



## Growing Together: Haiti's Holistic Approach to Healing

By Denise Turcotte CSC

Last year, I was privileged to visit Haiti for our congregational Justice and Environment Statutory Meeting. In a land marked by poverty and ecological degradation, but also by faith and resilience, our meeting was appropriately themed “Ecological Economics,” an economic model that promotes personal, social, and planetary wellbeing.

At our opening ritual, we planted mung beans, symbols of hopes for our assembly and for Haiti itself. In the ensuing days, challenged by our Haitian presenters, we grew in knowledge, compassion and communion; the seeds became seedlings.

As we visited various Holy Cross missions together, we came upon a variety of sprouting seeds, both literal and figurative. Among the figurative were seeds of human resolve, seeds of sustainable living, and seeds of common commitment – evidence of grace at work in the midst of injustice, pollution, and political unrest.





One of the most impressive sites visited was Marie Porte du Ciel (Mary, Gate of Heaven) Orphanage. Founded by Claire Daneau CSC in 1986, the orphanage is now home to 60 children from 2 months to 16 years of age. Here, enfolded in human compassion and care, the children also learn to live intimately with Earth.

Fresh vegetables, grown in the nearly two-acre orphanage gardens, form part of the children's daily meals. Orphanage cows provide milk, chickens eggs, and goats and rabbits meat. Coconut, grapefruit, orange, banana and mango trees on orphanage grounds offer fruits for



nourishing desserts. Designed to increase the children's connection with the food that sustains them, such immediate contact with Earth also instills ecological knowledge, reverence and gratitude.

Another growing Holy Cross project is located in Limbé, a small village 40 minutes from Cap Haitian, on land first purchased by Zita Ruben Charles CSC. Under the direction of Maureen Fuelkell CSC, bananas were planted and this year other crops will be added. Future plans



## PETITE MAINS

In Cap Haitian, a new Holy Cross project Petites Mains teaches Haitian women to sew using industrial machines, preparing them to earn a living. A holistic program, Petite Mains offers participants opportunities for spiritual and personal growth as well.

include the creation of a small pond, a garden of native medicinal plants to encourage Haitians to continue to use traditional medicine, and a much-needed multi-use gathering space for local grassroots leaders, students, and non-governmental organizations. With their diverse gifts and a shared sense of purpose, the people involved are creating a legacy of resilient community for future generations.

Haiti is a country that has lost most of its original forests and plant cover. Fruit production is almost nil and, cleared of trees, hillside gardens have lost their fertile soil to erosion. To

counter this, several years ago Réjeanne Charest CSC and local people initiated a tree-planting project to stabilize the soil, provide fruits and nuts for consumption and offer shade. The program, which is now coordinated by *Le Club Ceinturons Verts*, a group of students from the region, has helped stabilize not only the soil, but also the surrounding community.

In the rural areas of Hinche, we visited Brother Francklin Armand, founder of the Congregations of the Little Brothers and Little Sisters of the Incarnation. With his leadership and the

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engagement of local communities, vitality is returning to both the land and its people.

In areas where the clay soil holds rainwater, over 170 manmade lakes have been constructed, offering water sources for agriculture, fishing and drinking. The availability of water has made possible the planting of over 20,000 fruit and forest tree seedlings each year as well as various food crops. Such projects are being replicated in villages throughout Haiti, providing opportunities for experiential education for children and young adults and bringing local residents together.

I was profoundly touched by the signs of hope that I experienced on this small island with so many political, social and environmental challenges. These emerging ecologically sustainable projects speak of the creativity, courage and faith of the Haitian people and those who accompany and support them. Here, we see the concept of Living Well, Living Well Together in action: the hungers of body and soul are satisfied even as a sense of belonging is restored. Is this not what truly makes life rich and worth living?

