamped on the packages were current. One inspector challenged what I was doing and thankfully Sister Margaret Mary was able to determine that the woman had a headache and when a bottle of Tylenol was given to her, she passed me through customs with no further delay. Pere Octave LaFontant drove us into the city and took me first to the Convent on the Cathedral grounds and then to the home of my hostess.

I sat on the front porch of the Convent with the other sisters of the Community of St. Margaret. I learned of their history and work in Haiti; watched as children from the Cathedral school played on the grounds and then lined up to begin their return to their homes, for some a walk of up to two and three hours. (just talked with Sister Claire Marie at the Mother House for the Society of St. Margaret and learned that everything on the Cathedral grounds, the convent, the school, of course the Cathedral, the home for the

elderly and all the buildings were destroyed in the earthquake; however, all the nuns survived, thanks be to God.) Then I was taken to the home of my hostess to settle in and prepare for my training that would begin in several days.

The next morning, I attended a women's Bible study group at a local Methodist Church. The images still stand out for me—a large room in a church with an earthen floor; a door open onto the street; no electricity; eight women sitting around a table in the dim light from the open door; street noise from outside and a quiet expectation. When I was shown to my seat, there before me on the table was a bottle of water (an offer of hospitality) and seated across from me, a woman who could best be described as a skeleton with skin loosely stretched over her bones! I fully expected her to topple over and die before my very eyes!

The Bibles were open to Job, Chapter 24, which was read aloud and translated for me from Creole to English by my hostess. Then the woman sitting across from me said, speaking in a weak and wavery voice, "They (meaning Cedras, the dictator at the time and his government) have taken everything from me; my husband and my children, my home, my food, my clothes, my job, but there is one thing they cannot take from me—my faith. God is with me and will be to my last breath! Her eyes were alive with an interior fire and one could only imagine as she looked into the distance, that her earthly life would soon end, but life eternal would be hers! I cannot erase the image of this woman from my mind after these many years!

The next day, I was taken on a tour of the city and was overwhelmed with the teeming humankind pushing carts, pulling heavily laden wooden carts with large truck tires looking very much like beasts of burden, sweat glistening on their bodies and

muscles straining to pull their burden. When we drove by a river, it was filled with people doing laundry or taking a bath; children scavenged through the garbage along the water front fighting dogs and pigs for anything remotely edible; people sitting on the street with children milling about and a few cars and busses filled to overflowing capacity with passengers. And in the midst of all this teeming humanity sat the pristine white President's Palace behind a wrought iron fence with armed soldiers patrolling the grounds! And the poor and destitute sitting quietly on the street, watching, for what? One stop was an incredible art museum filled with art done by local artists, most of which told in paintings the decades and generations of plight of the people. One was of a man pulling one of those huge and heavy wooden carts moving out of darkness toward a brilliant light, which I was told was the hope of all Haitian people. Later I was to learn that this artist lived in New York City and a much larger rendition of that painting had sold there. Once again, the image of all those people is burned into my memory, as fresh today as they were those many years ago. Everywhere we went; the streets were crowded with people and armed soldiers watching everyone. This is not a scene that one from the United States sees.

The third day, I was driven to a conference center outside of Port-au-Prince that had at one time been a plantation. There I would meet eighty six lay people and priests, some of whom had walked for several days from across the country to get there and learn! I would work with a translator, the daughter of the previous Bishop. We based our work on the Baptismal Covenant from our Book of Common Prayer. When I was introduced, they all stood and said in English, "Welcome!" They each had a Prayer Book and several had Bibles, which were shared amongst them. Not many spoke English and I

did not speak Creole, so I had to remember to speak slowly and await the translation, watching the attendees writing down everything that was said. Many questions were asked, most of which were about what Scripture was used for these questions. (In preparing for my work in Haiti, I had gone to Sewanee to meet with Marion Hatchett who had worked on the BCP to ask that very question. He smiled and stated that he thought I could find the answers easily enough!) I spent quite some time with a Concordance, a Bible, a Book of Common Prayer and Marion Hatchett's Commentary on the American Prayer Book preparing my lessons. It was an invaluable learning for me and when shared with the participants, it became like a catechism class. They were hungry to learn and to understand. There was a constant conversation amongst them and myriad questions asked of me for more information.

Our format was simple: I would ask the questions, as stated in the Baptismal Covenant; one question per day, and they would respond. Then I would teach some of the Scripture and the history of the Creed. They worked so hard, took page after page of notes, engaged in discussions and listened intently to the teaching that I did. Thank you Marion Hatchett for putting my feet on the road to sharing. As a way of helping them to know what the Covenant was calling them to do, I would then ask, "In what way(s)....." The level of discussion rose and they became so excited to discover how God was calling them to live their Baptism. We worked into the night on each day—sometimes until midnight—because they were so enthusiastic. On the ninth and tenth days, they were to come up with specific plans for their return to their congregations and villages. Proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ took on tangible plans. No longer

were these just words, they became a call to evangelize (will you proclaim by word and deed the Good News of Jesus?)

I remember two young lay men who said they had gone to a woman's home in their village to talk to her about Jesus and she screamed at them to get away. She then said, "Look at me, I am starving and you dare to give me only words—I cannot eat them and live!" Their plan was to help her plant a garden and help her harvest the food. Once she had been able to eat and not starve, then they would talk to her about Jesus. The learning was that we must first listen to what people need, fill their need(s) and then share the Good News! I was later to learn from Bishop Duracin that he had baptized this woman during his visit to the village and that she had become quite an Evangelist in her village! It took time, but this woman's needs were first met, (he has filled the hungry with good things....Luke 1; 53). Jesus asked, "Simon, do you love me.....Feed my sheep." John 21; 17

Each person, lay and ordained, left the training with more knowledge and specific plans for evangelizing in their villages and congregations.

When it was time for me to leave the training conference, I was presented with a brand new Bible, a complete translation from French into Creole, the language of the people. The connection for me who grew up in Kansas and whose husband went to the University of Kansas (though he graduated from a different college) and whose daughter and older son both graduated from there, is that the Bible was translated into Creole by the Haitian studies department after ten years of work and was published for the Diocese. I was given the first Bible from that shipment. The people whom I had taught wrote this dedication, translated by The Rev. Father Nathaniel St. Pierre:

“Work on the Gospel

Is never easy.

When we do not speak the same language

The Spirit talks, Bang!

Without Him we do not await Pentecost

To make us become each for the other

As brothers and sisters in Jesus,

In the country of Haiti.

For all of that, we say thank you.

This Bible is a souvenir.

It will make you remember the moment of time

That we passed together without disturbance.

You, who showed us.

We, who learned;

You who taught us,

We who explained.

We will have love for one another;

Neither will see the other as stupid.”

Clergy of the Episcopal Church of Haiti

April 1994

A gift to LaDonna Wind

Upon my return from Haiti, I brought with me two wood carvings (see photograph) that were done by a father to sell in the Cathedral's gift shop as a way of helping to pay the costs for his children to attend the Cathedral school. One of them done in black, I gave to Bishop Marmion when I began to work for the Diocese and he came to visit me, the second I kept for myself.

As I traveled throughout the Diocese of Haiti, I was amazed to learn that each congregation, no matter where it is located, has both a school and a health clinic to serve the people. The language of the people is Creole and having a Bible in their own language is a wondrous gift—French is the language of the elite—perhaps less than five percent of the population. Through the years, the infrastructure has improved, but now is devastated by the earthquake. The people are frightfully poor, but eager to learn and improve their lot in life. After a long series of Presidents who used untold force and cruelty to control the people, and were nothing more than dictators, strides have been made to be a more democratic country. As God is willing and the Church remains strong, education and health care will continue to meet the needs of the population.

At the Eucharist held at the Cathedral, it was so crowded with people that we had to stand, not shoulder to shoulder, but front to back to front to accommodate all the people in attendance. There were so many people, that parishioners even crowded around the altar at the sides and behind. The Cathedral school offers a wonderful music program, a small group even came here to our Cathedral several years ago to put on a concert—I only wish more people had attended.

Haiti to me is myriad images of her people. A little boy ran along side the car in which I was riding, yelling, Blanco! Blanco! He held out a coconut as he offered me half

of it. The Bishop said I must accept it, his gift to me! I did and the smile on his face was radiant! There was the generosity as evident as each helped one another. Simple things, water, Scripture and Baptism, art carvings and music make up the tapestry of what is Haiti. In the 111 congregations, prayers, Eucharist, Baptism, health care and education abound. No matter whether the Church is located in the city or a mountain village, it has stood the test of time and has grown. God's people are steadfast in their faith and ministry to one another. The Church is alive and in dire need of resources to recover and rebuild. God's people will not be overcome, but will continue to be faithful in their efforts to reach out to His people. ".....You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever. Amen"

As the woman across from whom I sat that first day at Bible study said, "They cannot take away my faith!" No matter what calamities occur, Jesus is with them.