

Our Lady Queen of Peace, Remote Area Medical and St. Joseph's in Medor Form a Relationship

By Dr. Heidi Sampang and Dr. Sue Carlson

Like 340 parishes across the US, Our Lady Queen of Peace (OLQP) has a sister parish in Haiti, St. Joseph's in Medor. One thing that stands out about OLQP's twin parish is its isolation. Medor is only 29 miles as the crow flies from Port-au-Prince, but it takes more than eight hours to get there. The final leg is a hillside trail, impassable to vehicles, that winds up the slopes of the Artibonite Mountains to the village.

As a result, Medor has no local government. There are no police or mail services; no roads; and not even basic necessities such as clean water, electricity or a sewage system. Life is hard in Medor.

For the last 13 years, Our Lady Queen of Peace parish and its Haiti committee have been working with St Joseph parish to lessen the hardships of the community. Our projects include providing access to clean water and latrines, building the primary and secondary schools that serve Medor and the outlying villages, providing a daily meal to the 1,250 school children, initiating a reforestation program and helping to build the church. The generosity of OLQP parishioners in supporting Medor for all these years, support which is truly extraordinary given the size and makeup of the parish is truly amazing. Pere Luckson and the people of Medor are extremely grateful for the continued support which is helping sustain them through the many hardships experienced regularly in Haiti.

But OLQP is a small parish with less than 1,700 families, and the committee pursues all these projects with limited resources. And these resources were put to the test following the earthquake that hit Haiti in January 2010.

The church was heavily damaged but repairable. The kindergarten and primary school buildings were not as fortunate—they were no longer safe to use and would have to be demolished and rebuilt from scratch.

Not only were the costs staggering, running into the hundreds of thousands of dollars—the logistics were daunting as well. How would the necessary materials and equipment be brought up to Medor? The committee discussed various options, once initial funding was identified, and decided that the most feasible option was airlifting materials to Medor via helicopter—a very costly endeavor.

OLQP tried contacting the UN, the US military, the US embassy and various NGOs that had post-earthquake operations in Haiti, with little success. And the committee could not afford to pay for an airlift. They needed an angel, it seemed.

And an angel arrived, in the form of Remote Access Medical Volunteer Corps (RAM). RAM is a non-profit, all-volunteer airborne medical relief corps, founded in 1985 by Stan Brock. RAM's mission is to provide free health care to remote and inaccessible areas, around the world and more recently in the United States. Over the past quarter-century, RAM organized over 60 medical expeditions, and served more than 300,000 patients.



RAM hangar in Knoxville, TN



One member of the OLQP Haiti committee, Dr. Heidi Sampang, had also worked with RAM on a medical mission in Honduras, and contacted Stan Brock. After that initial conversation, Dr. Sampang asked Dr. Sue Carlson, Chair of the Haiti Committee, to communicate with Stan Brock about the details of OLQP's work in Medor and the need for helicopter transportation of supplies for building the kindergarten/primary school. The timing turned out to be fortuitous—Stan wanted to expand RAM's work in Haiti, and remote and inaccessible Medor seemed to be a perfect fit for RAM.

The conversations with RAM began on Labor Day, 2010. Since then, Stan twice flew his private plane to Northern Virginia to meet with Father Tim and the Haiti Committee. He also flew to Haiti and hiked seven hours up the mountain to Medor to meet Pere Luckson, pastor of St Joseph, the Parish Council and community leaders.



Stan, the Pilot

Unfortunately, RAM does not have a helicopter so it cannot provide helicopter delivery of the 8,000-pound steel containers needed for the school construction. But RAM has lofty plans how it can serve, plans that the people of Medor endorsed wholeheartedly.



Sue and Stan with truck full of medicine donated by OLQP



Stan flew this plane to Haiti. It was full of medicine for the people of Medor.

RAM's initial endeavor took place in December, 2010. Stan organized a team to travel to Medor. The team was multi-talented: nine parachute jumpers each landed safely in Medor. Most of these people worked on building a small airstrip there. *Five OLQP members* joined the RAM volunteer team.

Pediatrician, Dr. Heidi Sampang



Nurse Practitioner, Lori Clements



- Pediatrician *Dr. Heidi Sampang* and Nurse Practitioner *Lori Clements* conducted a medical clinic with other RAM doctors and treated several cholera patients. OLQP supplied over the counter medicines, some prescription medications and more than 4,000 oral rehydration packets. RAM also supplied prescription medicines.

-Ophthalmologist *Dr Sue Carlson* ran an eye clinic and conducted classes on cholera and clean water.



This patient is happy with his new glasses.



Medor's ambulance

-*Minhthu Lynagh* organized the meals, transportation and interpreters, helped with daily logistics as well as worked with St Joseph's water committee members to distribute bleach bottles & 30,000 donated aquatabs to the outlying chapels. She also contributed 2 boxes of school supplies to the primary & secondary schools



Minhthu playing with some children in Medor

In addition, -*Ray Sampang* cooked three meals each day for the 60+ Haitians who were hired to help build the airstrip.

- a dentist provided the first dental care for the community.
- a veterinarian provided the first veterinary care for the community.
- a construction expert organized the repair of the road.



Ray and a Haitian worker

The two-week visit was extremely successful. A small airstrip was built in Medor. RAM will use it for emergency air evacuation of seriously ill patients, the first such service in Haiti. The road to Medor was repaired and a 4-wheel drive vehicle drove all the way up to Medor's market. The Medical Clinic treated over 850 patients. One hundred eighty-two persons had their eyes checked and were given eye glasses. Sixty-nine patients received dental care. Seven hundred twenty-three people were given de-worming medication. Many donkeys, mules, goats, pigs and chickens were treated. Classes on cholera prevention and clean water were taught to all the school children and to many clinic patients. Bleach, soap and oral rehydration packets were distributed to more than 1,000 families. And, importantly, OLQP and St. Joseph Parish committed themselves to redouble their efforts on clean water activities.



Medor's new airstrip

Like OLQP, RAM is making a commitment to the people of Medor. Stan Brock plans to provide a small plane to be based in Medor. Eventually RAM will build airstrips near various hospitals and other strategically located remote locations so that a network for emergency evacuation of ill patients will be established throughout Haiti. RAM intends to purchase a 4 wheel drive truck that can be used for the people of Medor. Plans are being made for the establishment of a RAM Ranger Program: a continuously running six week course on clean water, latrines, sanitation, reforestation, construction, rocket stoves, solar cooking, first aid and other practical topics for people in a rural setting. During the last week of each course the students will participate in a project to benefit the community. Possible projects include building a latrine, building rocket stoves, planting trees, etc.

RAM is well respected for its charitable work. This fall, Dateline NBC contacted Stan Brock about doing a story on RAM. When Dateline learned that RAM was planning to initiate work in Medor, they decided to film a one hour program on the December trip, featuring the work being done by RAM and OLQP in this very remote location in Haiti. The tentative date for the show is January 9, to coincide with the one year anniversary of Haiti's devastating earthquake.



The Ladies of the Mountains:
Sue, Lori and Heidi with Ann Curry

The collaboration of RAM, OLQP and St. Joseph's in Medor is a long-term commitment. Its primary goal is relationship building based on mutual respect, sharing and understanding. A second goal is sustainable development for the 40,000 people in the Medor community. Each group realizes that to achieve these goals we must continuously work to improve our communication skills, broaden our views of global issues and strengthen our bonds of love and support while working together on practical activities.