

Of Amos 8:4, and Haiti

By Paul McMullen

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It didn't cause the sensation of Pope Francis' interview with *La Civiltà Cattolica*, but last Sunday's first reading, Amos 8:4, offered a similar clarion call: "Hear this you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land."

A few days after the pope directed us to be more inviting, the Old Testament shouted that rather than gouge them, we should aid the homeless and the underemployed and those just scraping by.

Like the folks in Haiti.

It's been more than three years since a massive earthquake devastated Port-au-Prince and the surrounding countryside. While weary hearts and attention spans have moved on, the Archdiocese of Baltimore maintains its effort toward what was already the most impoverished nation in the Western Hemisphere.

Every summer since 2003, Deacon Rodrigue Mortel, director of the archdiocesan Office of the Propagation of the Faith, has taken local high school students to his hometown of St. Marc and its Good Samaritans School. A total of 110 young men and women have gone there to volunteer and share their experiences back home.

Even before the earthquake, from 2000 to 2009, 16 parishes in the archdiocese sent nearly \$2.6 million to sister parishes in the Diocese of Gonaïves.

That money has provided daily meals to tens of thousands of children, paid the teachers at humble parish schools that are their only educational hope, and upgraded learning and worship environments more primitive than what you would find at a Maryland state campsite.

That aspect of the Baltimore Haiti Outreach Project has grown to 21 parishes, including the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland.

A Haiti Carnavale, paired with a back-to-school celebration, drew some 500 people to the cathedral grounds the night of Sept. 14. The parish created its own "tap tap," evoking the colorful busses that are Haiti's version of mass transit. According to Paddy Morton, one of its outreach leaders, parishioners enjoyed Haitian food and music, and youths made Haitian-inspired crafts.

In the process, Monsignor J. Bruce Jarboe's parish raised more than \$15,000 for Monsignor Victesse Nicolas – who concelebrated Masses in Homeland that weekend – and his sister parish in the city of Gonaïves, the Cathedral of St. Charles Borromeo. Before moving to Gonaïves, Monsignor Nicolas was pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul in Desdunes. Its local sister parish is St. Agnes in Catonsville, where parishioners such as John O'Donnell lead the cause.

O'Donnell made his seventh and eighth missions to Haiti last winter. He shares photos of Haiti with parishioners and his Knights of Columbus Council, so others can grasp the need and poverty.

"The first thing that struck me when I went to the village of Modelle," O'Donnell said, "there weren't any poles for electricity. The chapel was a wattle, made of mud and sticks. It doubles as a school.

"Haiti changed my life. When I'm there, I ask, 'Why wasn't I born here, instead of the lap of luxury?' How did I win the lottery?"

A few years back, after Monsignor Nicolas spoke at Mass at St. Agnes, an unfamiliar face approached O'Donnell on the parking lot.

"A middle-aged woman said 'I don't have any money right now to give, can you wait until Wednesday, when I get paid?' " O'Donnell said. "She had me in tears."