

Departure from St. Francis Hospital (Hartford, CT)

As usual, our missionary team members gathered at the entrance to Saint Francis Hospital & Medical Center in the early morning hours to leave for our plane at JFK. It was a beautiful “morning” with a beautiful full moon and a quiet moment at the hospital entrance. The bus driver was especially excited when he found out he was helping to make a difference for the people of Haiti by safely getting us to JFK airport. His positive energy despite the early hour was infectious.



Gathering Site for Departure
01:00 am



Front: Enox Shepard, Premier Limousine Bus Driver; L - R: Standing – Valerie Rossetti MD, Lynn O’Heron RN, Sarah Bowlann RN, Maggie Levasseur RN, Kathy Aries RN, Michael R. Bourque MD, Anne D’Orvilliers, and Stephen Moran DDS

Special Milestone

Kathy Aries RN, a very special person and Labor & Delivery nurse, never realized where the road ahead would take her when she first agreed to accompany me to the Dominican Republic in 2006. I only knew that she could speak Spanish when I asked her to help me start a mission team. In those many years since, Kathy and I have been to many different places of severe poverty where we both learned by hard service and sacrifice to be directors of medical, surgical, and nursing teams. This was mission trip #31 for the two of us and I just had to acknowledge this marvelous milestone.

And I can’t commemorate our 31st trip together, without mentioning the two special people without whose lifetime support none of what we have done would be possible. A special thank you and hugs to our life partners – Barbara and Richard. Both of whom have also contributed mightily to the success of our mission program through their own efforts.



L - R: Barbara Bourque RN, Michael R. Bourque, MD, Kathy Aries RN, and Richard Aries

Mother Mary

The Holiday season is upon us, and in the US, it is a time of reflection, gratitude and a reaffirmation of those values that make us proud as a family, community and country. However, civil unrest is the only voice / choice that the average citizen in many communities and countries can use to express their frustration and unhappiness with the state of their government's inefficiencies and lack of support. The daily reality of finding enough food and water so their families can survive another day are their holiday reflections. Haiti is one of those dire places.

I am reminded of the song, *Let It Be*. Paul McCartney wrote, "When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me Speaking words of wisdom, let it be" So I reflect on our adopted Haitian community of Dame-Marie, a fishing village named after our Blessed Mary.

Eglise de Dame Mare is the centuries-old treasured landmark in the center of the town, where I have attended Mass several times when we have served the people in Dame-Marie. The mass is said in French or sometimes Creole, and the singing and attentiveness of the people is full of positive energy and especially hope.



Eglise de Dame Marie

Now back to our tale...Airport Travel

One of the first chores by the American missionaries is getting themselves and our life-saving supplies through the airport gauntlets of security and customs. Heavy lifting is a necessary requirement. Most trips, the 50-lb. blue bags require explanation, patience, and government forms; and it helps to have a well-connected person to get our equipment and medications through intact. Even after all these years, there is always a new wrinkle, hassle or worry, but a good feeling once we are on the outside into Haiti proper.



Aéroport International Toussaint Louverture L – R: Kathy Aries RN, Stephen Moran DDS, Valerie Rossetti MD, Lynn O'Heron RN, and Maggie Levasseur RN

Travel in Haiti

Travel on the roads in Haiti is perilous these days. The government is at a standstill and very few services are available to ensure safe travel. So, for the first time, Pierre Antoine hired military police to aid in our bus travel to Dame-Marie.



Two military police on motorcycles and one on the bus provided safe egress from Port-au-Prince – the densely populated city of millions



Four military police on the bus provided safe travel in the more remote and rough areas between Jérémie and Dame-Marie; L – R: Front – Bus Company Owner and Michael R. Bourque MD

We were grateful for their willingness to help, and a successful and peaceful trip was enjoyed on our way to Hôpital de la Communaute Dame-Marienne (HCDM), our community hospital. You do find yourself in quite unbelievable situations when you work in the greater world and an open mind to adventure is a key part of missionary service.

Bus Travel

Although Mission Aviation Fellowship has 9 and 5-seater planes that can be chartered to fly into Jérémie or to the grass strip in Dame-Marie, the bus ride is a necessary evil to keep expenses affordable for the US team members, keep the team and medical supplies together, and ensure the “on-time” arrival in Dame-Marie is not affected by inclement weather.

Everyone is in great spirits for the tasks ahead, and as there are hours and hours on the bus before we function as a medical team at HCDM, we snack, catch up with our Haitian counterparts, and decompress from the high-paced life in the US that we left just that morning.



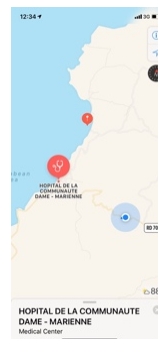
L – R: Front – Patrick Charlorin MD Pediatric Surgeon, Marc Aurele Osiris MD Urologist, Michelin Bazalais, and Joseph Glavylove MD OB – GYN; 2nd Row – Benoucheca Pierre MD Anesthesiologist, Esther Antoine-Dardignac MD Anesthesiologist, and Dasny Mackenson MD HCDM Medical Director



Djovensky Mathurin, MD General Surgeon



L – R: Maggie Levasseur RN, Valerie Rossetti MD, Lynn O'Heron RN, and Sarah Bowlann RN



Tracking our way –
~2 hours out of the 13 hours away

The path to Dame-Marie can be monitored on iPhone Maps when connectivity is available along the way. So, like being a young child in your parent's car, we can now see for ourselves, "Are we almost there?", and the usual answer is "Still far to go".

A Cook's Welcome

Upon arrival in Dame-Marie on Sunday afternoon and before the work at the hospital begins, the team is welcomed and enjoy the traditional pumpkin soup prepared by the Haitian women and helper who make up our kitchen family.



Welcoming meal



L-R: Imane, Amise, Bernadette, Aya, Lucienne, Noeline and Idecia (missing Ada)

Thank you to Dr. Felice Colliton for donating flip flops from her daughter's recent wedding that we could give to the cooks as a small token of appreciation for their hard work.

All the food we enjoy is freshly prepared from scratch in the cooking area at the back of our mission house. Everything is done traditionally as it has been done for years. There is a pantry, two open charcoal fires and, of course, the cleanup using sand. Very, very few have any running water in their homes, so we are so grateful to the benefits of living in Pierre Antoine's childhood home in the heart of Dame-Marie.



		
It all starts here...		...no fancy gadgets or electricity in the kitchen...
		
...could this fish for dinner, caught right off the shore of Dame- Marie, be any fresher...	...one of the amazing finished products – spaghetti and ham with onions and garlic (one of my favorite breakfasts)and cleanup

The Work Begins

Our mission of *Helping Haitian Heal Haitians* is well underway. Everyone is eager to work and learn together. It is inspiring.

The all-Haitian OR staff is well-equipped and carrying out lifesaving surgery. While in pre-op and post-op, work is underway with the Haitian nursing staff in promoting the safeguards of managing surgical patients.

		
All Haitian surgical team	L – R: Patrick Charlorin MD, Benoucheca Pierre MD, Esther Antoine-Dardignac MD, Djovensky Mathurin MD, Tabuteau Marie Thatcher RN, Pierre Walmane Lavalese RN	Val Rossetti MD, an accomplished missionary and anesthesiologist, advises on all safety issues

			
	L – R: Lynn O’Heron RN, Viard Messalut (Translator), Lundy Ismord RN, Edmond Evan Pouchy MD, Maggie Levasseur RN, and Ostin Arcelin RN	Lundy Ismord RN checking on post-surgery patient	

Dr. Tellus Nickeson Cazeau, our Haitian internal medicine specialist and longtime Dame-Marie physician and mission trip member, was deluged with patient’s waiting to be triaged for medical and surgical issues. Like all our Haitian medical members, a true humanitarian and advocate for his people.

	Dr. Tellus Nickeson Cazeau		
		The patients are very patient, but nothing stirs up the crowd like someone trying to cut the line	

Dr. Stephen Moran, a dentist from West Hartford, CT, also joined our team this trip and was immediately busy with examinations, extractions, and, most importantly, dental education, alongside Dr. Jean-Pierre Chavannes, the local Haitian dentist at HCDM that MATH helps to support.

			
L – R: Jean-Pierre Chavannes, DDS and Stephen Moran DDS – Dental examinations, extractions and education for all ages			

An Additional Specialty Service Added

Dr. Marc Aurele Osiris, a warm-hearted urologist and professor of urology from Port-au-Prince, was recruited and added to the surgical team this trip. Enlargement of the prostate gland and issues with urination are very common in Haitian men, who have long been wishing for their medical needs to be addressed by our visiting teams. Dr. Osiris was immediately busy in the clinic. He admitted a patient with advanced prostate cancer for hydration and pain relief, and thanks to the support of several of our benefactors back home, we were able to provide medication that will ease this man's suffering and slow the cancer -- *a price beyond the reach of these people who live day-to-day.*

			
	Dr. Marc Aurele Osiris	Patient with prostate cancer	

Saving Mothers in Dame-Marie

This program, started in 2016, supports an OB / GYN and anesthesiologist to be on-site 24 / 7 and contributes to the Well Baby Clinic held weekly. Over 125 emergency Cesarean sections, over 1,000 natural deliveries under medical care, and over 7,500 pre-natal visits have been performed. The program is a blessing for those where breast feeding is the only option for a healthy baby.

	
	Well Baby Clinic

Dr. Joseph Glavylove was one of the first OB / GYN in the program and is now a veteran mission team member. The ultrasound machine, donated by Dr. Marco Morel in 2016, is a staple diagnostic machine and there is always a line of mothers anxious to see the results. This trip also allowed us to evaluate Butterfly iQ (www.butterflynetwork.com), the innovative handheld ultrasound probe that connects to an iPhone.



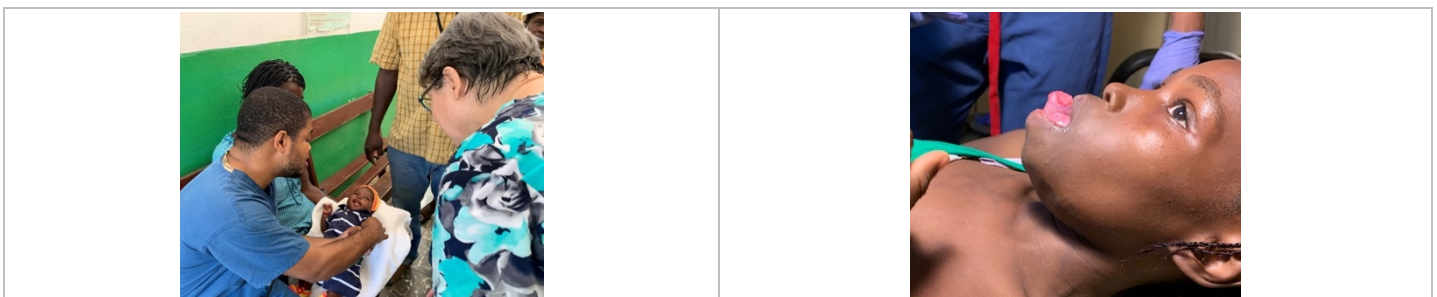
L – R: Michael Bourque MD and Joseph Glavylove MD using iButterfly

What Price for a Miracle?

As I have shared with some of our supporters at fundraising events, healing a patient requires monies that are beyond the means of their family. The bus or motorcycle taxi ride to see us becomes impossible for those who make \$1 - \$2 US a day, if they have work, and with the cost of gas in Haiti presently at \$10 US a gallon. With this inflation, obtaining needed medical care requires a miracle.

Each trip, donors provide funds meant to help a single patient / family for care that will make a life-changing difference. So, our mission leaders in country are always looking out for that someone in extreme need for assistance. Two patients were identified during this trip.

- A small baby unable to move his arms at the shoulders. It was unclear if this was a birth injury or an acquired injury and an x-ray was needed. Funds were provided for the 3-4 hour bus ride to the closest functioning facility in Jérémie, and for the x-ray. The results were negative, and arrangements were made for further evaluation in Port-au-Prince.
- A 21-year old woman with a jaw lesion that has grown over the last 4 years and is closing off her mouth cavity. Funds allowed Dr. Moran and Anne D'Orvilliers to put in motion some further evaluation by an oral-maxillofacial surgeon in Port-au-Prince and, hopefully, eventual resolution.





L – R: Djovensky Mathurin MD, mother, baby, and Anne D'Orvilliers

Jaw lesion in 21-year old woman

Hospital Facility Management

Our Haitian hospital administrator, MATH Board member, retired builder, and lifelong members and patron of Dame-Marie, is always there making sure the hospital is in working condition. During our first day of surgery, the electricity was intermittent and disrupting the schedule. But in true Haitian manner, immediate attention was provided and resolved.

	
Pierre Antoine during a rare quiet moment.	Part of my job now is to assist in putting out fires as they arise. L – R: Pierre Antoine, Sonny and Michael Bourque MD

Just as important, Pierre Antoine looks to the future and showed us what has been accomplished since our last trip in Nov 2018. He somehow found dollars, contributed more of his own, and had a third floor added to the hospital. This is to be the new living quarters of the resident doctors and nursing staff who live there on a semi-permanent basis while doing their required service to Haiti after training. The floor is solar powered and includes a kitchen and dining / social areas for the medical and nursing staff.

Due to the remote location of HCDM, Pierre, the local community and ourselves, we all want to encourage young medical professionals to come and join the hospital and having a welcoming and functioning hospital is a step in that direction. Thank you, Pierre, for this inspiring work.

			
View looking down onto 2 nd floor surgery	View looking at 3 rd floor	Sleeping quarter	Community bathroom
			
Kitchen		Dining / Social Area being tiles	

And Then There are the True Miracles...

Every trip seems to involve an event that is truly beyond understanding, and the outcome leaves no doubt that God is working through all of our hands. It usually involves a case of maternal health which in Haiti involves significant risks of dying and disability. On Monday night, we received word that a pregnant mother had arrived from another hospital after going into a seizure at home. This was her fifth pregnancy with four children at home, and, unfortunately, she was only 7 months pregnant. She had eclampsia and needed a Cesarean Section in order to save her life, but saving her life meant putting her unborn child's life at risk due to prematurity. But without being delivered, neither would survive. Preparations were made and the C/S accomplished without incident.

We have been part of other premature deliveries, and without a functioning NICU and respiratory support, most of these infants have survived for only a few hours. This day however, we would be amazed. A little girl was born just over two pounds and with immediate resuscitation by Kathy Aries RN she came around and required no respiratory support. And with advice from Indira Panthagani MD at St. Francis Hospital & Medical Center in the US and support from Sarah Bowlann RN, Maggie Levasseur RN, and Lynn O'Heron RN, the little one somehow found a way with her tiny mouth to start breast feeding.






The mother named her daughter Edna. I called her Angel. For truly she was a gift from God to all of us who were present that day. As caregivers in a land with few blessings, we lose patients way too often, and sometimes we, ourselves, need a miracle to recharge our spirits and hearts. This mother and her baby went home on the third day on the back of a motorbike. The beautiful newborn outfits that barely fit this little soul are thanks to another longtime benefactor, Ann Beloin.

The epilogue to the story is, unfortunately, not a happy one. After returning home to the US, we learned the baby did not survive more than three weeks at home. There is no neonatal services for a newborn at risk of infection and dehydration when born at such an early age. Still the value of 3 weeks of life is immeasurable for that woman's dedication to her pregnancy and newborn, and to us who participated.




The Bigger Issues in Haiti and Our Return Home

While we work in our isolated fishing village, literally on the farthest western point in Haiti, we always must keep in mind what is happening in the more populous parts of the country that we have to travel through to get back to Port-au-Prince. This is when the experience of so many veterans and support people in country make a significant difference.

On Wednesday, we learned there was to be a countrywide shutdown and street protests on Friday, our projected day of travel back to PaP. For safety of the team and for return of the Haitian team members to be with their families, we decided it was necessary to leave Dame-Marie on Thursday. We quickly broke down the operating rooms, packed for home, and left in the middle of the night with our soldier escorts for Jérémie, where there is a grass air strip. Pierre Antoine, the wizard that he is, pulled 3 small planes out of his back pocket without even a wand, and the team was ferried back to PaP avoiding the most troublesome parts of the land journey. Amazing. Thank you, Sir.

		
	<p>L – R: Front Row Lynn O’Heron RN and Sarah Bowlann RN; 2nd Row Maggie Levasseur RN and Valerie Rossetti MD; 3rd Row Patrick Charlorin MD, Esther Antoine-Dardignac MD and Benoucheca Pierre MD; 4th Row Local villager and Tellus Nickenson Cazeau MD; 5th Row Joseph Glavylove MD and Dasny Mackenson MD</p>	<p>Early morning at the grass airstrip</p>

The grass airstrip in Jérémie has become a favorite place for me, and we happened to arrive when a group of horses were galloping around for forage and exercise. Needless to say, all the animals were safely corralled and the airstrip empty when the planes arrived. A little bit of comic relief to the serious business of evacuating our team safely, on time, and without incident back to the PaP and a flight back to the US on Friday.

		
<p>L – R: Front – Pierre Antoine, Michael Bourque MD, Anne D’Orvilliers, Joseph Glavylove MD, Bus Driver; Standing – Patrick Charlorin MD, MAF Pilot, Valerie Rossetti MD, Sarah Bowlann RN, Lynn O’Heron RN, Stephen Moran DDS, Maggie Levasseur RN, Esther Antoine-Dardignac MD, Benoucheca Pierre MD, Djovensky Mathurin MD, Marc Aurele Osiris MD, Kathy Aries RN</p>	<p>Peaceful flight into PaP</p>	<p>At the airport leaving PaP for the US</p>

Closing Thoughts..

Another incredible adventure in service was completed in September with our growing number of friends and family in Haiti. Yes, there are dangers, but with careful planning, oversight, and so many now watching out for our safety, I feel these trips can continue to be worth the efforts of so many here in Haiti, back at home and at our community of Saint Francis and beyond in the US.

With the increased performance of the Haitians now delivering the majority of the care to their people, and the addition of specialty services and updates to the hospital, it seems we are making progress. We can only pray that the greater political situation in Haiti will reach an improved resolution for the people. And as Paul McCartney finished in his song *Let it Be*, "When the brokenhearted people living in the world agree, there will be an answer, let it be". And may it be peace.

Epilogue

It is another Christmas season as I write these reflections. I look over to the windowsill and see the Christmas cactus with its single flower in bloom. An amazing journey in nature that this humble plant shows its gift of a pretty pink blossom to the world for just two weeks in a single year.



We on the other hand are blessed that we can offer our gifts to help the world be a better place every day, whether by our actions, or words, or donated gifts. As you have seen in the mission tale, our ability to support someone in need allows us to transform a baby, child, or adult for a better life in impoverished Haiti. I would ask that you share this story of our work with someone who might listen and be moved by these words. For only by growing our support base, can we make more of a difference. There are just so many that need help.

Thank you everyone, and may God share his blessings to our readers of this tale, our supporters and travelers, families, volunteers, and those incredible Haitian patients. Their absolute trust in what we do as their caregivers is a responsibility like no other. Wishing everyone happy and healthy holidays. Amen.

God Bless you all,

Michael R Bourque MD

Michael Bourque MD
Medical Director for MATH Dame-Marie