

NEWS FROM HAITI

March 19, 2021, is an important date to remember! It is the feast day of St. Joseph, the adoptive father of our Lord and the patron saint of workers. On that date, during a year our church has dedicated to his patronage, Catholics all over the world will honor and pray to St. Joseph to help guide our families and our nation. That date is also the 100th anniversary of the founding of the parish of St. Joseph, St. Bede's twin parish in Haiti. It is an event of great importance to its parishioners who hope to be able to celebrate a Mass in honor of their patron saint in a new church they are working hard to construct. St. Bede plans to celebrate a Mass in solidarity with them on that date and to begin discussions about how to re-vitalize our engagement with them.

St. Bede has been twinned with St. Joseph since about 1987 but the extensive support it has been providing began to flag when its Haiti Ministry committee dissolved a few years ago. Upon his arrival at St. Bede, our new pastor, Msgr. Joe Lehman, began looking for ways to re-establish a vigorous new ministry to interact with and support St. Joseph. Unfortunately, disruptions caused by Covid-19 and growing needs at home, curtailed those efforts. Significant new developments have arisen since then, however, that may open the way to a renewed and more effective Haiti Ministry.

As many people at St. Bede know, St. Joseph of Thomonde, Haiti, was obliged to demolish its church in 2018 because it had become unsafe for use due to irreparable deterioration over the years. However, many probably do not know that, over a period of three years, the parishioners of St. Joseph also managed, somehow, to collect \$10,000 by themselves to replace the old church. This amount may not seem like much to people in the U.S., but it is impressive in an impoverished country where many people are lucky to receive an income of \$3 a day. The bishop of their diocese, Desinor Jean, impressed by the sacrificial donations of St. Joseph's parishioners, was attentive to their pleas for a new church. He selected a new church design prepared by a well-known Haitian architect and authorized the parish to break ground for a new church in January 2020.

Relying heavily on volunteer parish labor and materials as well as professional work crews, the parish quickly constructed the foundation of the new church. That completed, St. Joseph's pastor, Fr. Bertrand Desforges, and Bishop Jean solicited and obtained major support from several Haitian sources, including former residents of Thomonde living abroad and as well as local community sources. To the joy of all, they also managed to obtain a major grant from the Government of Haiti with the help of its new prime minister, Joseph Jouthe. That grant alone, in March 2020, amounted to about 20% of the total cost of the church.

Work continued at an amazing pace throughout 2020, despite the arrival of Covid19 in Haiti -- as in the U.S. Soon, most of the church's reinforced concrete upright beams, arches and walls were erected.

In December 2020, just as the project was beginning to run low on funds, another U.S. parish twinned with St. Joseph, St. Margaret Mary (SMM) of Neenah, Wisconsin, contributed \$35,000 and a subsequent donation of \$5,000 a month later. These were the first donations received from any U.S. partner since the project began. By mid-January 2021 most of the church's main structural supports were in place -- as can be seen in the accompanying photo.





A week or so later, around January 18, the outline of the church's topmost dome began to come into view. Work continues as of this writing.

Unfortunately, the disruptive effects of Covid-19 in the U.S. and the lack of a functioning Haiti Ministry prevented St. Bede from participating in this magnificent effort – **until now!** Thanks to the unforeseen receipt of a large bequest from an anonymous former parishioner, St. Bede is now in a position not only to make a meaningful contribution for the construction of the church but also to coordinate more closely and more substantially with SMM on other important projects being pursued by the pastor of St. Joseph in the important areas of health, education and job creation.

St. Bede now has an unparalleled opportunity to do something very meaningful and important for our twin parish, but we need to find a few parishioners who are able and willing to help leverage all resources to best effect. St. Bede needs to have an effective Haiti Ministry committee to help our pastor assess resources and needs, vet existing projects, decide on the best and highest uses of current and future donations and, ultimately, to establish a new, more intimate relationship with our Haitian brothers and sisters. The providential gift St. Bede received must not be our sole contribution to our needy twin parish but serve as the starting point for a grander role in God's plan for the world.

If this somewhat exotic but important ministry appeals to you, please contact either our pastor, Msgr. Joe Lehman, (msgrjlehman@bedeva.org) or Paul Dauphinais (ledauphin@cox.net) to provide your name, email and telephone number.

Also, please know that no matter how large a donation St. Bede makes for a new church from its new bequest, it will not be enough to complete the entire church, let alone support other urgent needs of our twin parish. At best, our initial donation may help greatly to complete the reinforced concrete shell of the church and roof in time for the feast of St. Joseph on March 19, 2021. However, at that point it may take yet another \$200,000 or so to complete the church. We plan to remember our twin at mass the weekend of February 13, 14 with a second collection then. So, if you can contribute any amount at this time, it will be most welcome and greatly help maintain forward momentum. We ask that any check you write be made payable to **St. Bede Catholic Church** with a notation in the memo line that it is **for church construction in Haiti**. Our annual envelope for Haiti ministry will be found among your April offertory envelopes. But don't wait till then. If you cannot donate now, we hope you will be able to contribute something in April

The new church will look approximately like the architectural rendering (below) when it is finished. Thank you and please keep the pastor and people of St Joseph and all Haitians in your prayers.

