

# Dedicated Catholic Ministry Has Won Many Battles In Haiti's War on Poverty

Seeing the emaciated young Haitian boy sitting listless under a tree — skin and eyes sallow from dehydration — American-born nurse, Bette Gabrian, felt convicted before God.

“Here, an hour-and-a-half from Miami, children are starving,” she said. “This can’t go on. God is watching. We have to do something.”

In addition to severe malnutrition, the five-year-old’s back bulged grotesquely due to Potts Disease-tuberculosis of the spine.

“What was happening to this boy happens all too often in rural Haiti,” explained Bette Gebrian, the Director of Public Health with the Haitian Health Foundation (HHF), a Catholic medical outreach with a long history of serving the country’s rural poor. “His mother came home to the mountains to deliver her baby. She breast-fed for awhile, then she went back to Port-au-Prince because she had to find a job.”

The boy’s grandmother, whose own energy had waned with age, was not capable of caring for him properly. Although she loved the boy she nick-named “Raisin,” the grandmother was unable to recognize the danger he was in, and her poverty kept her from having an adequate supply of nutritious food on hand. As a result, the boy was slowly starving to death.

And, as Bette Gabrian rightly says, situations like this are common in Haiti, where the population is destitute, medical care is inadequate and food is scarce.

Because of this severe poverty, Bette had to see countless children die from heartbreaking — and totally preventable — maladies. But she has also won many battles, conquering such illnesses through

HHF’s programs, supported by Cross International Catholic Outreach.

Fortunately for Raisin, Bette happened to visit his rural village with her mobile vaccine clinic. She recognized his classic symptoms before it was too late.

Responding to the boy’s urgent needs, Bette took little Raisin to a nearby HHF facility where caring nuns treated his Potts Disease and anemia, de-wormed him, and lovingly fed him back to health. It took a whole year for the weakened boy to reach the level of health and vitality appropriate for a five-year-old. At that point, he could return home.

“But the important thing about this situation is that the boy wasn’t simply brought home and left to fall back into his previous condition. We knew that was a risk, so we assigned a health agent to return to his village and do follow-ups,” Bette explained. “That’s the point of having resident village health workers, who are local people trained by HHF to provide health care to their own people. They do more than put a Band-Aid on the problem — they become part of a long-term process that improves the quality of life for the people in a meaningful way.”

Cross International Catholic Outreach fully supports HHF’s strategy, recognizing that the constant presence of a trained health worker greatly augments the care given by doctors who come to the village only for emergencies or for occasional wellness visits. Cross has supported these efforts and would like to find ways to expand and strengthen the outreach.

“Clearly, these resident health workers are essential to maintaining the work that’s been accomplished by doctors and nurses. HHF



has shown the creativity and commitment that marks most Catholic ministries for the poor. This isn’t just a job for them. It’s a mission and ministry. It’s an expression of their love for God and love for others,” explained Jim Cavnar, president of Cross International Catholic Outreach. “This is precisely the type of ministry we American Catholics should be supporting overseas.”

Cavnar added that HHF’s method of training local people to better their own circumstances is also right in line with how Cross works. It’s a method that is both empowering and extremely cost effective in the long run. And this too makes it a wonderful project for U.S. Catholics to support.

“Ultimately, it doesn’t take a huge grant of aid to save lives in rural Haiti,” said Cavnar. “Pennies can literally mean the difference between a child receiving a lifesaving antibiotic or losing a limb from a staff infection; an expectant mother getting access to medical care or dying in childbirth; or an infant getting vaccinated or succumbing to

measles. It only costs us pennies to help — and therefore not helping can cost lives.

“Like Bette, we should all feel concerned when we see children suffering. We should all wonder what God thinks as He watches our response,” he added. “And as Bette says, something should be done... and it can. All it takes is a commitment to get involved and support dedicated Catholic ministries like HHF, and thereby stand with them in their struggle to help the poor. Then, when God watches... He will have reason to smile.”

Readers interested in hearing Bette Gebrian describe HHF’s lifesaving work in Haiti can listen to interviews posted at [www.crosscatholic.org/podcast](http://www.crosscatholic.org/podcast).

To make a tax-deductible contribution to Cross International Catholic Outreach and its work with Catholic ministries overseas, either use the enclosed postage-paid brochure or send contributions to Cross International Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC00397, 490 White Pond Drive, PO Box 63, Akron, HO 44309-0063.

## Catholic Leaders Help Build Strong Foundation for Cross

With the recent addition of His Eminence William Cardinal Keeler as its Patron, Cross International Catholic Outreach continues to build on a strong foundation of Catholic leadership and support.

The impressive group of Catholic bishops already on the organization’s board includes its Chairman, Most Reverend Sam Jacobs, Bishop of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, and directors Most Rev. Michael Cote, Most Rev. Carlos Sevilla and Most Rev. Edward Slattery.

“Cross International Catholic Outreach is an official Catholic organization, listed in the national Catholic directory, and our mission has always been tied to the work of the Catholic Church overseas,” explained Jim Cavnar, president of Cross. “Our goal is to make American Catholics aware of the work being done by the dedicated priests, nuns and other Catholic leaders serving overseas. The Catholic Church is accomplishing amazing things in serving the poor. More people should be aware of it — and support the work if they can.”

In Cavnar’s view, Cardinal Keeler, the Bishops serving on the board for Cross and

the thousands of U.S. Catholics who support the ministry as benefactors are all part of one unified mission.

“Christ called us to love one another, and all of us are simply trying to respond to that command in a meaningful and tangible way,” Cavnar explained. “We are people bound together by a shared mission, and God has blessed us. As Christ calls others to take part, we will continue to grow — expanding the outreach by feeding more who are hungry, providing shelter to those who need it, delivering medicines to comfort the sick and sharing the Gospel with those who are lost.”

This commitment to the poor has also helped forge an official collaboration between Cross International Catholic Church and the Holy Father’s own international relief organization, the Pontifical Council Cor Unum. This unique collaboration has already been a blessing for the poor following several disasters, including the tsunami in south-east Asia, floods in Haiti, drought in



*His Eminence William Cardinal Keeler at a recent meeting with Pope Benedict XVI.*

Africa and programs serving refugees in Rwanda.

“Ultimately, the success of Cross depends on the prayers and support of

American Catholics — their generosity and faithfulness have made all of this possible,” Cavnar said. “We are deeply grateful for their support.”