

Amazing Tidings - 2011

The narrative of our February 2018 mission to Dame-Marie will be somewhat different this time. Truly amazing accomplishments and dreams are starting to bear fruit in our fishing village home of Dame-Marie. I am honored to be able to share them with you all – our missionaries here and in country, our missionaries past and present, our supporters, our families, our donors. But before I get to the present, let's look back at how far we have come.

Our teams of missionaries had been working in many different and remote locations in the Dominican Republic since 2004. But our program needed a change. We needed to grow from being just a band-aid to communities where we would fly in and fly out helping only those we could during one week of service. We needed to grow our program to the highest level of mission work – building a sustainable model where we become part of the community and accept responsibility for it and its people and involve Haitian medical personnel.

So four of us went to Haiti in September 2011 and interviewed 7 or 8 hospitals, one of which was Hôpital de la Communauté Dame-Marienne (Community Hospital of Dame-Marie), to see what was needed and what we could offer.



L-R: Kathy Aries RN, Michael R. Bourque MD, Sr. Judith A. Carey RSM PhD, and Maggie Levasseur, RN

The most remote, the one with the least resources, and the greatest degree of difficulty was the fishing village of Dame-Marie. The small community hospital had laid fallow since 2009 when it lost the support for maintaining physicians and staff – not unlike many institutions and medical services in Haiti that wither and die from the lack of ongoing financial support from the government or from large NGO (non-government-owned) organizations; and not unlike other villages in which the local townspeople can barely sustain themselves, never mind contribute to the common good of full-service medical care.



Hôpital de la Communauté Dame-Marienne
(Community Hospital of Dame-Marie)



Typical home in the village of Dame-Marie

An incredibly determined Hospital Administrator named Monsieur Pierre M. Antoine, himself a local homegrown son of Dame-Marie, continued to have a vision of what his beloved village could be and was working towards having medical care return to the community. The resolve of Monsieur Pierre, his family and the community, along with the great need, were the primary factors in our selection of Dame-Marie as the community where our services would relocate.

For me personally, my vote was influenced after a conversation with the obstetrician who left in 2009 after having to deliver a young mother by Cesarean Section with no available anesthesia services. Although he saved the mother and the child, the experience traumatized him for life. He gave up his medical career and began working for an NGO away from patient care. For the sake of these brave mothers, on whom our St. Francis program was founded, this reality could not stand.



First visit by (L-R) Christina Antoine, Nina Antoine Hilaire, Pierre M. Antoine, Anne-Christele Antoine and Liliane Antoine Aly MSW to St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center

Little Steps 2012-2018

In February, 2012, a small group of brave and exceptionally skilled men and women from Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center and other hospitals on the Eastern Seaboard came together to accomplish what seemed an almost impossible task – to re-open the operating room in the 16-bed community hospital in this small fishing village of Dame-Marie. The team boarded a small plane out of Port-au-Prince, landing on a dirt airstrip in Jeremie, and then boarded a bus for the 5-hour ride to Dame-Marie.



Front Row – Adwoa Opoku-Boateng MD, Pam Bourque Delfino RN, Michael R. Bourque MD, Jamie Bohl MD; Second Row – Pierre Antoine, Ken Messier EMT, Maggie Levasseur RN, Clark O'Brien MD, Liz Shlansky MD, Rebecca Brushwood MD, Denise Bolduc CRNA, Toby McPherson CRNA, Kathy Aries RN, Jean O'Neill MSN



L-R: Adwoa Opoku-Boateng MD, Maggie Levasseur RN, Denise Bolduc CRNA, Jean O'Neill MSN, Toby McPherson CRNA, Jamie Bohl MD, Rebecca Brushwood MD, Liz Shlansky MD, Pam Bourque Delfino RN, Clark O'Brien MD, Kathy Aries RN, Michael R. Bourque MD (Missing from photo Ken Messier EMT)

On the first day of this inaugural mission trip to Dame-Marie, we were greeted by the freshly painted OR room. There was a broken anesthesia machine in the room and little else. But as a self-contained surgical team, we carefully began the task of setting up a working operating room.



Clark O'Brien MD working on the anesthesia equipment



Original OR Table 1 – A very much used OR table patched up with a hodgepodge of duct tape and garbage bags.



Original OR Table 2 - A wobbly stretcher having used towels placed by Kathy Aries RN in the wheels to keep it from moving during an operation.

The amount of good we have rendered to the village of Dame-Marie over the past six years has gone from hundreds of patients treated to thousands through the individual professional excellence and extraordinary teamwork of the almost 200 mission team members who have journeyed to Dame-Marie.

Many of these professionals have not worked together before and find themselves dealing with extremely difficult cases in a place with limited resources and no one but each other for backup. This experience quickly causes you to grow to professional levels of skill that are quite different from what is required for success in the US hospital system.



Trip 2 (November 2012) – One of over 600 surgeries conducted to date.



Trip 18 (November 2017) – Two surgical teams operating simultaneously in the original operating room.

As we return trip after trip, our confidence and our support by the people of Dame-Marie increases. We have witnessed this hard working community of good people put the funds together to build a second operating room, which was completed in November 2017 and opened in February 2018.

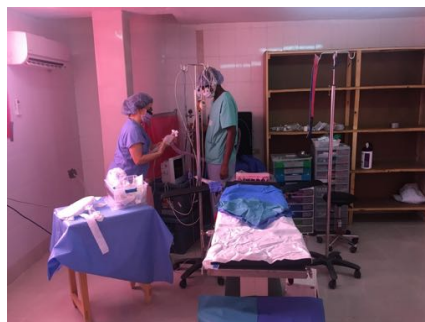
We have also been blessed with donors who have provided funding for much-needed equipment and supplies – e.g., surgical headlamps to provide / improve lighting during surgeries; new, operating tables purchased from China (gone now is the wobbly stretcher and broken OR table. YAY!)



Valerie Rossetti MD and Gene Elderkin CRNA working to clear medical supplies being temporarily stored in the newly built operating room.



Original operating room equipped with new OR table.



Second operating room opened for surgery.

One of the initial surgeries performed in the original operating room on the first mission trip was a Cesarean Section. So, it was only fitting that our first case in the new second operating room was a Cesarean Section, saving a mother, who had an obstructed labor and the baby would not fit through her birth canal, and her baby.



A mother and her baby delivered by a safe Cesarean Section during the first mission in February 2012.



A mother and her baby delivered by a safe Cesarean section during the February 2018 mission.

And finally in February 2018, the two large crates sitting in the main lobby of the hospital for the last four years were opened. After the loss of the four-pound baby to prematurity during our November 2017 mission, we decided we couldn't wait for the development of a NICU that could help to save those babies who needed some extra breathing support.

It was with eagerness that we opened the boxes to find the gifts the Lord and USAID had left to help the newborn babies of Dame-Marie – *an incubator and baby warmer!* Both much needed and will be well used when they are properly equipped with electricity and oxygen.



The curiosity of Michael R. Bourque MD



Incubator



Baby warmer

As all our long time readers know, our dreams have slowly but surely been taking shape with everyone's help. In 2014 when the corporate model for Saint Francis changed, our team joined with Medical Aid to Haiti (MATH), a non-profit organization with the mission of Helping Haitians Heal Haitians. Both programs have merged seamlessly into an amazing program of doing good. No paid staff, volunteers all, and everyone working here and in country for those who have little in the blessings we all take for granted.

Epilogue

I was reading in the Hartford Courant today about a young woman named Stacie Roberge, who used this quote from American writer Mark Twain to summarize why she had just donated a kidney to a good friend. In the 1800's, Mark Twain wrote: *"The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why."* For us who work on behalf of our community and family in Haiti, whether in Dame-Marie or Port-au-Prince, I would humbly submit that we have also found the answer as to why we are all here.



Team 19 (February 2018) L-R: Anne D'Orvilliers, Donna Denault RN, Heather Devendorf LPN, Lauren Scheetz RN, Ed Sauter MD, Valerie Rossetti MD, Reinaldo Figueroa MD, Jean O'Neill MSN, Elizabeth Howard RN, Candace DeLong RN, Jamie Bohl MD, Michael Bourque MD and Kathy Aries RN

The future and our hopes for our Sisters and Brothers in Dame-Marie look so much brighter from that long ago trip six years ago. We now are making plans for an expanded hospital with improved dental facilities and emergency room, pathology services, NICU, urology and eye care, and someday orthopedics. We will continue to improve the prenatal care and delivery services available to our mothers in Dame-Marie. And why not add another dream to ponder – maybe someday a new Delivery Room such as I enjoy at Trinity Health Of New England - Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center.

With God's blessings and the spirit of our Blessed Mother whom our village is named after, we pray the success of our mission work will continue. Thank you everyone for your continued prayers, support and hard work that has been 12 years in the making, six in our hometown of Dame-Marie.

God Bless,

Michael R Bourque MD

Medical Director for MATH Dame-Marie