Last year Many Hands for Haiti purchased a small piece of land in a nearby area called Maliarette. Our long-term hope is to do programming on this land. In the meantime, we decided to begin building relationships through a series of short teachings we’ve been calling “Community Conversations”. These educational talks were inspired by the Many Hands for Haiti goal of Strengthening Families and were developed in a way to encourage community members in their God-given responsibilities as parents and citizens.

The newly built gazebo on our land was the setting of the first conversation. Pastor Lumanès and Jean-Ronel’s topic was “The Importance of Children according to God’s Word,” discussing a focus on the value of children in the First Thousand Days of life. They shared how children need the love and care of their parents to help them grow into strong and capable adults, as well as how parents can find all the wisdom they need to raise their children in God’s word!

People wandered in from all of the five nearby zones that had been invited. With the gazebo full, they found spots to sit in the shade near the shelter and under trees. As the crowd slowly grew to well over 150 people that beautiful, hot, sunny afternoon, I couldn’t help but think about how this event may have resembled a first century gathering of people who followed Jesus into the wilderness to hear his preaching, each person following the murmurs of those ahead of them, to a remote place where Jesus taught.

Similar to the first century people who came to hear Jesus, curious, the participants were full of hope and hungry, but not sure for what. My prayer is that through these conversations, our Haitian neighbors may be filled with the life-transforming truth of our Lord Jesus.

Since the first crowd was so large, our next conversations were held in a nearby church. The church provided enough shade that we could use some AV equipment. Dr. Berry Joseph was our speaker for conversation #2 and he shared a beautiful presentation about the stages of pregnancy. It was really fun to see the women react to the photos and videos of babies in utero! With technology at our fingertips, the things that we take for granted truly amazed these women! I’m sure for most it was the first time they had ever considered what a baby in the womb might actually look like. “Fish! Animal!” they cried as the images passed the screen. It was a joyous time as lots of laughter and oooh’s and aaahh’s filled the church that afternoon.

For conversation #3, we had a jovial group of American women who came to share LOTS of rich information about breastfeeding! We saw the Lord moving in so many ways as He provided heaps of insight and amazing connections for these women as they prepared for their presentation. They did a conference for our Sylvain PMJ moms too, but said the event in Maliarette was way more exciting as the ladies really got into it and asked good questions!

Each of these two conversations had an attendance of just over 60, which seems down from the first, but as the topics were specific to women’s bodies, the crowd of predominantly pregnant and nursing women seemed fitting.

Pray for future conversations, when we discuss the stages of development in toddlers. Although Haitian children are culturally considered gifts from God, typically little is invested until the child reaches an age where they can contribute to the workings of the household. Our hope is to encourage parents to see value in and care for babies and young children in a way that will help them develop healthy and strong from conception. This will surely give them a firmer foundation for a better future for not only themselves, but for everyone they touch.

To God be the Glory!
NEW SENIOR MANAGEMENT IN HAITI

Many Hands is pleased to announce the addition of new senior management in Haiti. Shelly and Darryl De Ruiter of Holland, MI, have answered the call and will be joining the Many Hands team in Pignon, Haiti. Both will be filling newly created roles, with Shelly filling the position of Spiritual Direction Coordinator, and Darryl the position of Organizational Development Manager.

Commenting on this, Tim Brand, MH4H Executive Leader said, “With the continued growth of our programs in Haiti, we’ve been praying for some time for God to anoint and call the right couple to come alongside Craig, Christi, and the rest of the staff in Haiti. Our desire has been a couple with administrative experience around education, deep spiritual maturity, and hearts to serve the Lord. Our prayers have been answered with Shelly and Darryl accepting the call. They are both high-capacity, servant-hearted leaders, committed to doing the Lord’s work. We can’t be more excited.”

Darryl De Ruiter joins Many Hands from Holland Christian Schools in Michigan, where he served for three years as the High School Principal. Previous to Holland Christian, Darryl served as Principal and Head of School for 12 years at Pella Christian in Pella, IA. Darryl has more than 30 years of experience in education, holding administration, coaching, and teaching roles. As Organizational Development Manager, Darryl will oversee the programs involving Education, Leadership Development, and Agronomy in Haiti. He will also work with our staff and continue to pour into them from a development perspective.

Shelly De Ruiter brings 26 years of physical therapy experience, along with experience in spiritual development, recently completing a one-year Spiritual Director program through the Dominican Center in Grand Rapids. As Spiritual Direction Coordinator, Shelly will facilitate the support of leadership in-country, focusing on mentoring, prayer, staff support, and spiritual development.

“These roles fit our respective skill sets well. My administrative and leadership experience have prepared me for the ODM role and Shelly’s passion, faith journey, and recent completion of the Spiritual Director program make her an ideal fit for the Spiritual Direction position,” explained Darryl.

“This will not be easy work. Haiti is hard, and Haiti is a dark place spiritually. It is a place of great chaos. We need lots of prayers and lots of encouragement as we begin a new calling that we believe God has ordained and has prepared and equipped us for.”

MH4H looks forward to Darryl and Shelly joining the Gabharts, and the rest of the Haiti team, come October 2018.

ALFA IS FOR ALPHABET

By Micah Aurand, Administrative Coordinator, Haiti

It is a common sight in Haiti to see school children flocking alongside the road going to and from class. Each child’s uniform declares which school he or she attends. This is particularly amazing when you see a uniform belonging to a school that is an hour’s walk away. Though some students may walk over an hour each day to attend class, they are the blessed minority.

Fifty percent of Haitian children don’t receive any type of formal education (World Bank 2015). Statistically, in a group of twenty, only ten children will see the inside of a classroom. Of those ten kids, four will go on to enter the sixth grade. That means sixteen out of twenty Haitian children do not make it past fifth grade (UNICEF 2008)!

According to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), nearly half of second grade students in Haiti cannot read. So when the average Haitian, twenty-five years or older, has not had the opportunity to complete third grade, there is small wonder that the nation’s literacy rate is approximately sixty percent (USAID 2016) (CIA Factbook Nov 2015).

Through the Love in Action Initiative, in partnership with Bible League International, Many Hands will be launching an adult literacy course this summer of 2018. We are happy to announce that we have recently hired a local teacher, Francin Chev-Englant, to lead the pilot class of ten students. This class, called an “Alfa class” in Haiti, is open exclusively to parents whose children are in the School of Light.

The ability to read and write, if wielded intentionally, is a tool which paves the way for spiritual, mental, and financial prosperity. By offering this adult literacy class, MH4H desires to give these parents the power to make lasting change for themselves, their families, and their communities.

“Today a reader, tomorrow a leader.” - Margaret Fuller
Alongside the Reformed Church in America, Many Hands announced the launch of the Husbandry Economic Project (H.E.P.) in the fall of 2017. To facilitate this vision, a large piece of land was needed. Knowing God would provide, MH4H started searching and was led to a spot less than half a mile from the Sylvain campus. The owner agreed to a ten year lease at a very reasonable price - God is Good!

The six-acre plot was hilly and unmaintained. Laborers were hired to fence in the property. They fought through rough underbrush every inch of the way to clear a path for the double-sided barrier. Wooden posts and barbed wire gave structure to the cacti lining. This fence, while very “Haitian”, was of superb quality.

Two goat shelters were constructed on opposite ends of the property. A mobile, solar-powered, electrical fence was also installed allowing the goats to graze the field in sections.

In the center, a concrete guardhouse was built with a twelve-foot tower on top giving a bird’s eye view of the area. Three guards rotate shifts to provide 24/7 security for the herds.

With a crew of twenty-three workers, this undeveloped land was made ready within six weeks for the twenty-five does, four bucks, and one newborn kid which currently make up the MH4H commercial goat herd. We will say it once more- God is Good!

Opportunities for our Executive staff to meet are rare and joyous occasions. Geography and the increasing numbers of MH4H staff limit the times they can meet and connect face-to-face. Fortunately, God was able to bless the MH4H Executive team with some time for such a meeting!

The team met in Florida near the end of April. Their retreat focused on strengthening the MH4H commitment of “transforming together.” Jennifer Browne and Jennifer Webster from OneBody3 facilitated the team-building and communication aspects of the retreat. Onebody3 is an organization that equips others to “build, develop and grow cultures on purpose for a purpose.”

The team were also able to visit Missionary Flights International (MFI). MH4H uses MFI to fly our staff and many of our teams in and out of Haiti. Kevin Stratton from MFI was able to give a private tour of their base in Fort Pierce, sharing the complex logistics that go into flying teams into various countries in the Carribean.

This weekend allowed staff to renew their commitment to each other and the vision He has called them into for Haiti. We are thankful for the people God calls for His purposes, enabling them to ‘transform together, to be love in action, in this broken world.”
Sainphirin Forisma started working with Many Hands as the Chaplain of the PET (Personal Energy Transportation) team on January 25, 2018. He travels with the PET technicians for cart distributions and tune-ups several times a week, praying with each recipient as well as learning how to do basic repair on the carts, Pastor Sainphirin says, "The biggest thing I have learned since working for Many Hands is the number of handicapped people in Haiti. But, however God makes us, our bodies are His and He is in control."