



Dear Mission Officers of Mercy Schools and Colleges/Universities,

We write to bring you up to date on the 2020-21 plans and hopes of the Immersion Committee of Mercy Focus on Haiti (MFOH).

2019-2020: The highlight of our work before 2019-20 was the **Student Immersion Trips** to Haiti. These “life-changing” trips brought benefits to the travelers (about 100 students) and help to our Haitian partners. The students learned what dire poverty is and looks like and assisted our Haitian partners in many tangible ways. However, in 2019 the increase of widespread civil unrest in Haiti, provoked by governmental corruption, and the warnings of the U.S. State Dept. meant that MFOH could take no Immersion Trips to Haiti in 2019-2020. And now, the COVID-19 pandemic makes it very likely that no Immersion trips can occur in 2020-21.

These challenges have caused us to think creatively about how we can serve our “critical concerns” in Haiti by “**bringing Haiti to our Mercy Students**” when we cannot “bring our Mercy Students to Haiti.”

New Initiatives in 2020-21: The Immersion Committee invites all our Mercy students in the Americas (in our schools and colleges/universities) to actively **Engage in the Mercy Mission in Haiti** by selecting *one* of the following basic needs of our Haitian partners, and then working on it as a school project during the 2020-21 academic year. In focusing on these urgent illustrations of our critical concerns, we are grateful for the active collaboration of the Mercy Education System of the Americas and the Conference for Mercy Higher Education.

Projects: We eagerly invite all our Mercy educational institutions, at whatever level, to enable their students to engage, in 2020-21, in *one* of the following needed projects:

- a. **Vegetable Seeds for Haitian Families:** Our Agronomy partners in Haiti say that they are in great need of heirloom vegetable seeds to increase the stock in their Seed Bank and supply seeds to the hundreds of poor Haitian families and small farmers who are now suffering severe food insecurity and skyrocketing food prices. The project will assist these families and small farmers to successfully plant and harvest vegetables that will supply family food and family income.

Students engaged in this project will study the nutritional value of various vegetables, learn the long-term value of heirloom (non-MGO-modified) seeds, and then raise money to enable the Haitian agronomists to buy more and more heirloom seeds for the families they assist. This **Seeds for Haitian Families** campaign could be a wonderful learning experience— as well as a great deal of fun.

- b. **School Tuition for Young Haitian Children:** Some Haitian families whose children wish to attend Jesus and Mary Primary School (PreK- 6), operated by the Religious of Jesus and Mary, cannot pay the full yearly tuition of \$125. They can barely afford to pay



\$25. These ultra-poor families were or are now in the *Chemen Lavi Miyo* program (“Pathway to a Better Life”) which MFOH has supported on their behalf. The 18-month CLM program has enabled them to rise out of their extreme poverty and to have food every day (in the past they could not). The children are now recovering from severe malnutrition and desire to go to school.

Therefore, MFOH wishes to raise funds to pay the additional **\$100 tuition** that is needed to educate each child at the Jesus and Mary School. We invite students in Mercy elementary and secondary schools to help us raise this tuition money by conducting, in their schools, a **School Tuition for Haitian Children** campaign so their young brothers and sisters in Haiti can enjoy the same blessings of a good education that they enjoy.

- c. **School Lunches with Good Eggs:** A needed project for interested Mercy students (elementary and secondary) is raising funds to provide hard-boiled eggs three times a week in the School Lunches given to children in Jesus and Mary School in Fon Ibo. The School Lunch is often the *only* meal these children receive each day. It is designed to be highly nutritious, and eggs are a good source of protein. They are produced in the cooperative Hen House run by poor Haitian women and men to secure family income.

The annual cost of these **School Lunches with Good Eggs** is approximately \$20,000. Mercy schools could compete with each other in raising some of these funds, and their efforts will be celebrated on the Mercy Focus on Haiti website and in other Mercy venues.

- d. **Harvesting Rainwater for Haitian Families:** Many people in Haiti suffer from water insecurity which leads to food insecurity. Currently, the heavy tropical rains run down the hillsides causing soil erosion and eventually desertification. When a family needs water for drinking and cooking, the mother or a child must walk a great distance to fetch water from a well. Often the nearest well has run dry.

Our Haitian Agronomy partners have asked us to help them build 50 cement cisterns to catch and store rainwater. Haitian men will build these cement cisterns using the Ferro method (cement applied to the walls of large circular barrels made of metal wiring). The project will cost \$40,000. But think of the wonderful water -- access to which is a fundamental human right – that will be available to all the Haitian families living near each cistern, and the rain will no longer erode the soil where they need to grow family food. Raising money for the **Harvesting Rainwater** project is certainly a “concrete” way to love our neighbors in this world, and to “give the thirsty something to drink” (Matt.25:35).

- e. **Learning about Haiti and the Haitians:** Mercy college and university students could engage in this educational/research project by studying topics related to the experience of



the Haitian people and then writing short research essays on these topics. For example, they could research malnutrition (its signs and effects); past and present U.S. policy toward Haiti; Haitian novelists writing in English; food insecurity; slavery in Haiti and its abolition; ecological efforts in Haiti; the social effects of material poverty; the COVID-19 pandemic in Haiti, and other topics MFOH could suggest. This research could be one of the normal course assignments in various kinds of courses.

MFOH will conduct an annual Essay Contest with prizes for the best essays and arrange for publication of the essays in Mercy-related media. The students' essays could also be submitted to campus publications and as Letters to the Editor of local newspapers. **Learning about Haiti and the Haitians** will strengthen the students' global understanding and solicitude.

The MFOH Immersion Committee stands ready to help all our Mercy schools and colleges/universities to actively engage in one of these projects and thereby enlarge our students' merciful outreach and deepen their dedication to serving our Mercy Critical Concerns. We are also willing to speak at your institution if you wish. Please contact one of the following members of the Immersion Committee to explore how you could **"Bring Haiti to your Mercy Students"** in 2020-21!

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Sincerely, and with our gratitude and hope,

Andrea (Andi) Healy, Chair, MFOH Immersion Committee