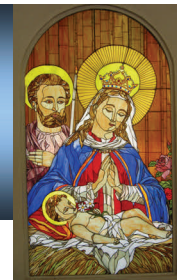




# La Sagrada Familia



*News from and about our family in the Dominican Republic*

December, 2014

Seventh Issue

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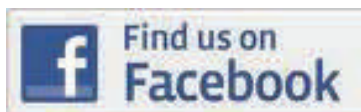
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Thanks for being a friend!

## United at the Heart!

— Antoinette Mensah

In 2016 we will be celebrating 35 years of relationship with our brothers and sisters in the Dominican Republic. Over the past 33 years, many of you have offered prayers, shared time and made monetary donations in support of our archdiocesan connection. For some of you this has resulted in deep and lasting relationships that have been transformative in ways you never imagined. These relationships make the world a smaller place as we pay attention to the needs of others and together live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

By now you may have received, or should soon receive, a letter from Fr. Martí Colom, former pastor of La Sagrada Familia parish, and me, the Director of World Mission Ministries. The letter will invite you to consider a donation as we move toward the Feast of the Holy Family. Also, it will provide an update and information on how you can support our collective work in the Dominican Republic. As an archdiocese, we have assisted the members of our sister parish in their efforts to grow and develop as a community in spite of overwhelming challenges of economic poverty.

We have done a lot and yet there is much more for us to do. Our support promotes self-sufficiency and respects the ability of the people of Sabana Yegua as they work to improve their quality of life. Our support provides access to educational programs for youth and adults, economic development and, most importantly, strong faith formation. Our support provides a layer of solidarity as we work together to spread the Gospel and celebrate the gifts God has provided.

We hope you will join us over the next two years in our campaign to increase awareness of our on-going relationship.

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## United at the Heart!

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We invite you to share this newsletter with others and whenever possible support various events throughout the coming years. Your presence makes a difference and we are ever grateful for all of your support.

As we approach the birth of our Lord, let us in this Advent time prayerfully reflect on how we respond to this call taken from Acts 4:32:

*“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.”*

The Office for World Mission and our La Sagrada Familia brothers and sisters wish you and your family a Happy Advent, a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year!

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## One in Three

**The generous work of our Saint Vincent de Paul Conferences in our parish.**

**-- Fr. Esteban Redolad**

Among the many activities, projects, groups, and organizations carried out by La Sagrada Familia, there is one (and three), that may not be very well known. These are the three Saint Vincent de Paul (SVDP) Conferences: La Sagrada Familia, San Agustín, and San Francisco de Asis (youth) conferences. Their purpose is to give comfort and support to the poorest and neediest.

Thanks to funds received from two SVDP conferences in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, the three conferences continue to minister among the neediest families in Sabana Yegua. The three conferences have separate leadership and work autonomously in terms of their help to needy families. Sometimes, they work hand in hand - such as in visits to the local jail for the celebration of the Eucharist - and they hold their monthly meetings together. While the help these conferences give is limited, it is extremely valuable in that it is both continuous and personal. Their help is better understood with names and stories, not with numbers. Here are some examples.

Milito Galvan is in his 40's and worked for years in a plastics factory. Due to constant contact with some chemicals, he is now weak and in poor health. Milito is married to Santa (whose name means "holy woman"). They have two children. The conference helps them on regular basis with medicines, food, and transportation when Milito needs to go to the hospital.



Juana del Rosario is a 70 year old physically handicapped woman who lives with her mentally ill son. She has two more sons who live in Santo Domingo but do not offer support to their mother or for their brother's condition. The conference of San Agustín provides assistance to Juana and her son through regular visits, food, and medicines.

Arcide Alcantara is 55 years old. In 2011, he and his son were run over by a truck and he is unable to work. His son, 15, receives therapy and is recuperating slowly. His wife suffers from cervical cancer. The conferences help the family with material and spiritual food and medicines.

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## One in Three

### The generous work of our Saint Vincent de Paul Conferences in our parish.

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Mr. Constantino is in his 60's and had a stroke several years ago. He is now in a wheelchair, as he had one leg amputated. Constantino lives with his wife, their 18 year old daughter who has spine problems, and a granddaughter from another daughter who has passed away. They have one son who works in the fields and is the sole bread winner for the family. The conference helps the family with food, medicines, and visits.

These are just four of the over 40 families the conferences have assisted. Plus, the conferences provided notebooks and other school supplies to more than 30 children at the beginning of the school year.

The Conference of Saint Francisco de Asis is made up of youth. It has around 20 members and has helped more than 30 people with food, medicines, and medical studies.

One of the strongest traits of the three conferences is that they are part of a well-known and organized international institution. Not too long ago, our three conferences hosted a provincial meeting in the parish with the presence of the Director of the SVDP of the Dominican Republic and other national officials.



It is remarkable how these three conferences reach out to the community. I can say without hesitation they have become instrumental in identifying and helping the neediest families. They readily assess the needs of people and families to assure a proper response. They work to create an atmosphere of familiarity, gentleness, and peace.

Help is needed! At present, our three conferences work only in the town of Sabana Yegua with about 10,000 inhabitants. Though valuable, their work is limited and relatively small compared with 30,000 souls living in the parish territory. If any SVDP conference within the Archdiocese or elsewhere could assist them financially, their work and ministry can be significantly expanded to more families and other communities within the parish.

Finally, the home visits by our conferences are not just to hand out some material help but rather to build relationships and to bring care. It is about sitting down with families and having a conversation. This opens an opportunity both for prayer and sharing that brings a ray of hope into people's lives. The SVDP ministry, as I witness here, is about creating a way of helping others that dignifies both those who give and those who receive.

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To access the La Sagrada Familia section of the Archdiocese website, [click here](#) or you can go to: <http://tinyurl.com/SagradaFamilia-MKE> .



## Soles for Catholic Education and La Sagrada Familia — Antoinette Mensah

On October 25, 2014 we walked in solidarity with students, teachers and the community of Sabana Yegua. Our goal was to raise awareness of the need for quality education and to raise dollars to support the students of La Sagrada Familia. Nearly 200 members of the community surrounding our sister parish came together on a beautifully warm day in Sabana Yegua. They walked and sang and promoted quality options for a better life.



"To express ourselves as we wish"



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## Soles for Catholic Education and La Sagrada Familia

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Another "We Love La Sagrada Familia" walk banner created by Vacation Bible School students at St. Anne in Pleasant Prairie



**"The first educators are parents"**



**"We fight for education for a better life"**

Locally we set up information stands and provided rosary bracelets made by the women of La Sagrada Familia. These bracelets reinforced the need for continual prayer and were a real hit with children who wanted to pray along with the youth of La Sagrada Familia.

Thank you for supporting our brothers and sisters in the Dominican Republic. We are grateful for the generosity of all who helped make our involvement in the Soles for Catholic Education a huge success! To date we have raised \$2776 towards improving educational quality for our youth and young adults in the Dominican Republic. Financial support such as this allows us to meet many of the needs for a student attending a school in Sabana Yegua. Donations are still being accepted until December 31, 2014.

World Mission Ministries



One Church One Community One Love



## A Big Party: Water for Cañada de Piedra and Altagracia -- Dolores Puertolas

It has been eleven years since Florinda Ramírez and “El Ciego” (which means “blind”), as everyone affectionately calls Bienvenido Mancebo because of his droopy eyelids, set about to realize a dream to bring water to their communities. These two little settlements, Cañada de Piedra and Altagracia, are located within the territory of La Sagrada Familia parish. Five hundred people live there. These people never had accessible potable water for drinking, cooking, or washing. Instead, while the men worked in the nearby fields as day laborers, the women walked up to four miles round trip to get water from a well. The women had to cross a dangerous state highway which resulted in accidents and injuries on multiple occasions. They carried 20 liter (5 gallons) cans of water which, when full, weighed over 40 pounds. At home, they carefully preserved the water because they knew the faster they used it, the sooner they would have to walk again under the hot Caribbean sun (85° Fahrenheit daily average).



Today their dream is a reality. After years of visits to institutions and authorities, letters, commission trips and meetings, the communities achieved their goal. A few years ago, the Foundation for Development of the Diocese of San Juan de la Maguana (FUNDASEP), together with Manos Unidas and Nuevos Caminos (two development agencies from Spain), and La Sagrada Familia parish in Sabana Yegua established a comprehensive development plan in which accessibility to water was an essential component. The Cañada de Piedra-La Altagracia Aqueduct was identified as the most pressing necessity.

It is difficult to describe the 18 months of struggle to complete the aqueduct. There was the hard work of brigades of volunteers building protection for the existing well, laying foundations, installing pipes, and building the elevated water tank of 50,000 gallons, as well as 18 months of technical supervision by FUNDASEP and parish personnel. It was quite an endeavor.

Now the 123 families living in both communities have a sink and faucet at each home. These families know the effort that went into the project and its cost and have organized a system to assure its prudent operation - like distribution of water only every two days for limited hours. Everyone fills all of their jars, pails, and containers to use this precious resource and not let the water run uselessly. This water will change their lives and those of future generations

We thank Florinda, “El Ciego”, and all of the community members for their tireless effort and faithful dedication to this beautiful project. In the photo to the right, we see a young boy enjoying the water.

And so today we are celebrating, with songs, dances, skits, and joy, the blessing of God who wants a dignified life for all. A great party to celebrate this wonderful achievement.



## A Poem By Anna Grosch, Holy Apostles Parish



*There is a chapel in the community of La Sagrada Familia,  
Sturdy wooden posts stand tall and support a simple thatched roof,  
There are no doors, no windows, no pews.  
But, the parishioner's hymns are carried on wind,  
Their Mass praises The Lord with song, with clapping, and with dance.*



*There is a nutritional center,  
A basic children's day care center housed in concrete walls,  
There is no playground, there are no computers, no video games, few toys.  
But there are dozens of smiling, bubbling children that run to greet you at the door.  
They open their arms for a hug,  
they reach their fingers to hold your hand  
They invite you to play with them.*



*There is a fútbol field,  
A vacant lot of dusk, rubble and stone.  
There is no grass, no painted white lines, no stadium bleachers for this soccer field.  
But there are players who have kicked a ball since they could first walk,  
Full of passion, intensity and spirit.*



*There is a pilgrimage,  
A four mile walk every Friday before Palm Sunday,  
A journey to share Mass with the Bishop.  
There are no cars, no water stations, no prizes.  
But there are hundreds of people walking, talking and praying side by side.  
They embrace one another.*



*There is a Haitian Community,  
Who live quietly and peacefully among the Dominicans,  
Refugees that have known neglect, discrimination and no citizenship.  
But they are people of God, joy, humility,  
Of Love and Faith that know no boundaries.*



## **SOLIDARITY: A Powerful Weapon Against Injustice.**

**-- Fr. Juan Manuel Camacho**

In September 2013, the Constitutional Tribunal of the Dominican Republic (DR) issued ruling 168/13. This decision snatched away citizenship from people whose parents and/or grandparents were “irregular migrants” (undocumented foreigners) to the DR. Since 1929, children born in the DR of “irregular migrants” had been registered as Dominican citizens. Now they are stateless. It is estimated this decision has affected about 2.3% of Dominicans including thousands of Haitian descent. For these former citizens, mostly young, this ruling makes them criminals just for being born on the Dominican side of the island.

The decision has not only hurt thousands of Dominicans, but is feeding an anti-Haitian ideology within the population. This ideology, rooted in complex historical and social events, had been latent. But now it is more explicit creating discomfort and social conflict among the population. Self-proclaimed “nationalist” sectors have taken to the streets to support the injustice this decision entails. Once again, what looms in the background is the resentment toward the Haitian people and their presence in the DR. This injustice should be strongly condemned. It is a grave injustice that is being committed on these former citizens of Haitian descent. Truly, these men and women are Dominicans born and raised in the DR. Their parents and/or grandparents were the undocumented ones who crossed the border - not them.

Since the ruling in September 2013, the Dominicans of Haitian descent have struggled to regain their right to citizenship. The debate over the past months has been for a humanitarian solution for the victims of the ruling which was promised by the president and other public authorities. Solidarity of international organizations and several civil and religious institutions in the DR, including La Sagrada Familia, have pressured the Dominican government to solve the problem created by 168/13.

Long debates and solidarity gave birth to law 169/14 passed by the Dominican government in May 2014. This law is twofold in that it establishes a plan to regularize all undocumented immigrants in the Dominican territory and sets up a naturalization plan for all those born and registered irregularly in the DR. This law was celebrated with joy as it opened the possibility to either attain or retain rightful citizenship. At La Sagrada Familia, we viewed the law as a great achievement and as an act of goodwill by the Dominican government to improve the situation of those who were in legal limbo due to 168/13.



Little did we know of the problems that awaited us in the coming months. When the process of regularization and naturalization began in the summer of 2014, some - but not all - offices of the Dominican government carried out the law properly. Unfortunately, there are provinces (states) in which officials are not following the provisions of the law today. Some officials have been adding modifications - notes and footnotes - to the law just to complicate things. Several provincial offices are setting up new requirements which are not part of the provisions of the law. One of these offices is in Azua, the province where La Sagrada Familia is located.

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## SOLIDARITY: A Powerful Weapon Against Injustice.

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Another area of concern for us is that most Haitian nationals living in the parish area do not have any documents of identification from their country. The three documents essential for the process of regularization in the DR are: birth certificate, identification card, and passport. To get these, a person must pay around 200 dollars in any Haitian consulate in the DR. Many Haitians cannot afford this cost. The Dominican government, the international community, and the Haitians have pressured the Haitian government to provide these documents in a manner that is more accessible and affordable. The Haitian government responded with the "Identification and Documentation Program for Haitian Immigrants in the Dominican Republic". This program is intended to provide the three essential identity documents for 25 dollars. Again, many were glad at what looked like a new step to advance the process. But, currently and much to our surprise and sadness, things are not working as expected.

At La Sagrada Familia, we are in contact with the Haitian Embassy in Santo Domingo trying to set a time to organize a process for Haitians in our parish to acquire these documents. It has been impossible to get a clear answer from them. Each call and visit is met with excuses and delays that have further exhausted the patience of some and disappointed the hopes of others. It's sad for us. The Haitians who live in the DR are becoming increasingly disillusioned with Haitian and Dominican authorities. It seems as if there is little willingness to make change. On our part, we will continue to accompany the impoverished and desperate population of Haitian immigrants in our parish. But, it has become increasingly difficult not to lose hope. It would seem, indeed, that this absurd legal odyssey is endless. Your prayers are welcome and needed!



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### Bishop Hying Visits La Sagrada Familia.

Recently, Auxiliary Bishop Don Hying of Milwaukee was able to visit La Sagrada Familia for a few days. Bishop Hying served in the parish in the Dominican Republic from 1994 to 1997. He was delighted to be back, to see friends and to visit the new ministries and programs that take place nowadays. It was a joyful visit.

We extend our congratulations and prayers as he moves into his new role as Bishop of the Diocese of Gary Indiana. Thank you, Bishop Don, for your presence among us!

