

ChristLife Series Becomes Main Adult Faith Formation Program

By Melissa Egan

Soon after Fr. John Dillon arrived in 2013 at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Derwood, MD, he lunched with two old friends at Mother of God Community who encouraged him to look at an adult evangelization program reaching parishioners in that Gaithersburg community. Knowing that his new parish needed a program to help parishioners encounter Christ, Fr. John watched a video testimony from Baltimore Archbishop William Lori, extolling the graces the ChristLife Series has brought to many parishes in that archdiocese. He prayed on it – and decided to take a leap of faith.

The ChristLife Series (*Discovering Christ, Following Christ, and Sharing Christ*) is a three-part evangelization process that brings Catholics together in small groups at the parish level, reintroduces them to Christ and teaches them how to live and share a Christ-centered life. The series consists of three seven-week courses, during which participants attend seven themed sessions and a retreat midway through the course.

St. Francis of Assisi Parish first provided the foundational course



St. Francis of Assisi Pastor Fr. John Dillon (center) and participants in the *Discovering Christ* course gather to share their experiences from the evangelization program in May 2016.

– *Discovering Christ* – in January 2015, partnering with Mother of God Community. Over the past two years, St. Francis has taken ownership of its ChristLife Series Ministry, with a 21-member service team in place and 114 people who have been involved with the program, said Medy DeAussen, coordinator of the ministry at St. Francis.

“The work of the Holy Spirit is what pushes you to go,” DeAussen said. “It’s not a typical training program. It’s the work of the Holy Spirit. You’re allowing the Holy

Spirit to work on you.”

Originally created in 1995 by Catholic lay leader Dave Nodar, the ChristLife Series provides a context in which parishes can help form missionary disciples within their church communities. According to the ChristLife Series web site, an estimated 80,000 people have participated in the ChristLife Evangelization Process in 800 parishes in 37 U.S. states and nine countries since 2009.

The courses are intended to build on one another, and coordinators

encourage participants to take all three at their own pace. *Discovering Christ* focuses on encountering Christ and helping participants build a relationship with Him. *Following Christ* teaches participants how to become a Catholic disciple. *Sharing Christ* focuses on how participants can learn to share their relationship with Christ with others.

Each of the courses follows a similar format: a meal to promote fellowship; prayer and worship; a DVD teaching of the session’s theme; and a small group discussion, where participants discuss the lessons of the teachings and the implications in their lives.

DeAussen said it takes participants a few sessions to feel comfortable sharing in the small group setting. “By the third session, people begin to share. After session four, they begin to linger,” DeAussen said. “That’s the work of the Holy Spirit.”

One important facet of the program is to have graduates of previous courses serve as leaders in upcoming offerings. They may start as assistant small group facilitators, transitioning to facilitators after they’ve gained experience. After any of the three courses is complet-

ed, participants are invited to take part in a monthly meeting called a Family Assembly, during which participants from the ChristLife Series and the parish’s Couples for Christ ministry gather for dinner, praise and worship, communal prayer and teaching.

With St. Francis having offered every course at least one time to parishioners, Fr. John said he has noticed a demonstrable change in the faith lives of participants. Many participants have shared that they’ve found meaning and purpose in life. Others said they have experienced the love of God in a very deep and life-changing way and feel comfortable sharing that experience in front of large groups.

“I have seen enough changes in people since we began to offer the courses in the ChristLife series to know that something wonderful and authentic was happening in the lives of participants,” he said.

St. Francis of Assisi Parish is offering a new *Discovering Christ* session from September 28-November 16 at the Goshen House, Mother of God Community in Gaithersburg. For more information, contact DeAussen at SFADCHRIST@comcast.net.

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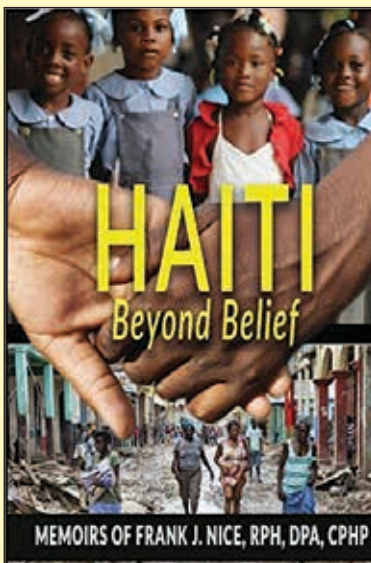
Origins of Haiti Medical Mission Documented in Parishioner Book

By Melissa Egan

When St. Francis of Assisi parishioner Frank J. Nice embarked on his first trip to Haiti on a general church mission trip in 1996, the pharmacist brought along two duffel bags of medication samples, prepared to supplement the medicine supply in the clinic affiliated with the church his parish supported. What he found was very different than what he expected: A caved-in roof. Mold growing everywhere. Leaking water. And a pharmacy with four bottles of medicine in it.

“I said, ‘We can’t leave it like this,’” Nice said in a recent interview. Twenty-one years later, with the help of many other like-minded people, Nice has made good on that word.

The seed of determination planted during that initial trip has blossomed into operational medical clinics in Leon, serving mostly parishioners from the Conversion of St. Paul’s Parish. St. Francis of Assisi Parish has supported St. Paul’s Parish through the Parish Twinning Program since 1987, offering help through health care, education and economic development. Over the 21 years since Nice established the Haiti Medical Mission, volunteer medical teams now travel to Haiti for five week-long missions each year, providing primary medical interventions to about 4,500 patients annually.



The stories, experiences and observations Nice has gathered in his 22 visits to Haiti are now compiled in his self-published book, *Haiti Beyond Belief*, which documents the many challenges and unexpected joys of providing medical care to residents of the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. According to UNICEF, Haiti’s population numbers 10.7 million people, with 69 children under the age of five dying per 1,000 births each year. For the vast majority of patients, the medical missions are their only access to healthcare.

Nice’s book documents his experiences in a conversational style, introducing readers to the

Haitian clergy and clinic staff instrumental in establishing and maintaining the clinics; the medical mission team members, including St. Francis parishioner Pat LaBuda; and the partnering organizations, such as the U.S. Public Health Services’ Disaster Management Assistance Teams, the Nurse Practitioner Program at Johns Hopkins University and the School of Pharmacy at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, without which the medical missions wouldn’t happen. He gives readers a Technicolor perspective of his experiences, sharing the travails of traveling across Haiti, gastrointestinal mishaps and observations he has made during two decades of on-the-ground patient care.

Haiti Beyond Belief sells for \$10.04, a price that commemorates the date Hurricane Matthew struck the island on October 4, 2016, badly damaging many of the clinic facilities. It can be purchased through Nice’s web site: www.nicebreastfeeding.com and through Amazon at: www.amazon.com/dp/0998502413/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1501004726&sr=8-1&keywords=Haiti+Beyond+Belief

All proceeds from the sales of *Haiti Beyond Belief* will be donated to the Haiti Medical Mission.

For more information about the Haiti Medical Mission, visit www.sfadw.org under ‘Haiti-Our Sister Parish.’

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New Parochial Vicar Relishes Bringing Young People Back to Flock

By Melissa Egan

Before completing his studies earlier this year at the Pontifical North American College in Rome, Fr. Jack Berard had amassed some very practical experience for his future vocation as a priest – discussing his Catholic faith as a missionary for FOCUS at the University of Pittsburgh, which exposed him to college students’ struggles, doubt and hostility toward Catholicism.

“The reality is I see myself in the people who are stuck or struggling in their faith,” said Fr. Jack, the new parochial vicar at St. Francis of Assisi Church. “I wasn’t always on track to become a priest and, because of that, I know how important it is to give personal attention to help draw people back into faith in the Church and Christ.”

A former resident of Glenn Dale, MD, Fr. Jack is the fifth of 10 children and graduated eighth grade from the former St. Hugh of Grenoble School, now the St. Joseph’s Regional Catholic School. He graduated from Eleanor Roosevelt High School in 2004, Temple University with a degree in political science in 2008 and from the Pontifical North American College, where he earned his bachelor’s degree in sacred theology (S.T.B) from the Angelicum and his license in sacred theology (S.T.L.) from the Gregorian, specializing in Fundamental Theology.

Fr. Jack arrived at St. Francis of Assisi Parish on July 12, adapting easily to the routine of cel-



Fr. Jack Berard, new parochial vicar at St. Francis of Assisi Church

brating Mass, hearing Confessions and preaching the Gospel for the Derwood, MD-based church with 1,500 registered families. Fr. John Dillon, the pastor at St. Francis, recently asked Fr. Jack to take over leadership of the parish’s Youth and Young Adult ministries. His approach, said Fr. Jack, is to root young people in the love of Christ

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