

Mission to Matel, Haiti

July 19-26, 2016

The Rev. Sam Owen

Mr. Michael Smith

Mr. Chris Dennison

Sam: The purpose of our trip was to meet with Fr. Jean Berthold Phanord, the priest in charge in Bondeau, Haiti, and members of the community of Matel, to discuss the possibility of building an Episcopal school and starting a new church in Matel. Our group represented four parishes from the Diocese of New York. Michael Smith is a warden from St. Michael's in Manhattan. Fr. Nathanael St. Pierre, Robin Newman and Susan Brown were from St. Augustine in Manhattan (Susan is a warden there). Gisele Isidore and I hail from The Haitian Congregation in the Bronx, and Chris Dennison came on behalf of St. John's in Kingston. We had met twice before the trip, to pray together, to talk about logistics and to discuss our purpose. Each of us seemed eager to meet the people of Matel and to have a conversation. Chris and Robin had been quite involved in Carpenter's Kids, a very successful partnership in Tanzania that provided tuition to orphans. Chris had lived in Tanzania for about six months, working for Carpenter's Kids in their office in there.

Port au Prince

Sam: We arrived in Port au Prince almost on time. After clearing customs we met our driver Antoine, a good man who lives in Bondeau and is building a nice business for himself. Since my last visit a year ago he has bought a second van and hired another driver. Antoine took us through Port au Prince without incident, and I could see the shock on the faces of some of our group members who were coming to Haiti for the first time. Port au Prince is crowded, loud and smelly. It assaults all your senses. But soon we were free of the city, travelling west and passing through the countryside, which is quite beautiful.

Michael: Every culture has its own taboos. For middle-class Americans with college degrees, littering is a sin only slightly less dire than human sacrifice. So, absurdly, one of the first things struck me is all the trash lying around. The main component seems to be empty plastic water bottles. I found myself wondering, with a certain degree of moral ardor, Why can't they pick this stuff up?

Then reason kicks in. Of course – particularly in Port-au-Prince and sizable towns – bottled water is the only water that's drinkable. The Haitian government has never been in a position to build anything like New York's amazing water-supply system. Bottled water comes in (plastic) bottles. There is no deposit on these bottles, and so no incentive to return them or recycle them. And plastic recycling is a heavy-duty industrial process anyway, requiring a lot of capital investment and an already robust industrial infrastructure, including transportation.

Moreover, the same government that can't organize water supply also can't organize trash collection. There's just no such thing, in Haiti. So suppose they did pick it up – what would they do with it?

In fact they often do pick it up and gather it into piles. And then, the only thing to do with it is burn it. Which makes a very nasty smell, and probably isn't very good for you to breathe.

Once you get out of the airport and head for the countryside, Port-au-Prince seems to go on forever. To the unaccustomed eye, it's overwhelming. But one soon becomes aware that the picture is very mixed.

Yes, there's the trash. Yes, the roads are a disaster. Yes, the buildings are shoddy, improvised affairs, mostly made out of obviously bad concrete and homemade, poorly-mortared cinder blocks, ready to fall down at a breath of wind, much less another earthquake.

But I was also vividly aware of the impulse to decorate. Haitians seem to love paint. Every weensy five-foot-wide storefront has a gorgeous colorful sign and an inventive name – nearly always in standard French rather than Kreyol:

Blanchisserie Jesu-Merci (Have Mercy Jesus Laundry)

Eglise Evangelique Golgotha (The Evangelical Church of Golgotha)

Institution Mixte Emile Durkheim (The Emile Durkheim Coed Primary School)

Funeraire Haute Tension (High Voltage Funeral Home)

Curiously, it was this exuberant, irrepressible, infinitely creative decorative impulse that first began to unsettle my own expectations of Haiti. People who paint like this, I thought, are not quite the kind of demoralized people I came expecting to meet. There is more going on here than our newspapers – and our confident First World assumptions – prepared me for.

The countryside is ravishingly beautiful. Of course there's still the trash, though not so much of it. Also there's an occasional burned-out car or tractor by the side of the road. But there are towering mountains, sometimes moodily veiled in soft mist, sometimes shining hard and bright and splendid under the relentless Caribbean sun. There are little bays and mangrove-y islands, short stretches of incandescent white beach, little unexpected valleys with palm and fruit trees and stands of corn and even, occasionally, rice paddies, terraced and irrigated with low-tech sluice-gates and ditches.

Some of the mountainsides are bare, some richly wooded. In some cases the bare ones are bare just because of the local microclimate – that particular slope, for whatever reason, doesn't get much rain. In other cases they're bare because people have laboriously climbed them and cut down the trees and burned them for charcoal, which is the go-to cheap fuel for cooking in Haiti. This is a serious problem because then the soil washes away and clogs the creek beds, and also, you get landslides.

Nobody likes a landslide, and with good reason. But people also have to cook.

Chris: We also saw a lot people wearing *pepe*. *Pepe* is the name for secondhand clothes (usually sent from the US) that can be found for sale all over Haiti. The name comes from *lapè*, which means peace in Creole (from the French “la paix”) because when the piles of clothes arrive, people had to call for peace to get people organized (so the legend goes). The culture that developed around *pepe* involves people taking more clothes than they need or want and reselling them.

Naturally, donated clothes can be resold for less than local seamstresses and tailors can make clothes, so this decimated the textile industry in Haiti.

Michael: There is no public transportation in Haiti. None. But there are 'tap-taps'. A tap-tap is a converted truck, whose bed has been covered with a canopy, and equipped with benches inside, and whose owner takes it on a more or less predictable route at a more or less predictable time. People hop on and off, and the reason it's called a 'tap-tap' is that when you want the vehicle to slow down and let you off, you tap a coin on the canopy or the truck body to alert the driver. Payment seems to be more or less on the honor system.

Tap-taps are even more elaborately decorated than storefronts, and they all have names. Here are a few I remember:

La main Dieu souveraine (God's hand rules all)

Louange a Dieu (Praise to God)

Psaume XXIII (The 23rd Psalm)

Toi seul O Jesus (Thou alone, Jesus)

Bondeau

Sam: If you take your right hand and form a backwards letter C with your thumb and forefinger, you can roughly make the shape of the country of Haiti. Port au Prince is located in the webbing of your hand, and Bondeau is located around the top of the knuckle on your thumb. Matel would be a little farther out on your thumb towards the end. To say it another way, Bondeau is on the northern coast of the southern peninsula, about halfway to the end. Matel is a short distance farther from Port au Prince.

We arrived in Bondeau just as the sun was setting. Robin and Chris both marveled at how short this trip was as compared with the mission in Tanzania, which takes three full days to reach. Fr. Phanord and several members of the church were there to greet us warmly at the guesthouse when we arrived. They carried our luggage and helped us get settled. Dinner was ready, and we ate the first of many delicious Haitian meals: chicken, rice and beans, fried plantains and spicy cole slaw. After dinner we met on the second floor verandah for compline and conversation, followed by an early bedtime.

Michael: The little town of Bondeau, which is where we stayed, isn't even a wide place in the road. There is a sign on the highway – BONDEAU – but it appears to refer to nothing. The actual village is a cluster of small houses, invisible off in the scrubby woods fifty yards or so from the road.

But Bondeau also has a school, and a church, and a guesthouse, and a sort of hostel for kids – the last-mentioned, an amazing story in itself, too long to tell here. These were all built with some help from American Episcopal parishes and individuals who take an interest. They are all now thriving, lively operations, staffed by local people, clearly doing a lot of real substantial good, and much valued by the

townspeople of Bondeau and its environs. Not at all the helicoptered-in, we-know-best grand-scale First World undertaking with which we are all too familiar, but rather, retail-level institutions with real roots in the community, and built on the expressed priorities of the local people.

We stayed in the guesthouse, which is not luxurious by First World standards, but is perfectly comfortable and homelike. There are screens on the windows and no mosquitoes in the rooms. There is no hot water, but a cool shower at 4 PM, after a sweaty day, is sheer bliss.

The food is beyond good: stews of goat or conch, chicken from the front yard, fried plantains, boiled plantains – which you have to treat like potatoes; rice with black mushrooms, a wonderful peppery dish made from shredded cabbage – Haitian cole slaw! – fresh fruit, and even spicy peanut butter, which is a huge improvement on the basic commodity. Then there's the Haitian beer – Prestige is the one we had – which can hold its own anywhere. One eats well in Bondeau.

Sam: The guesthouse in Bondeau is surprisingly comfortable. The climate is drier than other parts of the island, which means fewer mosquitoes. From the second floor there's a beautiful view of the Gulf of Haiti, with the large island of La Gonave in the distance. In the foreground you see the Bon Samaritan school, the community of Bondeau and the newly built, cathedral-size Bon Samaritan church. We knew we had work to do, but we also took time for prayer and reflection. The heat forces you to slow down, which is a perfect prescription for a group of type-A, achievement oriented New Yorkers like us. Afternoon naps weren't mandatory but they were encouraged. Each day we were up with the sun to do Morning Prayer, which was followed by a Haitian breakfast (fresh fruit and juice, strong Haitian coffee and omelets) and the day's activities.

Chris: On Wednesday, we toured Bondeau. Bondeau is a small village, with a spattering of houses, a coconut grove, and vast Episcopal construction. In addition to the guesthouse, we saw the original church, a small two-room structure built in 2000, probably accommodating 30-40 worshippers. In 2005, a 75-person church was built, as a part of the beginning of a school. In 2010, the school was complete, with a room for a medical clinic and classrooms to accommodate 350 children. (School is out-of-session in the summer, so we saw very few children.) This school runs on a budget of about \$84,000 a year, with donors from South Florida providing \$80,000 of that annually and the rest coming in through tuition fees.

The dominant structure in Bondeau (by a significant margin) is Bon Samaritan church. Construction of the church broke ground in 2013, and it was consecrated in 2015. This beautiful building can accommodate over 800 worshippers and seems to be the cultural center of Bondeau as well.

Matel

Sam: We met with the Matel people on Thursday. Matel is a twenty-five minute drive west from Bondeau. We arrived around 9:30. We first stopped at

Madam Nelson's home to greet her. She was the person I first met two years ago, who told us that her family was donating the land

We then walked south up a short but steep hill a couple of hundred yards under the blazing morning sun. When we reached the top of the hill and turned back, we saw the loveliest view of the ocean and of La Gonave. We also felt a gentle but steady breeze in our faces, and I realized that this land is quite special. It is large - ten acres - and relatively flat. Behind the property to the south the land falls away into a valley with mountains in the distance. Beyond the land to the west there is another hill (and beyond that another hill). The Mistal family has given the Episcopal Church 10 acres of relatively flat land, perched on a hill with an ocean view on one side and a mountain view on the other. It's really beautiful.

About 25 members of the Matel community were waiting for us when we returned to Madam Nelson's home. Many of them are farmers who took time out of their farming work to be with us. I hadn't thought of the impact of our two-hour meeting, that the people actually had other things to do than just meet with us. Of course they had things to do, but this was important to them. Madam Nelson is one of nine children from the Mistal family. At least seven of them were present for the meeting. Her brother, who did most of the talking, is named Maudelaire. Another sister who participated a lot is Benita. Madam Nelson is the director of the Catholic school down the road, and she has twelve years' experience. Maudelaire is a teacher at the school in Bondeau. Another brother, Jean Beny, is also a teacher. And Benita is a lab technician in a hospital. This is no simple peasant family.

The cool shade of the fruit trees at the Nelson home was a welcome change from the blazing sun on the treeless property above; it was surprisingly cool and comfortable for our meeting. Fr. Phanord led us off in prayer and an Episcopalian hymn that several people in our group knew by heart. After the prayer, Fr. Phanord introduced me, and I watched the now-familiar surprise of Haitian people listening to a white person speaking Creole for the first time. I told them that I have been praying for their community for the past two years, and that I have been traveling around the Diocese of New York telling the story of this community's need for a school. I told them I've been enlisting support from various churches to fund the building. This meeting, I hope, will be the beginning of a relationship that will continue for decades. We need each other, I said. Haitians need the help of Americans to build school, clinics and churches. Americans need Haitians to help us know that we are not the center of the universe, and that God is the center of our lives. Together we can create conditions to allow God transform all of us. Several Matel people eagerly said Amen to that.

Maudelaire said that the community needs a school. The children currently travel at least four miles to go to school, which is too far to walk. So they go by motorcycle taxi, at a cost of US\$1.00 per day, five days per week. The cost adds up, he said. The road isn't good and accidents happen all the time, putting their children at risk. It's not uncommon to see two, three or even four children riding with the motorcycle driver on a bumpy road to school. A woman in the crowd then added that most of the students pay around US\$40 per year for the Catholic school. A school in their community would bring safety and security, and the money they spend now could contribute a little to their children's tuition.

Madam Nelson told us that their family is Christian, and they very much want an Episcopal church in their community. They want a church as much as they want a school. Each Sunday they must travel four miles to that same Catholic church. There are "many, many" families who live in the hills behind the land that would gladly support a church, and those families have "many, many" children. We asked them how many children they thought would come to the school.

"Seven hundred to eight hundred," he said.

Chris: The people we met with are passionate about academic education and the need for a church, school, and medical facilities in Matel. The discussion was happening in Creole, so I didn't exactly keep up, but a good portion was translated for me, so I followed along.

Sam: The Mistal family seemed eager to work together to make this school and church become a reality. They were not at all passive about offering suggestions and ideas. Their approach seems well suited to a genuine partnership. We told them that we hope to work together on this project, to build a relationship as well as a school and church. They seemed very open to that idea.

The family's attitude and approach also reflects a positivity that I often see during my visits to Haiti. We Americans tend to think of Haiti as downtrodden and broken. It's true that Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world. It's also true that Haiti has fallen even deeper into poverty and political chaos since the 2010 earthquake. But the resilience and optimism of the Haitian people has not been shaken. Haitians have a *joie de vivre*, a joy that is unmistakable. It sometimes seems to me that the hopefulness of the Haitian people is in direct proportion to their difficulties.

Michael: I was very impressed by their seriousness and commitment to the project, and by the general air of informed, concrete, focused, businesslike competence. Another case of unconscious First World assumptions shattered by contact with reality; I had been not-quite-consciously thinking, I suppose, without really reflecting on the matter, that these folks would need *guidance*. Hah!

Sam: Maybe it was their optimism that led me to make my mistake, which was to tell the Matel people that we hope to have a school built by September 2017. Nathanael told me later that the people took my optimism as a promise. I told the people that we will do fundraising to build a school, and that the same building could be used for the church. We would like to start with a three-room classroom to serve three grades, perhaps beginning with kindergarten through second grade. We can add additional grades in subsequent years. Keeping the first phase of the school relatively small will help us have a success that we can build upon.

We had a lot of discussion about the wisdom of this approach, and whether it could work in Matel. Fr. Phanord said that the secondary school - what we would call high school or grades eight through twelve, generate more income from the families than the primary school. More parents are more willing to pay full tuition for the higher levels.

"The need is very great for the secondary school," Maudelaire said. "We need to start it as soon as possible. We also need an administrative office and a toilet for the children." We all agreed those two things were important.

We closed the meeting with prayer for the project. We sang a Haitian hymn and exchanging the peace. It was very inspiring and uplifting. It wasn't until later that I realized that our group wasn't as aligned as I had thought. I had created tension for the group.

Chris: We returned to Bondeau that afternoon, and I had a few concerns. My largest concern was the lack of a long-term plan. That meeting covered the basic issues of starting a school with three classrooms, a small canteen, bathroom and administrative office, adding classrooms each year until we have a full primary and secondary program. If we are to undertake a construction project that involves building every year for ten years, we need to make sure the community can staff and run the school for a long time. I am nervous about furthering the cycle of dependency that has plagued Haiti in recent times.

Our group talked a lot about sustainable models. We don't know the resources of Matel; we don't know the population of Matel; while the Mistals said there could be 700-800 students looking for a school in Matel, we don't know those families' resources or ability to pay tuition. Ultimately, we just don't know Matel. We invited the Mistals to come to Bondeau for another meeting on Sunday afternoon.

Sam: Ok, so maybe I got caught up in the excitement of the moment. Robin and Nathanael agreed with Chris, saying that we need to talk about sources of income and sustainability before we promise them a school.

"It's one thing to build a building," Nathanael said, "but we don't want to continue to fundraise for this school at the same level twenty years from now. We should at least try to build a model of self-sustainability."

"What do you mean?" I asked. Robin responded.

"We should talk to the people of Matel about a plan to develop an income generating initiative," he said, "one that could build up the commerce of the community. That money would help pay for student tuition. Ideally it would - over time - grow into a business that would also shift the burden of support from the American partners onto the community. They would slowly become responsible for their own school, and by doing that we would avoid the old mission model which creates a culture of dependence."

We started talking about how this project could be sustainable, so that the next generation of American Episcopalians in New York won't have to fundraise for the school.

"I've served in Haiti for ten years," I said, "and I've never seen an Episcopal Church that has a self-sustaining school." Robin responded.

"But there are proven ways of helping a community grow their local commerce that could be successful here," she said. "Microfinance and asset based community development are two possibilities. We need to start by finding our what assets already exist within Matel. We need to talk to them about what they think would be successful in their community."

Robin was right. We needed to talk to the people of Matel again. We may never arrive to the place where the school will be completely self-sustaining, but we have to try. We then ate, we prayed, we slept.

Beni Soit L'Eternel - Praise the Lord!

Sam: Fr. Phanord invited the Mistal family to come to Bondeau to worship with us on Sunday, and then to meet with us after church to have a more detailed conversation. We only invited Madam Nelson, Maudelaire, Bonita and Jean Beny. They arrived at the church shortly after the gospel reading. The four of them shared a motorcycle.

Chris: Sunday worship was electric, with very strong music and a passionate congregation. The churchyard also serves as a soccer field, and Sunday evening we saw a match between Bon Samaritan and another village – the final of a long tournament, and the town turned out in massive numbers to watch. It was quite a spectacle.

Michael: We had an opportunity to go to church twice in Haiti – on Sunday morning, in Bondeau, and again on the following Monday morning, in the temporary cathedral¹ of Port-au-Prince, for an ordination. Both services were about three hours long, but I can tell you there wasn't a dull moment. (And you can believe me, because I bore easily.)

It was all very Episcopalian, and a bit on the High side – incense, and chasubles, and chanting, and Signs of the Cross. But it was also very Evangelical. You should have heard these congregations sing. They raised the roof. The Bondeau choir, in particular, is led by a young man in his early twenties, whom everybody called Maestro, but they said it in the Creole pronunciation Maestwo (his name is Fleuriot).

Maestwo lived up to his nickname. I have seldom seen a more commanding presence in front of a choir. Choristers, for those who don't know, are by nature snarky and insubordinate. But Maestwo had a quelling eye, and the snarksters sat quiet and demure until he bade them rise, with a grand, commanding gesture; and then, the music he got out of them!

Four tenors, eight basses – better than the ratio at my parish in New York – nine sopranos, if I counted right, and I think five altos. They sang all the service music, in four parts, a cappella, in loud, open-throated, uninstructed but good rich chesty voices, without a hint of vibrato or portamento (thank God!) and very accurate pitch. It was like Mozart meets Shape-Note, and they get married and live happily ever after. The sweaty hairs on the back of my neck were doing their best to stand up. This was terrific, soul-stirring music. What church music is supposed to be.

¹ The real cathedral was flattened by the 2010 earthquake. The temporary pro-Cathedral is essentially a rather capacious shed. The site of the old Cathedral is now a parking lot. There are plans to rebuild. Don't bet against it.

Then there was a wind instrument band, whom we had heard Maestwo licking into shape the night before, from our veranda in the guest house. Trombones, trumpets, a couple of clarinets, and a guy on tenor sax who made my jaw drop.

Perhaps this seems a little shallow. I'm a music guy, and music is a big deal for me. But I think it's an outward and visible sign. And everything I saw in the congregation around me reinforced the same impression. These folks *mean it*.

Sam: The service was quite beautiful and inspiring. The Episcopal Church in Haiti uses the identical liturgy that we use in the States, infused with hope, joy and spirit that is uniquely Haitian. Fr. Phanord has claimed a level of spiritual authority that was not possible before the new church was built, and he has led the congregation to a deeper level of faith, and love of Jesus Christ. The choir sang beautifully and passionately. The horn section played more beautifully than last year, when they first received their instruments. Church members bring their Bibles to church, and the read along during the lessons. Fr. Nathanael preached a beautiful sermon focused on a passage from Luke 11: "Lord, teach us how to pray." The congregation responded with generous Amen's throughout the sermon, and a grateful applause at the end. The Holy Spirit has a way of making a three-hour service seem much shorter.

This is one of the reasons I love to come to Bondeau. The Holy Spirit is alive and present here. Bondeau is one of those "thin places" in the world that so many people talk about, where the distance between God and man is small. It's not surprising, really. With so few things material in their lives, the people of Haiti have no choice but to depend on God for their needs. Death appears to be much closer to them than for us in the States, and as such the people live moment-to-moment, knowing and hoping that God will be there for them.

Haiti is a thin place for us visitors too. The typical distractions that we enjoy at home - Politics, On-Demand TV, Internet, cell phone coverage and the like - simply aren't available here. Bondeau is a place to unplug from the world and plug into the Divine. Fr. Phanord takes care of our safety and comfort; most days I don't lock the door of my room. If this sounds like a tourism promotion for Episcopalians to come to Bondeau, I ask for your forgiveness. But as they say, it is what it is.

We met the Mistal family after church, and they were thrilled with the service. "We've never seen worship like this," Madam Nelson told me. "We are going to come here every Sunday."

It was affirming to see the worship service through the eyes of people who weren't Episcopalian. They are Catholic. Here was a family that likely had never been to an Episcopal worship service, saying that they were uplifted and inspired. It gave me hope for our churches back home. Lets face it: some of our churches have lost the spark of the Holy Spirit. The spark may not be dead, but it's sputtering. I'm not naming names, but some churches in our denomination have made the mistake of becoming more focused on keeping the doors of the church open rather than proclaiming the Good News of the love of God in Jesus Christ. Many churches are in survival mode. Fear of closing grows year after year as families leave and long-time members die. I wish that some of them could come to Haiti to experience worship here and to feel the spirit of love, hope and joy that exudes from the pews. People

here know that God will provide, one way or another. That certainty of faith is contagious, perhaps we can spread that faith around the diocese.

Imagining a Future Together

Sam: After some soup we sat down with the Mistals to talk about the project. We started with prayer.

"We are happy you all came to Bondeau to talk to us," I continued after the prayer. "Our group has not stopped talking about the project since we left your house, and we wanted to ask you a few questions." Before asking, though, I told them that we sought to make the school as self sufficient as possible."

"We would like that too," Maudelaire responded. "Anything that can help our community is welcome."

"So you are willing to work with us to come up with a small business?" I asked.

"Of course!" he replied enthusiastically. Maudelaire is a very earnest man.

"Great," I said. "Can you all think of a project that could make some money for the community, and that could help support the school?"

I didn't know what to expect in response, but I did not expect the level of brainstorming and creative conversation that ensued. We talked about a few possibilities, and then we landed on something that seemed mutually viable.

Chris: The idea we all latched onto – it was from Maudelaire and Bonita originally – was a mill for grinding the corn and millet grown in Matel. Currently, the farmers need to travel out of Matel about 90 minutes one-way and pay the owner of the mill there to have their grain ground. A local mill could keep that money in the community and draw others from nearby villages to contribute to Matel's economy. Personally, I am passionate about adding a facet like this into our project as early as possible, so that it can start generating income that can offset operation costs of whatever institutions we establish in Matel.

I still worry that we don't know Matel that well, so starting a project scares me a little, but this second conversation with the Mistal family did make me feel much better.

Sam: That evening our team met to talk about next steps back home. We all agreed that the mill was a fabulous idea that we can support. We went around the table, and one by one each person enthusiastically offered their support for the project. The seven of us now form the core of the New York Haiti Project, and we are eager to share our vision with others in the Diocese of New York. Maybe one day we'll look back at that conversation as the moment that the New York Haiti Project was born.

On Monday we headed back to Port au Prince for the ordination at Holy Trinity Cathedral. There has been a lot of ecclesial drama in the Diocese of Haiti surrounding the bishop of late, and all of that was present as we met for worship. But it was a beautiful service. Bishop Duracin ordained eight new priests.

Chris: Our final meeting related to this project was on Monday afternoon. We met the architect of Bondeau's church, Andrew, an American architect, working in non-profit post-earthquake architecture in Haiti. The firm he works for, Masada, focuses on local materials, earthquake-resistant plans, and utilizing natural light and ventilation. Though, we have no official estimates yet, this conversation implied that we can expect to need around \$100,000 for year one of building. We don't have more than a ballpark figure for annual operating costs, but we have a start.

Sam: Andrew and Makenson the builder have each visited the land in Matel, and they are both eager to get involved. Andrew is an American who moved to Haiti a year after the earthquake. Andrew agreed to begin work on the plans and design, and Makenson agreed to send us a cost estimate as soon as he reviewed the plans.

Conclusions

Michael: As Sam and Chris have noted, there was some concern afterwards, among ourselves, about the risk of moving too fast, and the question of sustainability came up. So we did a bit of research into costs and potential revenues, and I drew up some financial projections; unless the numbers or the arithmetic are way off, the school can be well above break-even within a couple of years, on cash flow. It seems that we can make a pretty persuasive case for sustainability. Certainly we can make a very good case that the only First World inputs needed are capital (i.e. the buildings). Clearly more work and more research are needed here, but I really think this might be do-able, and do-able without ongoing open-ended funding commitments from the First World.

Chris: The next things for the New York Haiti Project are to work on continued communications with Matel and Bondeau and starting to raise money for construction in Matel. We need to get estimates from builders in Matel, while continuing to hone the model that the school will initially take. I look forward to having some conversations with my parish St. John's in Kingston about the role we'd like to play as this project develops.

Sam: I had hoped that the trip would be successful, meaning that we would have productive conversations between Haitians and Americans, and among ourselves. But the level of collaboration and engagement were beyond what I had hoped. I arrived home feeling inspired and energized, which to me can mean that the Holy Spirit is present. The difficult conversations that we had were necessary to envision this shared future. We anticipated well, I think, the questions that potential funders will ask. So now we pray, now we work, now we hope.