

[Start Video] Good evening. I am here tonight to tell you at least one of the stories of the Holy Spirit Haiti Mission. I remember so well when Kathy and I first entered Marriage Encounter and one of the stories that was told then was that of Jesus and you riding on the tandem bicycle. I was in the front seat of course because I had to be in control of everything, but the story encouraged me to take the back seat and let Jesus drive. I understood what He was telling me but Type A personalities do not give up the front seat easily. The story of this mission is a lot about me letting God do what he does best and letting me be His eyes and hands.

To open this story I want to tell you about the Garden Girls, the Bible Girls and Minerva. They all have something in common. **[2]** This story begins in 2002 when Eliane St. Jacques was working for Father Tom Streit from Notre Dame. He was doing research in Haiti



to eradicate Elphantius. She has a heart bigger than life and decided to bring Nerline into her home. Nerline was 2 yrs old at the time and alone in the world without a family because her mother had just died. Sarange came right after Nerline and was 5 yrs of age. Both Sarange who is 18 and Nerline

who is 15 are still at NDC today. Soon 2 girls became 4 girls and then 8. Eliane had to rent a different house which I still remember well. While I knew she had begun this project, I did not know her well yet. She had been one of our translators on a 2003 medical mission and in those days we were only making one trip a year, so relationships formed more slowly. By 2005 I learned of her need for support and we began providing a small monthly substance. The deal was as it is with all of our projects, provide us with some reasonable accountability and we will continue the funding. To this day I get meticulous records from Eliane. **[3]** By 2008 NDC had become a Haitian Non Profit Corporation

and Eliane moved the girls to a larger facility. By then she had about 40 girls. Average age was about 6. They were relatively happy at the new facility with adequate water and some electricity and a lot of love. By now we were doing about two trips a year and I clearly remember visiting them one month and Eliane telling me that some men had stolen the electrical cable that runs from the street power to her house and she no longer had electricity. The girls all went to school in the Leogane area. By now HSHM had begun the educational sponsorship program and there was sufficient resource money for us to fund NDC for food on a monthly basis. 2007 was also the first year the Forever Friends group in South Huntsville collectively provided Christmas for the girls. It was a one year experiment that is still ongoing today.



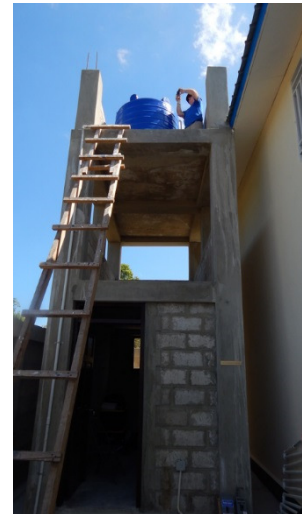
By 2009 we had begun discussing building a new building for NDC but we owned no land so that was the first hurdle. Purchasing land in Haiti is a real hoot. Many say they will sell the land to you but few can show you a free and clear title. By Oct 2009 we finally were able to find and close on a piece of land which houses the NDC



School today. . [4] And then the terrible earthquake of 2010 struck. While all the children by God's grace survived, their home was flattened. 10 days after the earthquake when I arrived, Eliane and the girls were in a field living in tents and a makeshift shelter. I shall never forget the look of sorrow on her face and the burden on her heart trying to decide what would happen next. But she is a survivor. [5] Within 3 weeks she had heard there was a Canadian crew in the area with a bulldozer and would put up three buildings for her if she had

land to put them on. Just 3 months prior we had acquired that land. Is that not God's Grace at work? For the next four years this was the new NDC. It was ideal as they had a kitchen and dining hall in one building, sleeping quarters in another and storage in a 3rd. Unfortunately space was tight and the earthquake victims continued to mount which meant Eliane had to take in more kids. HSHM dug a well for them, built a water building and installed a water purification system. In addition some nicer toilets were installed although they were still outhouses. The bedroom was pretty crowded with bunk beds stacked three high on each side of a 3' aisle down the middle. But it was so much better than a tent.

Beginning in 2011 and through 2012 through an enormous effort on a lot of people's parts and incredible generosity of the parish and diocese we were able to raise almost \$200,000 to



buy additional land for a new and much larger building, a wall, well, water purification system and solar power sufficient to power the building and the water system. During this timeframe on one trip I casually mentioned to Eliane that it would certainly be nice if the younger kids did not have to go into Leogane to school. On my next return trip Eliane had cobbled together enough money that she earned from renting her motorcycle to put up a simple kindergarden-first grade building on the premises. This is the way Eliane is so I have to be careful about making too many suggestions around her. This was the beginning of NDC school. When the girls moved into the new building the rest of the old NDC property was soon built up with additional buildings. Now the property serves as a K-6 school for the community. About 40 of the 70 girls today attend NDC

school with the remaining going to other schools or university in the area. However, NDC K-6 now educates 120 students, has a staff of 10 and is becoming sustainable on its own.

[6] Today NDC is one of the favorite spots to visit if you are on mission team. Playing with the kids is great fun for many and teaching the girls new skills is always a plus. There are a couple of women on the team that even stay at NDC while they are there. Two years ago Julie Lichay began an ESL course for the girls and that has now morphed into a weekly ESL class for nine of the girls. In Feb of this year we have begun teaching computer classes and Guerline was graduated from 4 year university with a degree in forensic accounting. We recently hired her as Eliane's administrative assistant. And two more of the girls are in university right now. Most orphanages in Haiti have a rule that once you turn 18 you are on the street, but there is no age limit for the NDC kids. Some of these girls did not get the opportunity to begin school until they were 10 or older. So to combat the on the street scenerio Vivian who is a Haitian but married to an American has purchased property next to NDC to build a votech school to teach some of the kids that have been put on the street some survival skills in how to make a living through sewing, cooking, carpentry or other such skill sets. [7]

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So what does all of this have to do with the Garden Girls, Bible Girls and Minerva? Since the earthquake we have been in the stabalization mode and beginning in 2017 I have reported to the HSHM board that we are transitioning to the sustainability mode. To do this we have to provide ways that NDC can produce revenue and understand their expenses. [9] Last year we solicited the prior of PFST, Fre Jones who is in charge of the Agriculture University in Hinche to come teach a group of girls how to grow produce. A volunteer set of girls was selected and Fre Jones spent numerous Saturdays teaching the girls the economics of gardening, seed growth, proper cultivation, watering, how plants grow, etc. Then they finally got to get out and do something. The

garden had become very overgrown, so over the next month the soil was prepared and the girls raised from seedlings a lot of vegetables, enough to feed themselves, sell some and give some away. The girls are working on their own now and have replanted the second growing season. They still get guidance from Fre Jones, but Fre Jones is 100 miles away and a hard 3 hour journey at best each way so much of the guidance now comes from Bertone. However to the girls credit they are pretty much working on their own.



About a month ago Eliane got an invitation to participate with 5 other Protestant orphanages in the Leogane area in a Bible showdown called a sword draw. Biblical knowledge is not something we Catholics are known for excelling in, but Eliane and the girls took on the challenge. This is a contest where two teams are facing each other, a verse from the Bible is posed and you have to identify it and locate it or some character or activity is stated and you have to give the chapter and verse. The nine Bible girls studied very hard and as it turns out Wistlancia is a Protestant at NDC and knows her Bible cold so Eliane put her in charge of the coaching. Wed, July 26 they beat Blue Ridge 1150-900. Friday July 28 they lost to Emmanuel 1050-1100. Tomorrow and Friday there will be two more contests, so please pray for the girls success. This has been an incredible boost to their confidence.

[10] Things do not always turn out as we wish them to. On one afternoon during my recent trip we had a little extra time so we stopped by NDC to go over a number of administrative items with Guerline since we couldn't do it previously. About half way into the conversation about the sponsorship for the girls I am informed that one of the girl's mother had come by to take her home. I was ecstatic until I learned the mother's motivation is through her brother who got a US family member to provide financial support for Minerva. We questioned the Mother regarding her true intentions for quite a while but unfortunately my suspicions do not override the fact that she is the child's true mother and Eliane had to let her go. Minerva did not want to go and the mother did not want the child. There were some tears all around and I ended up giving Minerva some money in an envelope instructing her that it was to take care of her and her mother. I doubt I will even know the end of this story but I know God placed me there that afternoon for a reason. We can only pray that Minerva gets the education she is promised. We made sure the door was still open for Minerva to return if things did not work out. I only wish it were that easy.



So what is the connection between the Garden Girls, the Bible Girls and Minerva? You are the connection. Your and Elaine's love and support for these girls has fostered an environment unlike any other I have seen in Haiti so far. Because you have cared all these years you have made it possible for these young people to have a safe environment, a reasonable education, an opportunity to learn what is ahead in life because they have a roof over their heads, a strong presence of God in their midst and a comfort you just don't find outside the walls of their compound. It is our love for others through our faith in Jesus Christ and our listening to Christ when he asks us to open our hearts and resources to all of humanity. There are no barriers between

all of us and the people we help in Haiti. We do what Jesus asks of us each day – to see Christ in each other so the kingdom of God will be close at hand. When we go to Haiti I know God's finger is touching us, but I know it is touching all of us in this room also this evening. So you can go home knowing that you have helped in some way if for no other reason than just listening to me tonight because God wanted you here and you answered the call. [11] Our mission is first and foremost about building long lasting relationships and transforming lives. This is what Christ has asked us to do. Grace and peace my brothers and sisters and thank you for all you do for this mission.