

Parishes benefit from Haiti partnerships

Instead of asking for presents for her seventh birthday, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Edgewater, parishioner Sophie Smith asked her friends to help sponsor a child in Haiti.

Sophie, her brother Sam Smith and other young people have taken the lead in raising money for Our Lady of Perpetual Help's new sister parish, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Perodin, in Haiti.

Sam has been collecting spare change from parishioners after Masses each weekend while his friend Tyler Phillips, 10, sells colorful pencils with the words "Give a hand to Haiti" engraved on them for \$1.25 a piece.

"We are more fortunate than them and they are poor so we should help them," said Sophie while Sam added, "knowing they need our help" is what drives him to collect donations.

The parish started collecting school supplies like glue, markers, crayons and more for their sister parish's school. Our Lady of Perpetual Help has formed a Haiti committee of about 17 parishioners from the age of 9 to 60.

"We want our kids to understand that when great wealth comes to you, great things are required of you," said Nadine Smith, mother of Sophie and Sam. "We are blessed to be born in this country but we should look outside it to help."

Suzanne Cooley said the parish Lenten mission this year was to educate the community about Haiti. Father Joseph Cosgrove, pastor, said the parish plans to use the rebate from the Lenten Appeal to help their sister parish.

"These people have nothing and they didn't give us their leftovers but they gave us their best," said Ms. Cooley who had the opportunity to visit St. Elizabeth of Hungary a few months ago. "We know we have been changed and it was really important for us to create awareness."

Six parishioners from St. Ann, Hagerstown, recently returned from visiting their sister parish of St. Claire in Dessalines, Haiti, and the experiences they had will last forever. Barbara Lloyd said the group participated in a celebration of the parish school's 10th anniversary as musicians and the community sang and danced through the streets.

"I was truly at peace with the world and I felt that this was heaven on earth," said Ms. Lloyd. "The Haitian people have such a deep faith in God and the church service was the most memorable I've ever been a part of."

When returning from their journey each person was given a chance to share their experiences. They started a program called the "Little Angels" which raises money to feed the approximately 350 preschool kids each day during the school year. So far the parishioners have raised more than \$17,000.

Ms. Lloyd said 20 percent of Haitian children die before the age of 5 due to sickness and malnutrition.

"It is incomprehensible that this level of poverty exists in the world and here we were in the midst of it," said Ms. Lloyd who plans to one day return to Haiti. "We continue to pray constantly for the entire country and we will continue to work to raise more funds so that more children can eat at school."

On May 12 and 13 Father Dachemy Destine, pastor of St. Anthony the Hermit in Chenot, Haiti, will speak at St. Isaac Jogues, Carney, and all are welcome to come.