

Mercy Focus on Haiti  
275 Parsells Ave.  
Rochester, NY 14609

July 8, 2019

Dear Mission Officers of Mercy Schools and Colleges/Universities:

Mercy Focus on Haiti (MFOH) hopes that the summer will give you some rest from all the work of the past academic year, and some time to prepare for the upcoming year.

We thought this might be a good time to send you some current information about Mercy Focus on Haiti's Student Immersion Trips to Gros Morne, Haiti. As you may recall, Mercy Focus on Haiti (MFOH) has been taking Mercy secondary school and college/university students to Haiti ever since the Spring of 2014. The students who went on these week-long trips universally described them as "life-changing" experiences in which they came face-to-face with the extreme material poverty, yet hopeful resilience of our brothers and sisters in the poorest country of the western hemisphere. This is certainly an important and necessary learning for any student in a Mercy sponsored educational ministry.

However, since early 2019 circumstances in Haiti have necessitated that MFOH not take students to Haiti for the immediately foreseeable future, at least not in 2019-2020. The Haitian government is currently not serving the Haitian people well, and during this past year unrest has grown stronger, peaking in severe protests in February 2019. Consequently, in early 2019 the U.S. Department of State issued a Level 4 Warning (its highest) against travel from the U.S. to Haiti. Then, recently, the State Department lowered its Warning to Level 3 ("Reconsider Travel"), to allow Haitian businesses that are dependent on tourism and travel to experience some relief, and to allow aid agencies to provide services in Haiti.

Given the warnings and the risks involved, MFOH has decided that we should not take any student groups on Immersion Trips to Haiti in 2019-2020.

If circumstances greatly improve by October or November 2019, which is somewhat unlikely given the behavior of the Haitian government, and if the State Department's Warning remains at Level 3, MFOH *may* then be in a position to encourage Mercy schools and colleges/universities to consider planning such trips for their students in Spring 2020.

HOWEVER, since Mercy Focus on Haiti is an important and timely ministerial initiative of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, there is a great deal – short of going to Haiti – that Mercy schools and colleges/universities can do to raise up greater knowledge about the realities and needs of the Haitian people, and greater commitment to our merciful accompaniment of them.

In particular, we think of all the detailed insertions about Haiti that your faculties could be encouraged, and helped, to make in the **curricula** of your various courses. For example:  
---in **theology** or **religious studies** courses: examination of the "one humanity" we share with all suffering peoples, including the "ultra-poor" Haitian families who are trying to live on \$1.25 a day or less;  
---in **biology** courses: the effects of mal-nutrition and under-nutrition on young Haitian school children and their educational progress;

---in **government** or **political science** courses: the role of political advocacy, and the global responsibility of developed nations to promote the right to sufficiently human well-being of peoples in other nations such as Haiti;

---in **earth science** courses: the ways the native Haitian agronomists with whom MFOH partners are working to care for the Earth and mitigate the climate crisis we all face – through reforestation, composting, family food production, rain water collection, use of solar lamps and panels, etc;

---in **literature** courses: reading Haitian novels or poetry;

---in **psychology** courses: examining the concepts of and methods for developing self-esteem and personal empowerment among materially poor people;

---in **history** courses: focusing, as an example, on the historical conquest, slavery, and inadequate government experienced by the Haitian people;

--- and many other possible curricular topics.

**Please Note:** Mercy Focus on Haiti is very willing to supply some materials to and assist any of your faculty who are interested in educating your students about these realities. It could be a kind of “Adopt a Country” Year at your educational institution!

We can all learn so much from our Haitian families and partners in northern Haiti: their patience and hope, their care for Earth and ecological know-how, and their abiding trust in our merciful God. So please do get in touch with Andrea (Andi) Healy or Mary Sullivan, RSM, even in a tentative or preliminary way, if you’d like to work on these curricular possibilities in 2019-2020.

All of us in Mercy Focus on Haiti wish you wisdom and energy as you prepare for the upcoming academic year. We also ask you please to pray for our beloved people in Haiti.

Sincerely yours in Mercy,

Andrea (Andi) Healy  
Coordinator of MFOH Immersions  
[andijhealy@aol.com](mailto:andijhealy@aol.com) 267-549-6857

Mary Sullivan, RSM  
Member of the MFOH Immersion Committee  
[mxsgsl@rit.edu](mailto:mxsgsl@rit.edu) 585-271-2657