

# Haiti



Picture courtesy of Handstogether.org

The Republic of Haiti is located on the western third of the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean Sea. It shares the island with the country of the Dominican Republic. There are almost 11.5 million people who share this tropical island that is slightly smaller than the state of Maryland; almost 25% of the population lives in the capital city of Port-au-Prince. Most Haitians are descendants of Africans who were brought to the country as slaves. The country's two official languages are French and Creole.

Haiti has been an independent country since 1804. It was the first independent nation in Latin America and the Caribbean region, gaining its freedom from France after a 10-year slave-led revolt.

Haiti's location makes it vulnerable to hurricanes, severe storms, floods, and earthquakes making life very unpredictable at best. Whether in flatlands or the mountains, the terrain of the country is mostly rough. There is little arable farmland, which means Haiti must import much of its food. This makes it very expensive for people who live in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Healthcare is very limited – there is only one doctor for approximately every 4,000 Haitians. Water borne diseases are common due to the lack of access to clean water in the country.

The Becky DeWine School, run by a Catholic missionary group called Hands Together, with help from The Pontifical Mission Societies, is helping to improve the literacy rate in Haiti. Right now, only 62% of the adult population of the country can read and write.

## Info

**Population** 12.2 million

**Religion** 55% of the population of Haiti identifies as Roman Catholic  
29% call themselves Protestant  
10% say they have no religion  
4.6% say their religion is "other"  
2.1% practice Vodou

50-80% of Haitians incorporate some elements of Vodou culture or practice in addition to another religion, most often Roman Catholicism. Vodou was recognized as an official religion in 2003

\*CIA World Factbook

**Other data** There are 553 parishes that make up 10 dioceses.

Last year, The Pontifical Mission Societies sent \$33,526 to Catholics in Haiti, in support of orphanages, schools, seminaries, and special needs children.

Saint Marc School in Tremessee, Haiti, started out as a small enterprise, educating a few dozen students in grades one and two. Since its humble beginnings in 2010, it has grown to a facility that now serves over 350 students in grades pre-K through 13, the end of secondary school in Haiti. Students receive a hot meal at lunch time. For many of them, it is the only nutritious meal they will receive on any given day.



In a recent interview with Fides, the Vatican News Agency of the Pontifical Mission Societies, Deacon Daren Bitter, a missionary in Haiti said, "What I witness when I visit the Tremessee community is a people who are materially poor but spiritually rich and who radiate a simple joy. The children are healthy as they have food as well as shelter to live in, they have access to education and medicine; outside of the communities we support this is not the case," he stressed.

About 5,000 people live in the rural area; few have access to running water or electricity. There are no paved roads, no stores, and no businesses or industry.

The goal of Saint Marc School is to help students and their families build a better future for themselves and others. Each family is asked to pay a tuition of \$10 per year per student. The idea is that this "buy in" will help parents take more seriously something that they may not have had access to- education. For families who can't afford the \$10, arrangements are made for them to give of their time to help the school.

Fides reports that last Sept. 15, hundreds of people from the Tremessee community took part in the inauguration of ten new primary/secondary school classrooms and six new vocational school classrooms that will offer programs in agriculture, carpentry, welding, and construction, in addition to the current sewing program.

Archbishop Launay Saturné said, "The impact is very positive for the whole community." This is because the school also employs 60 full or part-time cooks, educators, security, and maintenance staff, providing employment in the area as well as the much needed education and vocational training.



pictures courtesy of HandsforHaiti.org

During the past summer, students from Saint Marc's first class graduated and a new vocational school opened this fall. "Students are also now receiving faith formation and families have moved closer to celebrating sacraments."

**TAKE ACTION:** Challenge students to raise as many \$10 "scholarships" for MCA during November so that more children in the missions can afford school fees!