At the beginning of the twinning relationship between Sacred Heart Church in Norfolk and Saint Gabriel in Lascahobas, Haiti, the Haiti Twinning Ministry (HTM) communicated with Father Bernard Desras, pastor at St. Gabriel by e-mail. They soon found out that the use of e-mail even though indispensable was not keep in touch with the St. Gabriel’s responsible during their pilgrimages. Thus, they started to correspond with Father Bernard and the box at the Rectory in Haiti. Two visits a year, base of a strong relationship. It helps with other life of the church, news from a spiritual friend in Haiti is exciting. The letters sent and received include prayer requests, details regarding the observation of the church, family news, observations of current programs such as the School Cafeteria Building, the Lunch Program for children, the Teacher Program, and Medical Assistance Program. The letters sometimes contain family pictures and holy cards.

Since there is no postal service in Haiti outside of Port-au-Prince, the ministry has developed, through an ongoing network with other catholic churches in Virginia, an informal list which shows the names and details of potential messengers. This helps St. Gabriel to know who is going to Haiti throughout the year. The ministry makes contact with the group going to Haiti to arrange sending them an envelope with letters and documents for Fr. Ady Mytal, pastor at St. Gabriel.

Currently 22 members and friends in the community correspond with 22 responsibilities and teachers at St. Gabriel Parish including three students. A gentle reminder is sent every month to each person who has a pen pal. Letters can be sent to the chair of the ministry at Sacred Heart or Francesca Smith, Pen Pal Coordinator, by e-mail, post or brought to monthly meetings. Letters are sent to Haiti each month and replies are received a couple of times a year. Pen pals in the US know not to be discouraged when they do not receive regular letters from St. Gabriel since it is in giving that we receive. It is best to write whenever possible without necessarily waiting for a reply. Using a few words in Creole or French in the correspondence goes a long way. It shows interest and respect to our Haitian family. Also the site Google Translate is most useful. It is fun to write to our family in Haiti.

If you wish to have a pen pal in Haiti or obtain more details about this program, please contact

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Picture: Teachers from St. Gabriel parish schools writing to their pen pals in the US