

St. Matthias Fellowship
October 2017

St. Matthias Fellowship Celebrates Friendship (and a New Water Well!)

The St. Matthias Fellowship held a retreat in September to reflect on the Fellowship's mission, goals and objectives. It has been almost 8 years since St. John's first teamed up with St. Matthias School in Deslandes, Haiti. The retreat revealed new insights and ideas about our work together, and affirmed that this ministry is, first and foremost, about our relationship with our Haitian partners.

People to people, parish to parish, we grow in mutual understanding through our commitment to each other. It is about LOVE. Giving and receiving with dignity and respect, and having fun along the way -- that's the primary purpose of the mission. We arrive at common goals through discernment and consensus. Then, we lean into the work together, and get it done!

It's quite astonishing when we look back to see where we started, what we have accomplished and where we are today. In addition to our deepening friendship, there are many tangible accomplishments...

Completed:

- A new tin roof over the main classroom building to replace the old unsafe one
- A new school building with 2 classrooms and an office for the Principal (finish work still needed)
- A one-classroom extension on an existing classroom building
- A Goat Project, initiated to create wealth (and meat) for families and the school (to be expanded in the future)
- Gap funding for teacher's salaries (to be phased out over time)
- Cloth for school uniforms, provided to families in need
- A fresh water well on campus, 165 feet down with unlimited supply
- A perimeter wall to secure the school and its new infrastructure

In Progress:

- A pump house with a water filtration system to give people in Deslandes local access to clean water. Over 300 people died in the area during the first cholera epidemic. Now, instead of having to travel an hour across the river and down the highway to buy 5 gallons of water (which weighs over 40 lbs.), they can buy it at St. Matthias for less than 1/5th of what it used to cost.
- A 12-panel solar power system to pump water and provide electricity and light. Not only will we be able to draw water from the well more easily, but we will be able to keep the campus open at night for worship services, festivities and other activities.
- A latrine with 6 toilets, wash basins and shower stalls. Instead of a small tin shack with two holes in the ground, the boys and girls will have their own areas to relieve themselves and wash up. Studies

across the world have shown that a WASH program like ours is particularly beneficial to young girls: they tend to be healthier; choose to come to class more often; and stay in school much longer.

- A “gray water” recycling system to move water from the Wash Area to the Community Garden. The water used to wash hands and bodies will not be wasted, but filtered and diverted into a model teaching garden for the students. We hope the produce can be used in a lunch program, or sold at the local market. The composting toilets will supply fertilizer for the garden!

All these projects were made possible thanks to the generous support of the St. John’s community, leveraged by a matching grant from the Rotary International Foundation and a grant from a private foundation. The Rotary Clubs of Huntington and Mirebalais, Haiti, have also provided invaluable expertise and oversight for the well, solar and latrine projects.

Next up: a 5-year plan that includes a strategy for decreasing contributions from St. John’s as self-sufficiency at St. Matthias grows. In the coming months, our goal is to improve communication, develop sustainable economic projects (including expanding the goat project), help train teachers, encourage local leadership development and complete the various infrastructure projects we have started. Our ultimate goal is to help St. Matthias become more self-reliant, and for the school to become a thriving beacon of hope for the community of Deslandes.

We welcome new volunteers at any time, at any level of engagement you are able to offer. We are in the initial stages of planning a trip in either December or January - an opportunity to enjoy fellowship with our friends, engage in strategic planning with St. Matthias leaders and inspect projects currently under way. If you are interested in becoming involved (or just learning more), please contact either Peter Charles, charles.peter@gmail.com or Laura Swiggett, swignet@aol.com

“Piti pit wazo fe niche li.” Little by little the bird builds it’s nest!

-- from a Coffee Hour presentation on October 22, 2017 by Laura Swiggett, Jamie Wylie and Peter Charles