

ST. NICHOLAS, NEW MARKET

Father Bernard Reiser challenges Knights of Columbus and parish to reach out

St. Nicholas Knights help Haiti solve water problem with 6,000-gallon water truck

By Dave Hrbacek
The Catholic Spirit

A few thousand Haitians are glad a local priest came out of retirement.

Father Bernard Reiser decided to get back into active ministry last summer and took an assignment as pastor of St. Nicholas in New Market in August.

He wasted little time developing out-reach projects. After making several trips to Haiti over the past several years, he was aware of some practical needs.

First, there was food. He approached a local farmer, Leander Wagner, and said he wanted to buy 10 tons of corn to ship to Haiti.

"Leander and the farmers donated 10 tons of shelled corn, put it in a container and it was shipped down to Miami and put on a ship to Haiti [in October]," Father Reiser said.

Then, there was water.

"We knew something had to be done because the people had no acceptable water for drinking or household use," he said. "The [distribution] system was run down, not operable."

Father Reiser believed the solution to the water problem was a truck to take water from wells located in Port Au Prince to outlying areas. So, he turned to the St. Nicholas Knights of Columbus Council. The Knights accepted the challenge and, last week, sent a 6,000-gallon water truck to Miami, where it soon will be loaded onto a ship bound for Haiti. The final hurdle is clearing U.S. Customs.

Although water currently is available to Haitians, a rundown distribution system combined with greed have driven up the price of drinking water and made it unaffordable for some. Father Reiser and the Knights say they hope that the water truck will eliminate the problem.

One Knight, Bob Seykora, worked to both find and modify the truck to make it suitable for transporting drinking water. After canvassing New Market, he talked to a local contractor, Tim Rud, who donated a tractor and tank. Seykora arranged to have a stainless steel replacement tank put on, then added another tank on a trailer. He and a group of drivers drove the truck to Miami.

From there the truck will be in the hands of Kevin McClellan of St. Stephen in Minneapolis, who will go with the truck to Haiti and oversee its use.

The beneficiaries of the water truck will be residents of Citi Soliel, a section of Port Au Prince that lies about three miles from the nearest well.

"If I can deliver 20,000 gallons a day, I would be happy," McClellan said.

For the Knights, this is another item on a growing list of big charity projects. They already have built two houses since the start of the new millennium, one given to a needy family and the other sold to raise money for pro-life causes. Not bad for a group with only 50 active members.

"Our council has the faith to jump into any project," said Paul Laursen, the council's program director. "We think big. . . . We'll build anything, we'll do anything."



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From left, Bob Seykora, Father Bernard Reiser, Debbie and Tim Rud and Paul Laursen stand in front of a water truck they and the St. Nicholas Knights of Columbus recently sent down to Florida for shipment to Haiti.



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