

The words on the blackboard in an open-air Port-au-Prince classroom for disabled children summarize the [Episcopal Church of Haiti's](#) vision of ministry: "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine."

Episcopalians in Haiti are using tools ranging from schools and medical clinics to pigs and plows -- as well as financial resources from elsewhere in the church -- to make that vision a reality. The mixture makes for a long list of what Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori called "bold and creative initiatives."

During the Eucharist at the beginning of her November 15-19 pastoral visit to the most-populous diocese of the Episcopal Church, Jefferts Schori told an overflow congregation at Cathedralé Sainte Trinité (Holy Trinity Cathedral) in Port-au-Prince that the diocese's work requires "courageous and whole-hearted investment in something that leads to more abundant life."

"That is what Jesus asks of each and every one of us -- full investment in a world that looks more like God's dream," she said, preaching in English with a translator at her side. (Haitians speak French and Creole, as well as English, and Jefferts Schori presided at the Eucharist in French.)

At the end of her visit, the Presiding Bishop told ENS that she and the delegation accompanying her had seen "miracles everywhere" they went. "The people of Haiti are immensely resourceful and hopeful despite the fact that the vast majority of them have very little with which to work," she said. "What little they had in many cases was taken away by the hurricanes this summer, but they are eager and creative in figuring out how to get on with life. They are in immense need of solidarity from other parts of this church."

The Episcopal Church of Haiti, known locally as L'Eglise Episcopale d'Haiti, has preached and practiced what Bishop Jean Zaché Duracin calls a "gospel of wholeness" since its founding in 1861. It is a gospel, Duracin told ENS, that "can serve people in their body, their mind and their spirit."

It is a gospel that appears to resonate in a country where religious references are a part of everyday life. The elaborately crafted and colorfully painted and lit Haitian jitneys, known as tap-taps, are often emblazoned with Scripture citations and bear images of Jesus, Mary and John the Baptist alongside rock singers and soccer players. "Merci, Jesus" is a favorite name for a business, whether it is a bar or a car repair shop.

One of the U.S.-based Episcopal Church's 12 overseas dioceses, the Haitian diocese is part of [Province II](#) of the Episcopal Church. The other 11 dioceses and convocations are Colombia, the Convocation of American Churches in Europe, Central Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Litoral Ecuador, Micronesia, Puerto Rico, Taiwan, Venezuela and the Virgin Islands. (More information about the 12 is available [here](#)).

The poorest of the poor

Haiti is by far the poorest and least-developed country in the western hemisphere, with more than half of its people living on less than \$1 per day, and 80% living on less than \$2 per day. One-third of its children are malnourished and 500,000 cannot go to school. The unemployment rate is estimated to be 60 percent.

Natural disasters often sweep Haiti. Four storms battered the country between mid-August and mid-September. The island of Hispaniola (which includes the Dominican Republic and Haiti) was already reeling from the death and destruction caused by Hurricane Gustav and tropical storms Fay and Hanna when Hurricane Ike rampaged over Haiti for four days in early September. In all, nearly 800 Haitians died and more than 151,000 were displaced, according to an [October report](#) to the U.S. Congress.

"In parts of the country, almost nothing is left," U.S. Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson told the delegation during an hour-long meeting at her Port-au-Prince residence on November 17. To imagine impact of what Sanderson called the storms' "body blows," she suggested that the destruction amounted to "Katrina 10 times over," referring to Hurricane Katrina which devastated the U.S. Gulf Coast in late August 2005.

Haiti's history of violent political instability has also hampered the nation's efforts to serve its people, Haitian President René Prével told Jefferts Schori and the others at the beginning of a 70-minute conversation in the presidential palace on November 17. Prével knows that reality first-hand, having overcome a near-collapse of his government in April when deadly riots over rising food and fuel prices caused the [downfall](#) of Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Ale. The parliament rejected Prével's first two nominees before agreeing to Michele Duvivier Pierre Louis' appointment in September.

What Prével called "stability by dictatorship" between 1957 and 1986 that emptied the country of its "intellectual capacity," followed by 20 more years of political infighting, has meant that Haiti has been unable to form lasting partnerships with non-governmental agencies that can help the country, he said.

Prével told the delegation through a translator that "churches often have greater credibility than the state."

'What abundance can look like'

The Episcopal Church in Haiti is "exceedingly well-respected by all Haitians," Jefferts Schori told ENS. The diocese serves between 100,000 and 150,000 people in 168 congregations. There are 37 active clergy, most of whom serve multiple congregations in urban and rural areas. In addition to the churches, the diocese's ministry includes:

- 254 schools, some of which are self-sustaining and many that began with grants from the [United Thank Offering](#) (UTO), which teach more than 80,000 Haitians from preschool to university level. The institutions include a school for handicapped children, a trade school, a music school, a two-year business school, a nursing school that will grant the first baccalaureate degrees in the country in January, a seminary and a university.
- medical clinics including one run jointly with [Partners in Health](#) and another, Hôpital Sainte Croix in Léogâne, which provides outpatient treatment, a nutritional program and a de-worming research and treatment effort aimed at the parasitical filarial nematode and funded by the University of Notre Dame and the Gates Foundation.
- a renowned philharmonic orchestra and children's choir based at the cathedral.
- agricultural, reforestation and other development projects and micro-financing efforts run in part with help from [Episcopal Relief and Development](#) (ERD).
- peace and reconciliation work, including the Desmond Tutu Center for Reconciliation and Peace and non-violence training provided by [Episcopal Peace Fellowship](#) (EPF).

Duracin and others showed what he called "a little part of the works of the Episcopal Church in Haiti" to Jefferts Schori and the group of Episcopalians and Episcopal Church Center staff members traveling with her. The group toured seven of the diocese's schools. They also visited a school children's canteen and a home for the elderly, and talked with participants in three small-scale agricultural projects.

The diocese funds its ministry by way of the rental income from a 12-unit apartment building in Port-au-Prince, a 2008 grant from the Episcopal Church of \$332,500 and an \$800,000 investment from ERD, along with some income from its schools and congregations. In addition, many Episcopal Church congregations and dioceses outside of Haiti are engaged in various relationships which bring money, materials and people into the diocese. UTO made grants totaling \$415,000 between 2001 and 2007.

Haitians "are very inspired to develop their own country" and very resourceful, ERD Latin America and Caribbean Program Officer Matthew St. John, a member of the delegation, told ENS. "We try to capitalize on the spirit that they have," he said, as the delegation was driven with a police escort from United Nations Stabilization Mission to visit ERD-funded projects in and around Les Cayes in southwest Haiti on November 18.

The relationship can work both ways. "Everybody who comes here goes home blessed with the sense of what abundance can look like in a place like this," Jefferts Schori said during a November 19 interview outside the diocesan offices in the Port-au-Prince suburb of Pétienville.

The Episcopal Church also brings its resources to bear for Haiti on another, larger scale. Through its Washington, D.C.-based [Office of Government Relations](#), the church advocates for changes in U.S. and international policies that would benefit the country.

For instance, Jefferts Schori wrote to President George W. Bush earlier this month to reiterate the church's support of Préval's request that the U.S. government grant Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Haitians migrants. Noting that Haiti meets the program's natural disaster and political criteria, Jefferts Schori wrote that TPS would allow Haitians to work legally in the U.S. and contribute to their country's reconstruction "until it is safe to return." She told Préval of her efforts and raised the issue with Ambassador Sanderson.

The church has also been involved with the rest of the Anglican Communion in a 10-year effort to forgive international debt accumulated by the world's poorest nations. Jefferts Schori told ENS that payment of the interest alone on Haiti's nearly \$1.3 billion debt is bankrupting the country and taking money away from work needed to improve the country's education, health care and infrastructure.

In her sermon at the cathedral November 16, the Presiding Bishop promised that the Episcopal Church would continue to work toward the elimination of the debt, most of which, she noted, "is the result of the corruption of earlier regimes." As with TPS, Jefferts Schori discussed the issue with Préval and Sanderson.

Living the founder's legacy

The Rev. James Theodore Holly, one of the Episcopal Church's first African-American priests -- ordained in 1856 at age 27 -- founded the Haitian diocese after he left New Haven, Connecticut, for Haiti with 100 emigrants. Holly, who later became Haiti's first bishop, went to the countryside first, Duracin told ENS, and wherever he went he founded a school. He thought people should be able to read the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, and he believed in education as a development tool, the present bishop said.

The Presiding Bishop's delegation saw some of the modern-day results of Holly's vision. That vision includes giving people the skills to hold practical jobs in Haiti, while not educating them beyond the point that they are tempted to take their skills outside of the country. For instance, Hilda Alcindor, the dean of the diocese's nursing school in Léogâne (19 miles outside of Port-au-Prince), said the 107 female and 20 male students must agree to spend two years nursing in Haiti after they complete their studies. If they do not fulfill that contract, they will not get their credentials, she said.

Over and over again in their visits, the delegation heard that the future leaders of Haiti were today in the diocese's classrooms. At the Bishop Sharp Institute of Business and Technology (BTI) in Les Cayes in southwest Haiti, student Lafortune

Bernidine told the delegation November 18 that "what you see here is the future of Haiti and more."

Jefferts Schori gave the BTI students the same message she gave all the students she met: "Le bon Dieu vous bené ici." ("May God bless you here.")

"Together may all of us build a blessed Haiti and a blessed world for all God's people," she told the BTI students, echoing her prayer for the other Haitian students she met.

BTI, which opened in 2005 and is based on a community-college model, graduated its first class of 126 students in December 2007. Another 70 will graduate next month. Forty-nine percent of the first class got jobs in Les Cayes, 27 percent opened their own business, 13 percent went on to work towards bachelor degrees and 11 percent are still looking for jobs.

The school's first years were not without trauma. Edward Emmanuel Corneille, BTI's first director, was shot and killed in the Port-au-Prince suburb of Pétionville on January 5, 2006.

Growing farms and congregations

Not too far from BTI, the delegation saw three small operations that are part of a year-old ERD-backed effort called Les Petits Projets. Twenty-eight lay people work under the direction of local Episcopal priests as part-time development agents. Part of their efforts involved talking with residents to determine what sorts of resources they need to improve their lives. The delegation saw the results of three of those inquiries: a small project for breeding and raising pigs for food and sales, a similar effort with rabbits and the community purchase of a basic plow. In the latter instance, local ownership of the ox-driven plow will eliminate the need for poor farmers to pay to rent a plow.

As darkness fell on Lèogâne, the delegation drove deep into the countryside on rock-strewn, pothole-filled tracks to visit the Saint Mattieu (Saint Matthew) congregation. Five years ago, the Rev. Jean Bethol Phanord restarted an abandoned school which now teaches 180 students from ages three to 12. A newly constructed and still-incomplete church building welcomes 300 worshippers on a typical Sunday and 400-500 on holidays. [Holy Innocents Episcopal Church](#) in Atlanta is a [major partner](#) with Sainte Mattieu.

"I continue to see miracles in Haiti," Jefferts Schori told Phanord.

The next day, Jefferts Schori reflected lessons of the Haiti visit. Like many of TEC's overseas diocese, she said, "the Diocese of Haiti works with relatively little in the way of financial resources but with great ingenuity -- with a great entrepreneurial attitude when it comes to the gospel. Most American congregations and dioceses have much less experience and opportunity to put those kind of tools to work."

She also said that the delegation learned about "the need to pray for the people of Haiti, the need to respond to the financial crisis here, the need to respond to the humanitarian crisis in this place."

At a later news conference with members of the Haitian media, Jefferts Schori said the delegation came, in part, "to remind the Haitian people that we walk with them in their suffering and we look to increase hope in this place." She also said the delegation would return to the U.S. to share the diocese's story with the rest of the church and "remind the other congregations of the Episcopal Church how much they have to learn from the experience here."

Members of the delegation included Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations International Policy Analyst Alex Baumgarten, [Standing Commission on Anglican and International Peace with Justice Concerns](#) members Matthew Gobush (Diocese of Washington) and Minnesota Bishop Jim Jelinek, ERD Latin America and Caribbean Program Officer Matthew St. John, Richard Schori, and Episcopal Church Center Chief Operating Officer Linda Watt. The Rev. Nicole Janelle, a member of EPF and vicar of [St. Michael's and All Angels Church](#) in Santa Barbara, joined the group when it reached Port-au-Prince.

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