



# COASTAL CONNECTION

NEWSLETTER | FALL/WINTER 2023

## WELCOME

We pray that 2023 has been all you wanted it to be for you and your family. Much has happened for our ministry this year and we look forward to sharing with you some of our story. Thank you for your continued prayers and financial support.

## HAITI UPDATE

In July of 2023, the Department of State ordered the departure of family members of U.S. government employees and non-emergency U.S. government employees from Haiti. They also recommended that U.S. citizens in Haiti should depart immediately by commercial or other privately available transportation options.

Kidnapping has continued to be widespread. Victims' families have paid thousands of dollars to rescue their family members.

Violent gang crime, often involving the use of firearms, such as armed robbery, carjackings, and kidnappings for ransom that include U.S. citizens are common. Mob killings against presumed criminals have been on the rise since late April. Travelers are sometimes followed and violently attacked and robbed shortly after leaving Port-au-Prince International Airport. Robbers and carjackers also attack private vehicles stuck in heavy traffic congestion and often target lone drivers, particularly women. As a result, the U.S. Embassy requires its personnel to use official transportation to and from the airport.

Protests, demonstrations, tire-burning, and roadblocks are frequent, unpredictable, and can turn violent. The U.S.

government is extremely limited in its ability to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens in Haiti—assistance on-site is only available from local authorities (like the Haitian National Police and ambulatory services). Local police generally lack the resources to respond effectively to serious criminal incidents. Shortages of gasoline, electricity, medicine, and medical supplies continue throughout much of Haiti. Public and private medical clinics and hospitals often lack qualified medical staff and even basic medical equipment and resources.

The first week of October the UN Security Council passed a resolution supporting a multinational presence in Haiti. Kenya is taking the lead to send troops/police to help control gang violence and they are expected to arrive by year-end. Switzerland and other Caribbean and African countries have pledged to support them. The U.S. has pledged 200 million dollars for aid relief but no personnel at this time.

A poll was conducted by the private firm Diagnostic and Development S.A. during the first week of October.

From the survey, it is clear that a super-majority of Haitians believe the deployment of an international force, including armed soldiers, is necessary to restore peace and defeat the gangs in Haiti. The majority of those supporting intervention do not believe that the Prime Minister Ariel Henry can solve the political issues of the country and do not support him remaining long-term in office.

Please pray for a successful intervention and the improvement of living conditions of food, water, sanitation, healthcare, housing, schools, and public safety.

## BILLY'S STORY

We wanted to share this first-hand email from one of our partners who is on the ground fearing for his life during this time:

“Good evening. Today I write this text to you with great pain, and also to thank you for your unconditional support towards me, thank you for everything you have done for me – you are like an angel on my path. But to tell you the truth, I’m uncomfortable with the situation I’m living in and I don’t have the courage to ask for help again and again. I would like to get by, I would like to get out of it, but in this country the situation is really difficult. Young boys like me fall under the bullets of bandits or the police every day. Every day that passes, fear invades me, I’m afraid of everything. Today, two of my former comrades who were going to work fell under the bullet of bandits. Looking at those who are happening, I am helpless. We are forced to live day by day, our lifespan is twenty-four renewable hours. I don’t know what passes for my file in the humanitarian program, but I can no longer support this life here which is more and more fragile. If the program doesn’t work, I don’t know, but I will try to leave the country. My morale is so low, in the face of everything that is happening.

***I can't take it anymore, that's my cry.”***

## SISTERS OF CHARITY

The Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth have been in partnership with Coastal Connection for nearly 4 years. With our funding, they were able to sustain a free medical clinic staffed by a part-time doctor and nurse who provided medical care to the 300 students in their school in a village called Cuvier, as well as to their families and members of the surrounding community. During our collaboration, we served approximately 5,000 children and adults, gave out nearly 5,000 prescriptions, and paid for hundreds of lab tests and x-rays. They were the only medical clinic in the area which provided a desperately needed service in one of the poorest communities in Haiti.

The village of Cuvier is in Croix-des-Bouquets, homebase to one of the most notorious gangs in the country. Though violence surrounded the clinic for the past 3 years, it

remained open until the end of the 2023 school year. After 5 gang members surrounded the clinic, held patients at gun point, stole the clinic’s car, and kidnapped Dr. Moise, the Medical Director, the Sisters had no other option but to close the clinic in June 2023.

Knowing that they had to move out of Cuvier, the Sisters struggled to figure out ways to continue their Ministry in Haiti. Collaborating with their in-country management team, they worked during this past summer to relocate their programs to an area called Santo. With the help of on-going funds from Coastal Connection, they opened a new school on September 2, which encompasses many of the same programs they had in Cuvier, including a medical clinic. Dr. Moise has been working with the school’s administrator to hire a new nurse and turn one of the

classrooms into a medical office. Though the medical and wellness programs will not be fully operational until January, the new nurse has been setting up medical records for each of the children and Dr. Moise had her first clinic in October.

More good news.....Coastal Connection was also instrumental in helping to collect 13 barrels of school materials and ship them to Haiti. This ensured that the school had sufficient pencils, pens, paper, and office supplies for each student, teacher, and administrator on opening day!

In addition to Coastal Connection's support of the school, the Sisters also used our funds to purchase food. After one of their team members spent a year in the U.S. receiving life-giving medical care, he returned home to Haiti to find family and friends terribly malnourished. Because of the violence, many of the food markets closed, people lost jobs, and inflation hit double digits – meaning people could not find food, and when they did, they couldn't afford it. The Sisters provided 8,400 meals due to the generosity of Coastal Connection's generous supporters.

*“The Sisters of Charity are so grateful to Coastal Connection for their faithful partnership through the many challenges their ministry has faced during our partnership. We are pleased that in spite of the difficult conditions in the country, we have been able to find a way to continue to serve our Haitian brothers and sisters.”*



## ONAVILLE COMMUNITY HEALTH CLINIC/CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CLINIC

Since September 2015, the Onaville Community Health Center was open in Onaville 18. We were providing high quality of basic healthcare to everyone in the whole northeast, northwest of the Port au Prince. Onaville is a township surrounded by many other townships like Canaan, Jerusalem, Coraille and Village Lumane Casimir. Due to total absence of any government structures, absence of almost everything and with the help of corrupt politicians, multiple gangs were created to fight against the government mostly Jovenel Moise or other rival politicians. The first gang that was created in the area was the 400 Marozo in the northeast of Port au Prince, east of Onaville. Slowly, they expanded their territory and successfully controlling two major traffic routes. The international road crossing Croix des Bouquets to go the Dominican Republic, and then one crossing Croix des Bouquets to go to Hinche.

Most recently, a new gang (5 Seconds) was created in Canaan, west of Onaville by a few members of a gang in downtown of Port-au-Prince. The gang of Canaan and 400 Marozo were allies since day one. Onaville found itself in the middle of all this. More recently, people living in Onaville started experiencing kidnapping, armed robbery, and attacks on small businesses. The locals tried for months to defend themselves by all means but by mid-June 2023, gang activity substantially increased. Even our clinic that had been off-limits was attacked. The only staff member who stayed at the clinic and guest house was Yodi. Sadly, he was shot 4 times when the clinic was attacked. He returned fire and he miraculously survived. He is currently recovering after multiple surgeries. Canaan and 400 Marozo controlled the whole area 100% now.



The only way to keep the clinic running was to relocate the clinic altogether. We decide to move temporarily to the other side Bon Repos City, a few miles away from Onaville. Most of our patients have been relocated. The relocation has been a success, even though we couldn't go back to Onaville to take some of our medical supplies. The plan was simple, we move temporarily to the other side of town and later on move back to Onaville when it becomes safe and peaceful again. Five months ago we moved to our new location in Lizon, the first 4 months were more than perfect, even with a lack of some materials and medical supplies, it was impossible to see everyone.

We've been noticing a progressive drop in the numbers of patients that come to our facility. It takes me a few days to understand that 400 Marozo and Canaan gangs are progressively moving south to Bon repos area, trying conquer new territories. So, more people are migrating further south.

We didn't choose to go too far for many reasons. Most of our staff live in the Bon Repos area, same for most of our patients. But knowing how unstable this area can be, we signed a short-term lease for 12 months with the option to decide 6 months before the term to renew. The team continues to monitor the situation closely to see what the best long-term decision will be.



Left: Christian Community Clinic staff

Right: Dr. Garry Thomas treats a patient at the clinic

## SCHOOL FOOD PANTRY PROGRAM



The 2023-2024 school year has kicked off with Coastal supporting our 10 previously sponsored schools. We were also asked by the Food Bank of Northwest Louisiana to take on a local high school as well. This brings our total support to over 5,000 students. Food insecurity remains a top need in Caddo Parish with over 39,750 individuals seeking resources.

## EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH INVESTMENT (EWI) PROGRAM

Our second class of 10 women for the EWI program kicked off this October with a big bang. Mindy Rodriguez with Merrill Lynch has joined our volunteer team of instructors alongside Nancy Stich and Kathy Rosenblath. The 10 women, alongside their instructors, made their first investment decision with the \$10,000 donated by Coastal Connection. They have also been working on their individual SMART goals for this year.

## DROIDS & DRAGONS FUNDRAISER

Our 5th annual Droids and Dragons trivia fundraiser is set for March 1st, 2024 with our partner the Food Bank of Northwest Louisiana. All funds received go to support our school food pantry program and the school backpack program run by the Food Bank. We are actively contacting our previous sponsors and working on team recruitment.



## NIGERIA

### St. Dominic's Catholic Hospital

For the past several months, Coastal Connection has been working with its partner Hospital Sisters Mission Outreach (HSMO) to arrange the shipment of a 40-foot container. St. Dominic's has had the opportunity to select medical supplies and equipment that it desperately needs from the online inventory of HSMO. All contents of the container are being donated thanks to the hospital partners of HSMO. The only cost is rental of container and shipping cost to Nigeria. Coastal Connection is sharing the \$20,000 cost with the hospital. St. Dominic's Catholic Hospital is working to finalize import papers that have faced several delays due to government workers' strikes after the recent national elections. Delivery date is unknown at this time.

### Dominican Sisters Catholic Schools

Coastal Connection has partnered with the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Sienna in Nigeria to help support the Immaculate Heart Nursey and Primary School, Our Lady's Nursey, Primary and Secondary Schools, and Immaculate College.

The area around these schools is largely populated with both Christians and Muslims. Children make up about 65% of the population. Muslim culture has a great influence in the area with girls (child marriage) being a common practice, alongside polygamy. The majority of the population are subsistence farmers, as well as a few traders. Many children in the area do not go to school because of the lack of opportunities, especially girls who are often forced into marriage as a source of income for their family. The children on their own have a great desire to attain a basic education. But this desire often remains only a desire that is never fulfilled. Boys often have more opportunities here than girls. Girls' educations are not a priority within the family. Most girls are married off to rich individuals to become mothers at a very tender age with little or no support after second or third pregnancies.



This situation saddened the Catholic priests who decided to open up the Immaculate Heart Nursey and the primary school for education of children with special focus on educating younger girls.

Our initial support was the funding of 100 scholarships for young girls to attend school. Without these scholarships, many of these young girls would have been married off by their families. We hope to try and make some impact to this very sad situation.

Additionally, many of these children travel by foot major distances. Some travel up to two hours one way in scorching heat affecting their ability to focus and learn once they arrive. To improve this challenge, we will be working to raise about \$14,500 to fund the purchase of a used school bus.



## KITOVU HOSPITAL VVF PROGRAM, UGANDA

St. Joseph Hospital Kitovu is a hospital Billy and Stephen had the opportunity to visit and work with this past year. They were able to travel with the kind support of Missio Invest. They made a healthcare loan to the hospital for purchase of a replacement MRI.

During their visit, they were pleased to learn about the Center of Excellence program for the Fistula Surgery Care and training (VVF). During any given month, the hospital provides care to over 100 women facing VVF issues. About 50 surgeries are performed with significant post-op care. Women who face this complication are often ostracized by their families and their communities.

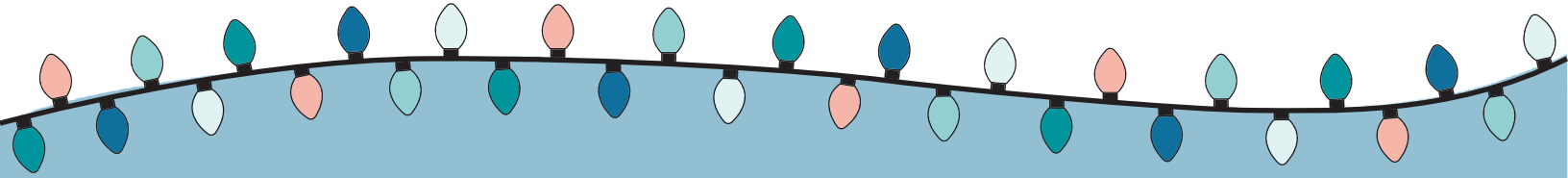
Once recovery is complete, the hospital has sponsored a “reintegration program” to help ensure a successful future. Thanks to our partner MARS, we were able to provide a \$5,000 grant for the program in 2023. Additionally, Coastal Connection (with the support of MARS) will fund a grant in 2024 and 2025 for \$5,000. Grant funds will be used to purchase pigs, goats, chickens, sewing machines, salon materials, etc. etc. These purchases will help each woman develop a specific economic opportunity for her and her family. We are excited to hear more from the sisters in future updates.





## BOURBON ON THE BAYOU

In late April or early May of 2024, we are planning an exclusive bourbon raffle. Tickets will be sold for \$100 each and our target is to sell 500 tickets. Bottles of rare bourbon are being donated to Coastal Connection from distilleries across Kentucky. These raffle events have drawn national attention by collectors. Winners will receive multiple bottles in multiple flights. Special thanks goes out to Don Lloyd, one of our Board members, for his efforts in contacting distilleries and collecting these donated bottles. Please be on the lookout for more information on this exciting event.



Mona and Stephen want to thank each of you again for your continued prayers and financial support of Coastal Connection. We wish you and your families a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year in 2024.

Yours in Christ,

*Stephen and Mona Wright*