

The first of many projects, aimed at supporting the vision of our Haitian brothers and sisters, of a self-sustaining, independent community, has taken shape. A modest, but beautifully constructed, six room building has been completed to house the Women's Resource & Education Center at St. Paul's in Petit trou de Nippes. The Women's Resource Center will be a place where valuable vocational skills, skills that can be the basis of small enterprise, can be taught. In addition, the Women's Resource Center will house a small satellite office of Fondasyon Kole Zepol or Fonkoze, Haiti's alternative bank for the poor, providing micro-credit programs for the women in Petit trou de Nippes, as well as a range of banking services to the entire community. An essential part of the Fonkoze micro-credit program is education. Classes in literacy, women's health, basic business planning, and human rights are just some of the programs that will be available through Fonkoze based at St. Paul's. The Center will also be used temporarily, as a primary school, replacing the sheet metal and wood lean-to previously used for this purpose.

The Women's Resource Center was constructed by Haitians, for Haitians and was completed on time and on budget! On time and on budget is a rarity in most any country, but nothing short of extraordinary in Haiti, given the difficult conditions that must be faced every step of the way. Funding for the center was provided by the Three Bishops' Fund for Haiti. This of course, was an essential ingredient . . . as no funding means no project! Coordination of the project, in terms of management and accountability, between the Colorado Haiti Project and the Episcopal Diocese of Haiti was another essential ingredient to the success of this project. But the true measure of success was the extraordinary effort made by the Haitian community to realize its' completion.

In early 2005, the excavation needed for the placement of the concrete and rock foundation was begun. While the Haitian proverb, 'Men anpil, chay pa lou' roughly translated as 'Many hands make for a light load' was at work here, the manual labor expended to complete the excavation was exhausting. Rock was then gathered to place with the concrete, and the foundations took shape. Local masons began to construct the columns and mud brick walls, that would support the roof and a 'future' second floor. The work progressed steadily and the building began to take shape. And then . . . the rainy season arrived.

Now, just a few months before an anticipated 400 students would arrive, many of whom were counting on classroom space in the new Women's Resource & Education Center, the rivers swelled, the roads became ribbons of mud, the working conditions on-site difficult to bear. Even in the best of times, the roads are rutted, muddied and difficult to navigate. The rivers, though shallow, must be forded, as there are no bridges. Even when shallow, one is at the mercy of the river, as there are deep holes, invisible to the eye, waiting to swallow the wheel of a truck, waiting to swamp the overworked engine. More times than not, during the rainy season, the rivers are simply impassable. How then, with daily torrential rains, would the reinforcing steel, the sand, gravel and cement, and the other materials still needed to complete the construction, possibly arrive? Father Kesner, and Paul Placide, the engineer/builder were determined to move forward. Hiring countless numbers of people and donkeys for a few dollars each, cement, steel, and the other materials needed to complete the project were carried and dragged across the river, to a truck waiting on the opposite shore. The truck navigated its' way through the ribbons of mud, sometimes needing the assistance of dozens of people to free it from the depths. But the materials did arrive, the workers continued to work, and miraculously, the building was completed a mere day before, the school children arrived!

Time and time again, we are inspired by the tireless, selfless, determination of so many people working together, against all odds, in an effort to improve the lives of the people in Petit trou de Nippes. The Women's Resource & Education Center, both in its' construction and its' function, has and will transform many lives . . . Just one more reason to support and contribute to the Three Bishops' Fund for Haiti.

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Don Snyder