

# The ADVOCATE

Queen of Peace Quarterly Newsletter

Summer 2023



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**Editor's Note:** Our Lady, Queen of Peace Catholic Church (OLQP) strives to follow the Gospel of Matthew 25: to love one another as God loves us; to believe we are all equal in the eyes of our Creator, and to welcome the "the other" in our midst. The Summer issue of The Advocate features articles on OLQP parishioners and programs that aim to carry out the mission of Matthew 25: helping Afghan families to rebuild a new life in our country; continuing the OLQP food pantry to feed hundreds of families during the height of the pandemic (even starting new ones); and advocating for Dreamers whose futures are still in legal limbo. Also featured: a White parishioner's personal journey toward anti-racism, Haiti scholars; and a tribute to Jeannette Herbert.

Paula Cruickshank  
Editor, The Advocate

## "I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me."

### How OLQP Helps Afghans Who Find Us

By Kathy Desmond

The first families approached OLQP about six months after the fall of Afghanistan in August 2021. They came with Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) or humanitarian parole documents, an apartment, and a few months of small grants from the resettlement agencies.<sup>1</sup> They asked for food to supplement what they could afford. A few OLQP volunteers started out as drivers bringing food to them once a week and supplemented it with items from the Matt 25 store. Within a year, the number of families grew to more than forty and the number of OLQP drivers grew to roughly twenty. And the work of the drivers expanded to meet families' needs.

This article provides a snapshot of how four generous OLQP volunteers helped some Afghan families. Common themes are the gradual building of trust and working together to meet the challenges faced by each family.

Pat Vinkenes' family of seven was headed by a man who supervised 300 people in a U.S.-supported program in Afghanistan and who had an SIV, but did not earn enough to feed his family and pay rent with his \$17/hr. job. He obtained a commercial driver's license certification and now is working as a long-distance truck driver in a position paying roughly \$68,000 a year. They recently received their green cards, and he can now better support his family.

Frances Michalkewicz helped families when their regular OLQP contacts were unavailable. After learning that Arlington and Alexandria were extending a rent assistance program that Afghans could apply for, she contacted her mayor, Justin Wilson, and she and Pat worked with city staff to get three months' rental assistance for Pat's family of seven. The family moved into a two-bedroom apartment.

Frances met another family in Alexandria while delivering milk for their young child and saw they were living in an apartment with no furniture. About six OLQP volunteers came together to find beds and drivers. She

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<sup>1</sup> Enterprise Development Group (EDG, formerly ECDC) and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services

## **"I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me."**

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then brought the mother information from the nearby public library for ESL and a reading program for her young child. Another OLQP member, on vacation, asked Frances to take a pregnant woman to her scheduled C Section. She drove the family of three and the pregnant woman to Virginia Hospital Center where the mother gave birth.



*Afghan families wear traditional dress to celebrate the feast of Eid-al-Adha, the end of Ramadan.*

*Anne Murphy* started delivering food from the OLQP food pantry to three related families with ten members at one address. The group expanded to 12 families with 21 adults and 27 children. She does this every Wednesday afternoon. She purchases requested items not available at Matt 25. She meets the mothers in the lobby (the men are working) and the women who speak English help translate. They established trust over time. "I fell in love," she says to explain her growing commitment.

These Afghans are eager to learn and work hard. The adults were well educated, university graduates with professional jobs, achievers in their home country. Two women who were teachers are learning English. The men are happy that their wives and daughters can go to school, work, and drive. Some of the OLQP

volunteers took an Arlington Country course on trauma after one man shared their terrible experiences in the evacuation.

The father of the first family who had worked at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul worked for a U.S. consulting firm, then Uber and Door Dash before finally obtaining a professional position. His family received their green cards granting permanent legal residency in 2023. In

April 2023 another family moved to Sterling, where the father has a job at Dulles Airport and the mother at a Montessori pre-school. This family "graduated" in 18 months.

*Karen Cavanaugh* and *Lisa McGregor* helped one family with little schooling in Afghanistan. The father oversaw laundry services at a military base. They soon focused on finding jobs and specialized training at NOVA and the public schools. They decided to work with Northern Virginia Resettling Afghan Refugees Working Together (NOVA RAFT) as job mentors. One young woman, from an ethnic minority in Afghanistan who owned and operated her own beauty salon in Kabul, wanted to start a similar business here. Karen and Lisa found a local hair salon that took her on as an assistant. Her time worked there will enable her to be certified as a beautician next year.

Karen and Lisa are also accompanying a family of seven whose father worked as an interpreter for the U.S. military. He was a successful Uber driver here until a car accident left him unable to work during his recovery period. They are helping his wife set up her own tailoring business (find "Shakeba's Tailoring and Alterations" on Google) and a part-time retail job. Once her husband is back on his feet, the mom wants to get a teaching job or train for a health auxiliary position. Karen and Lisa are helping the teen



*Sisters host a Nowruz (Afghan New Year's) feast for their OLQP friends.*

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## **“I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me.”**

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daughters get part-time work. They aspire to careers in medicine and computer programming.

Karen said, “I learned that letting them know you are there for them is the biggest gift. You end up with a new family. They are part of my extended family now.”

These are just some of the families helped by several of the OLQP volunteers and a small part of their stories, yet they show the courage, energy, and hope of

the Afghan immigrants as well as their contributions to American society.

These stories also demonstrate how OLQP lives its commitment to Matthew 25, seeing Christ in the “other,” irrespective of religion (most Afghans are Muslim), race, nationality, poverty, etc. Anne Murphy says her motivation is summed up as simply as this: “You will know we are Christians by our love.” She wants to counter all the “othering” in our society today by welcoming them, to show that we are all interconnected, part of one community.

How can OLQP help now?

1. *Continue contributing to the food pantry and Matt 25 store.* The new self-service system in the food pantry helps the volunteers select appropriate food for their Afghan families.
2. *Share these stories* about the immigrants we know — hard working, energetic, ambitious, contributing to American society — to counter anti-woke myths.
3. *Volunteer as a driver*, as a substitute or as the beginning of a deeper commitment.
4. *Advocate* for more just policies for immigrants and refugees. Afghan families on short-term humanitarian parole visas, especially, are living in legal limbo. The bipartisan Afghan Adjustment Act would provide a path to permanent status for thousands of Afghans who were evacuated to the U.S. following the fall of Kabul.<sup>2</sup>



*Anne Murphy visits two sisters and their children in traditional dress on the feast of Eid al-Adha.*

<sup>2</sup>While passage was blocked by a few Republicans in the first session of this Congress, the fight is not over.

## **QUEEN OF PEACE REACHING OUT IN THE TIME OF COVID**

**By Kathy Desmond and Jack Sullivan**

Given the mission and history of OLQP, it is not surprising that soon after the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic became apparent, parish members and ministries both expanded their efforts and initiated new activities to help — and give hope to — those whose lives were upended by COVID. Although the pandemic has abated, much of the parish-based activity carry on.

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## OLQP in the Time of Covid

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**The Food Pantry** expanded greatly. Almost overnight, it grew from providing a weekly bag of groceries for 235 families in February 2020 to 600–700 families now. Word of the food pantry spread, first by word of mouth, and then by articles in the [Washington Post](#) (4/16/20), [Catholic Herald](#) (July–Aug 2020), and the ABC morning news.

One week in March 2020, the Food Pantry had to turn people away. In response, Father Tim sent an appeal to parishioners asking for enhanced support of time, talent, and treasure to help feed the poor in our neighborhood. Meanwhile, parishioner Michaela Sims Stewart saw an internet post that local schools would not give food to families during spring break. Organizing a neighborhood response to help, Michaela became Coordinator of the OLQP effort.

The Social Justice and Outreach ministry assisted, reaching out to partners including VOICE, the Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC), and grant funders. Financial support came from parishioners, neighbors and outside benefactors. The Albertsons, parent company of Safeway, donated \$45,000; the Rales Foundation, \$25,000; No Child Hungry, \$10,200; and Lorton Knights of Columbus, \$10,000. Hundreds of other smaller donations flowed in. The Capital Area Food Bank, AFAC, and local supermarkets contributed food. Jose Andres' World Central Kitchen brought meals.

A core group of dedicated volunteers were the heart and soul of the operation. Because of COVID concerns, a “bubble” of sixteen volunteers was formed in March 2020. All wore masks and were vaccinated as soon as eligible. Taking the risks involved at the height of the pandemic, the volunteers purchased and collected food supplies and prepared bags for distribution each week.



**Matthew 25.** The need for clothes and household goods grew as many people lost work. Matthew 25 closed for several months in 2020 while a parish team planned how to adjust procedures to protect volunteers and beneficiaries. In June 2020, staff and volunteers moved the store outside. In June 2021, the facility moved back to its usual space with reduced operations. Only a limited number of individuals at a time were allowed inside for limited minutes to shop on Wednesday and Saturday mornings from 9–12 am.

**Comfort Calls.** Katie and son Jessie Remedios initiated a program for volunteers to contact members of the parish over 70 to offer to chat with them each week. It came from a suggestion by Jessie as he reflected on his experience calling his homebound elderly aunts and bringing them groceries. Caller volunteers were matched with seniors on the call list. The conversations primarily were aimed at offering companionship to counter isolation caused by pandemic restrictions, as well as determining if the elderly individuals needed any help.

**Feast on the Street.** During the pandemic the parish received a call from the Catholic Worker House in Washington, D.C., to help the hungry. Jack McHale offered to coordinate a “Feast on the Street” every Thursday at McPherson Square in the District, a place where the homeless gather. The volunteers began with sandwiches, and as winter approached, they made pots of chili. The OLQP group also brought toiletries and

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## OLQP in the Time of Covid

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arranged for delivery of blankets. Each Christmas the group has gifted winter jackets and other warm clothing to those who come for the meals.

**Queen of Peace Covid 19 Fund.** The fund began when Father Tim received calls in March/April 2020 from parishioners who said they were doing well financially and didn't need the \$1,200 Stimulus Relief payment. They said he could use the money for those who needed it. The Covid-19 Fund was born. The first beneficiary was a single parent with three children who lost her job when the school closed and the funds carried her over until she found new employment.

Others contributed. When an elderly man in Colorado asked his son in Arlington to recommend a worthy cause, he chose OLQP. The initial donation of \$10,000 has since reached \$26,000. As a result of his and others' generosity, the Covid-19 fund has helped at least 35 recipients with crucial household expenses, including heat, water, and electricity, and it has helped stave off evictions. Sally Diaz-Wells, who administers the program, notes that with influx of contributions the parish is able to give larger amounts, up to \$1,000. Most Covid-19 grants go to people who are not parishioners, she added.

An old English proverb says that "it is an ill wind that blows no good." While it is difficult to see anything positive in a pandemic that has taken and upended so many lives, the global outpouring of generosity resulting from Covid-19 is a reminder that God's grace is alive and functioning in the world. OLQP is a microcosm of that reality. Moreover, the good work goes on.



### Seeking Justice for Dreamers

**By Alex Gonzalez.**

In search for a better life, people leave their countries and go to places where things are or look better. They are desperate and they cross borders looking for asylum or the opportunity to get a job that pays better salaries or gives them better spending power. People look for peace, rule of law, and opportunities for better education. Some take their children along. Some must leave them behind.

In the Fall 2013 issue of *The Advocate*, staff writer Kathy Desmond shared a story about Jose, a "Dreamer," who was brought to the U.S. by his parents when he was 4 years old. Jose was in the process of renewing his Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Status and was concerned things would change. Like so many Dreamers, Jose faced the same uncertainty that countless others must live with every day.

Established by the Obama Administration in June 2012, DACA is a type of administrative relief from

deportation that protects eligible immigrants who came to the U.S. when they were children. DACA gives undocumented immigrants protection from deportation and a work permit. The program requires that DACA status and a work permit be renewed every two years.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), an agency of the Department of Homeland Security, began accepting DACA applications in August 2012. DACA has been challenged, and on September 28, 2021, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published a notice of proposed rulemaking to establish regulations to preserve and fortify DACA policy to defer removal of certain noncitizens that came to the U.S. as children, meet other criteria, and do not present other circumstances that would warrant removal. After a careful review of public comments, DHS issued a final rule to implement the proposed rule, with some amendments.

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## Justice for Dreamers

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The DACA final rule<sup>1</sup> took effect on October 31, 2022. It affirms that:

- Current DACA recipients' deferred action, employment authorization, and advance parole will continue to be recognized as valid under the final rule.
- DACA is not a form of lawful status, but DACA recipients are considered "lawfully present" for certain purposes.
- Non-citizens who meet eligible criteria, clear all national security and public safety vetting, and are found to merit a favorable exercise of discretion may be granted deferred action and obtain renewable two-year work authorization. Given pending litigation, however, the Department is currently barred from granting deferred action to any new DCA recipients."<sup>2</sup>

The main concern is that new applications for DACA will not be processed, which will put at risk the "lawful presence" of those who applied for the first time. They will not be able to work. This is a very challenging situation for Dreamers, who were brought to the U.S. in hopes of a better life. Dreamers want opportunities: education, and a longer period to process or renew their immigration status. They are joining forces for DACA to continue accepting new requests. On our part, we can contact our Representatives to continue protections for current DACA recipients, as outlined in the final rule.

*"If you want peace, work for justice."*

— Pope Paul VI

<sup>1</sup> Also referred informally as DREAMers program

<sup>2</sup> Full DACA Final rule can be found at <https://public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2022-18401.pdf>, Source: US Citizenship and Immigration Service webpage.

## Crossing Into Selma: A White Parishioner's (Ongoing) Path Toward Anti-Racism

By Julia Rocchi

The bridge leading into Selma, Alabama, arcs across the Alabama River, the central span its most decorative flourish on an otherwise basic design. Its name: the Edmund Pettus Bridge, also US-80. I never thought I'd see this bridge in person, yet there I was in 2013 as part of an unexpected day trip with a friend, recognizing it as the setting where determined Civil Rights activists faced off against helmeted state troopers in the Deep South.

I stood along the river walk and looked at the bridge from afar. It didn't have the technical wonder of the Brooklyn Bridge or the evocative grandeur of the Golden Gate, yet I was drawn to it in a way I'd never been drawn to those other places. It forced uncomfortable questions on me: "Would you have marched across me? Would you have traveled to join the protesters? Or would you have turned off the TV?"

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*Edmund Pettus Bridge*

## Crossing into Selma

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Three years later, I faced those questions again when I participated in JustFaith at OLQP, an experience that radically reoriented my adult faith life. The bigger the issues we tackled, the more complex the systems we dissected, the more I awoke to not only the world's injustices, but also our global interconnectedness. Placing myself within an intricate web of relationships rather than at the center of an individual island helped me understand my privileges and compelled me to consider how I might manifest God's kingdom on earth, here and now.

Of all the enormous societal issues we discussed — poverty, hunger, climate change, war — the call to confront racism struck me at my core. But the call didn't come from the documentaries we watched or books we read; it came from the unflinching personal testimony of parish leader Cecilia Braveboy.

I remember the evening vividly. Cecilia sat at the end of the long table in the food pantry room — our JustFaith group encircling her, the overhead lights flickering, canned goods surrounding us — and she shared with us her lived experience of growing up in the neighborhood under the thumb of Jim Crow-era segregation. I won't recount her story as it is only hers

to tell, but I will say that as I listened that evening, the truth broke through to me: It was not anyone else's responsibility to teach me about racism. Rather, it was on me to learn the difficult history and combat its present-day realities directly.

My self-education started with a baby step — reading books about racism, seeking out diverse authors, and widening the circle of voices I followed on my social channels. Then I made the crucial distinction that considering myself not racist was not the same as being actively anti-racist. To be fully anti-racist, I had to pair examination with action and work to dismantle the entrenched systems upholding white supremacy.

To build that foundation of contemplative examination, I joined OLQP's Minkisi Ministry, an interracial prayer group whose name means "healing objects" in Swahili, where we nurture our faith with prayer, reflection, and active listening. Led by Cecilia, the ministry joyfully centers the Black Catholic experience and has opened my eyes to new dimensions of spirituality. It also calls out the institutional Church's history of racism and compels us to live up to God's and Jesus' call for inclusive, all-embracing love.

As my learning and discernment have accumulated, I have striven to convert them into meaningful action in different areas of my life. I joined the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility committee at my workplace to help advocate on behalf of staff for policies and processes that cultivate a safe, equitable working environment and foster well-being and belonging for all employees. As parents, my husband and I elect to go most often to the 9:30 am service at OLQP so our young children can better connect with the parish's rich African-American spiritual traditions. And as a citizen, I have volunteered through organizations such as Vote Forward to write letters to fellow voters and encourage greater turnout among under-represented communities.

A decade after I first stood on the bridge in Selma, Alabama, I am finally grasping that I have embarked on this journey not for a season but for a lifetime. My path as one person often feels halting, imperfect, and insufficient. But I know I am joining generations of people who have marched across bridges in their own ways, and I'm praying for the strength to keep up with them.

*Julia Rocchi is the author of Amen? Questions for a God I Hope Exists (Lake Drive Books, 2022).*



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## Jeanette Herbert: A Life of Love

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By Sue Carlson

Jeanette Herbert, an integral member of OLQP parish for nearly 30 years, entered her heavenly home on May 14, 2023. Jeanette was known for her compassionate mentoring of many — both children and adults. Perhaps it is less well-known that she served as the first chairperson of our Haiti Ministry.

She traveled to Medor in 1997 as a member of OLQP's first delegation and she returned twice after that. A vignette that she shared about her visits with the community's sisters epitomizes Jeanette's loving focus on improving the lives of those in need.

During her first trip to Medor, Jeanette spent time with the nuns. She saw that their convent had a dirt floor, leaking roof, and shabby walls. The Sisters welcomed her and showed her their hospitality, serving the most special thing they had to eat: a single cough drop. When Jeanette returned to Medor several years later, she again visited the nuns. She was thrilled to see that their new convent was a lovely yellow cement building with a sturdy metal roof, living room, dining room, chapel, and a bedroom for each sister. This time they offered her homemade cake and a glass of coconut liqueur.

Jeanette had tears in her eyes when she told this story. She was delighted that the nuns' living situation had improved and she was grateful that the twinning between St. Joseph parish and OLQP had played a role in assisting them.

This is one of thousands of examples of how Jeanette helped others. As her earthly life was drawing to a close, Jeanette planned her own funeral. Its theme was love, a quality she had in abundance and shared lavishly with people in Haiti, at OLQP, and throughout the world. Her loving heart, kindness, and advocacy for the marginalized are sorely missed. *May she rest in peace.*



*Jeanette Herbert, Chair of OLQP's Haiti Committee, and Father Daniel Romulus, Pastor of St. Joseph parish, in Medor, 1997.*

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## Six Medor Superstars: Changing Their World

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By Sue Carlson

Our Lady, Queen of Peace (OLQP) started twinning with St. Joseph parish in Medor, Haiti in 1997. Since Medor's first high school graduation in 2011, dozens of the community's high school graduates have attended university. Six local scholars have returned home to use their knowledge to advance their community. This article spotlights them and their contributions to sustainable development in Medor.

**Rismene Esteme** was in Medor's first high school graduation class. The Parish Council selected her to receive a university scholarship provided by some parishioners of OLQP. After completing a business degree

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## Medor Superstars

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at the University of Notre Dame of Haiti, Rismene began teaching economics in Medor's secondary school. She is also the sales manager of the community's farm supply store, enabling farmers to purchase locally, which is especially important now, given the insecurity in Haiti's urban areas. Rismene also serves as the president of Medor's Local Development Committee, prioritizing and addressing development needs.



*Rismene Esteme, on her way to teach class at the College of Our Lady, Medor's secondary school (left), and selling products at Kay Plante, Medor's farm supply store (right).*

Since she was a little girl **Elcana Gervil** dreamed of becoming a healthcare worker. A physician friend of OLQP provided funding for her to study nursing at the University of Notre Dame of Haiti. She completed her course work, wrote her thesis on family planning, and now serves as the nurse at the St. Joseph Parish clinic. There is no doctor in Medor; the community relies on Elcana's nursing skills. She responds to health emergencies day and night, seven days a week. She recently stitched the abdominal wound of a patient gored by a bull!

Four of Medor's high school graduates attended the University of Fondwa (UFondwa) on scholarship provided by friends of OLQP. After completing their



*Elcana is the parish nurse. In addition to working in the clinic, she teaches health to the students attending the College of Our Lady.*

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## Medor Superstars

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studies, they each participated in post-graduate internships funded by Raising Haiti Foundation. Each now spearheads important initiatives in Medor.



**Jean Odel Pierre** is the Microcredit Agent in Medor, overseeing a program that provides small loans to women. The program, funded by Raising Haiti Foundation, began in 2020 with the provision of loans in the \$25-\$30 range to 50 women clients. The program has expanded and currently enrolls 200 beneficiaries, providing loans ranging from \$50-\$800. Loans are repaid in monthly installments over six months. After repayment of her loan, each client may apply for a larger loan. To date there is a 100% loan repayment rate!

*Jean Odel Pierre addresses participants in Medor's Microcredit Program, answering questions on the program and providing training on entrepreneurship.*

**Nathan Bien Aime** studied veterinary medicine and did his thesis on the intestinal parasites present in the mules of Medor, collecting stool specimens and identifying the pathogens. He determined the most common causes of intestinal disease in Medor's mules and identified the best treatment options. He is currently employed by Medor's Agro-forestry program and serves as the community's veterinarian.



*Nathan Bien Aime is Medor's veterinarian, caring for the community's cows, goats, and mules, and instructing the farmers on animal nutrition and health.*



**Guy Roland Baltazar** is an Agent in Medor's Agro-forestry Program. He conducts training sessions on topics that include soil and water conservation, improved farming techniques, and tree planting to combat climate change. Guy Roland also helps oversee the growth of tree seedlings in Medor's ten tree nurseries and their transplantation onto the surrounding hillsides. It is projected that the program will transplant 200,000 trees in 2023!

*Guy Roland Baltazar, on the left in the photo on the right, participates in at least 24 formal workshops and on-site training sessions annually.*

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## Medor Superstars

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**Vannia Laurent** serves as an Agriculture Service Agent in Medor's Agro-Forestry Program, overseeing the parish's ten seed banks, which loan crop seeds to farmers. This year 1,000 participants were each loaned 24 pounds of seeds. After harvest, they return the same amount they received plus an additional 10%, sustaining the program. Vannia's leadership at the seed banks empowers farmers to increase their harvests and incomes!



*Vannia Laurent, in black hat in the last row of the photo on the right, supervises Medor's ten community seed banks, sustainably increasing harvests and incomes of each participant.*

Vannia summed up her education experience with these words to OLQP: "The most important thing I can express to the parish of Our Lady Queen of Peace and to Raising Haiti Foundation is none other than gratitude. I will never stop thanking you for your love and devotion to me, giving me the opportunity to realize my dream: the dream of becoming a responsible agronomist with the ability to work with farmers from my home community. I give them the best of me so that they can get out of their undesirable situations. Thanks to this great opportunity, I can say that I am now a woman filled with good intentions, always ready to help others."

"I know that thanks to my agronomy skills, the farmers of Medor look at agriculture in a better way. The improved way they now manage their seeds and the agricultural techniques that I teach them allow them to have much more profitable harvests, and to have so many other benefits."

Nelson Mandela wrote, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." The people of Medor exemplify this. School attendance has grown from 300 students in 1997 to 3,100 students today. Father Leroy, Medor's second pastor, insisted that Medor's primary school start with kindergarten age children, despite cost concerns. His decision led to more children attending the upper grades. He challenged OLQP to assist in funding a secondary school, which led to the possibility of Medor students attending university.

Father Luckson, Medor's third pastor, realized that many children couldn't attend school because getting to Medor's primary school was too far to walk. He opened the four outlying chapel schools and worked with OLQP so that we could help provide some funding. Father Frantz, Medor's fourth pastor, has welcomed some of the Medor university graduates back to their home and been an advocate in the work they are now doing for their community. The people of Medor are truly using education to improve their world.



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