

The ADVOCATE

Queen of Peace Quarterly Newsletter

Spring 2024



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Editor's Note: *The Spring 2024 issue of The Advocate features two families who have belonged to OLQP for three generations and articles on the 2023 National Black Catholic Conference; a climate change event; a cholera outbreak in Medor; and the Shirlington Employment and Education Center.*

*Paula Cruickshank
Editor, The Advocate*

A Three Generational Family Worshiping at Our Lady Queen of Peace

By Sue Carlson

It was 1984. Susan Leverone and Gary Shinners were newly engaged and new to Arlington. Susan called the diocese and learned that Our Lady, Queen of Peace (OLQP) was their assigned parish. They loved the church from the very start. Father James K. Healy, C.S.Sp., was pastor and Susan and Gary admired his dynamic and captivating leadership. They were also drawn to the welcoming nature of the parish and its commitment to social justice.



From left to right: Susan Leverone, Alex King, Cecelia King, Maria King, Rebecca King, Danny King, Gary Shinners

Susan and Gary have raised three children, Rebecca, Laura, and Daniel. They grew up attending mass at OLQP, where they participated in religious education classes and had their First Reconciliation and First Communion. Eventually, Laura and Daniel moved to California, but Rebecca continues to live nearby in Alexandria and attends OLQP. She loves going to church with people who knew her when she was a baby. She is delighted that some of the members of the 9:30 choir who she loved watching as a child are still singing in the choir today.

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A Three Generational Family

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Rebecca married Alex King in 2013. They now have three children: Danny, who made his First Communion this year, Maria, and Cecilia. Rebecca, Alex, and their children join Susan and Gary each Sunday morning at OLQP's 9:30 mass.

The extended family finds that worshiping together has strengthened their commitment to coming to mass. The children look forward to getting together with their grandparents for mass and breakfast afterwards in Father Ray Hall. It is their Sunday tradition!

Rebecca is filled with happiness watching her children climb the same tree and interact with some of the same people that she and her siblings enjoyed when they were growing up. She and Alex cherish seeing the church experience anew through the eyes of their children, just as Susan and Gary love seeing the church experience fresh through eyes of their grandchildren.

The family members are committed to social justice and to the many volunteer opportunities at OLQP. The children are inspired by the work their grandparents and parents do at the parish and do their part to help, too, by shopping for the food pantry, raising funds for our twin parish in Haiti, and sorting items for the Gabriel Project. The children are being raised to think of others, just as their grandparents and parents do.

Gary said that worshiping at OLQP with his wife, daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren, "is a wonderful thing. It brings our family together as a unit as we engage in church activities. Worshipping together has brought us closer as a family and has deepened our faith." Susan agrees and noted, "I am so grateful that OLQP is in our lives." They each look forward to continuing to actively participate in the OLQP community as a family.

Three Generations at Queen of Peace

By Jack Sullivan

After her daughter, Margaret, a teacher in Arlington Public Schools, told her about OLQP, Mary Jo Johnson decided to see what the parish offered — and never looked back. The result is that three generations of her family are members and actively involved in the ministries offered by the church.

A resident of Alexandria and retired international consultant, Mary Jo has been a frequent participant in a variety of parish activities. Among them is the Haiti Committee. As a committee member she has made two trips to Medor with parish

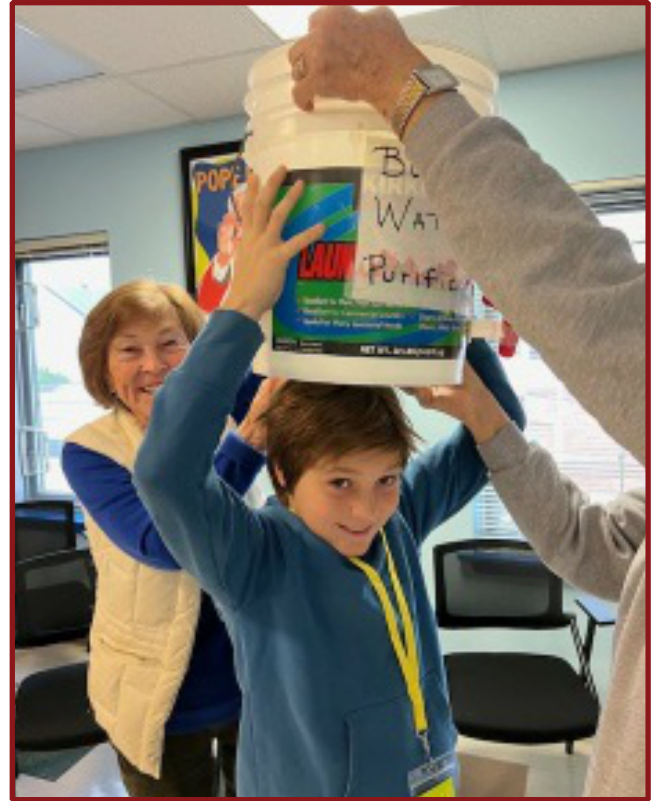
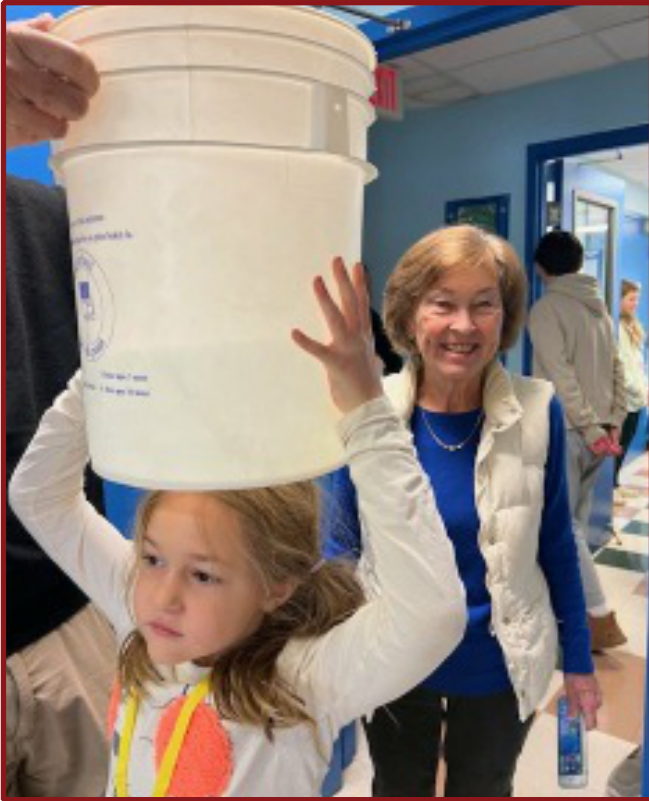
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The Johnson and Libresco families, with Father Martin Vu, C.S.Sp., on the occasion of Alexander's and Josephine's Baptisms.

Three Generations

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Josephine and Alexander participate in bringing gifts to the altar during Lent. The gifts represent several programs in Medor – in this case, the clean water effort.

delegations. She also participates in several ministries. They include: Gun Violence Prevention; Integrity of Creation; and Minkisi. Her current major occupation is supervising the coffee and donuts breakfasts now available to parishioners after Sunday morning Masses.

Amid all this activity, she is a proud grandmother who is delighted to see her daughter, Liz, and husband, Brett Libresco, raise their four children, James, Byron, Alexander, and Josephine. Like their grandmother and parents, they all participate in parish activities.

Liz says she was drawn to the parish by its focus on social justice and the welcoming nature of the community. She and her husband's principal activities are assisting their children participate at the church. The children have been in Faith Formation programs for many years. Among them are four Holy Baptisms, two First Holy Communions, and one Confirmation.

Recounting a number of church-organized activities in which she and her children participated, Liz said: "One year, our family made about a dozen pies and the group we organized with made dozens more, all in one afternoon. It was a lot of fun and helped us to get to know other parishioners. We still make pies every year as a family for donation through Queen of Peace."

Liz recalled that when the children were younger, she and Brett helped staff the nursery in Father Ray Hall and assisted providing childcare during Sunday morning masses. More recently as her grandchildren have grown, Mary Jo, while no longer traveling to Medor and the long dangerous road on a donkey up to the mountain town, has recruited her grandchildren into assisting the ministry by bringing symbolic items, like clean water, to the altar at Lent.

Many parishioners will recall the pre-Covid fellowship made available by the breakfasts provided after the

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Three Generations

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Sunday morning masses. Mary Jo has volunteered to lead an effort to revive this tradition that for so many years provided fellowship and enjoyment to parishioners. Although the buffet-style breakfast is now a little simpler, coffee and donuts have helped to restore the Sunday morning tradition. Mary Jo currently is looking for the help of other parishioners in this ministry.

The three generations of this family provide visible testimony to the multi-generational appeal of programs offered by the parish. The ministries help to meet the spiritual and temporal needs of all members of the community and of all ages.

Hear the Cry of the Earth and the Poor

By Kathy Desmond

The Integrity of Creation team sponsored a well-received program in April to celebrate Earth Day. Round tables were covered with white tablecloths, reusable utensils, and flowers from home gardens. All seats were filled, with community-building conversations over a supper of plant-based soups.

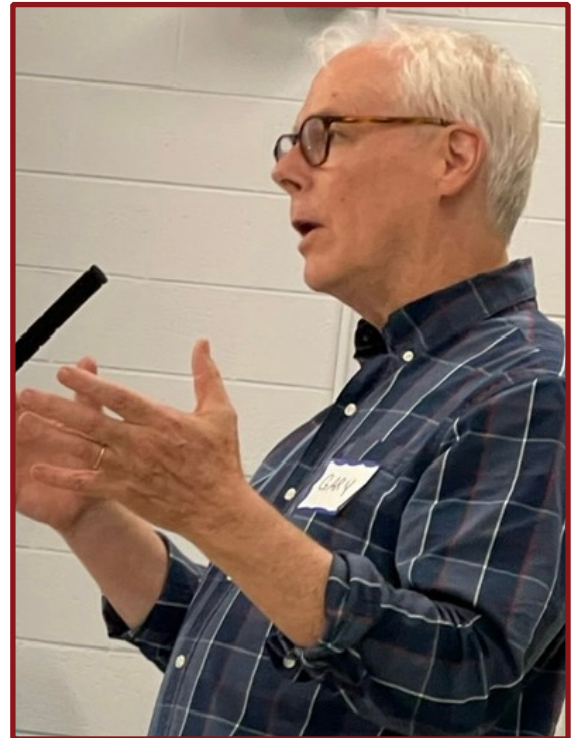
Team Chair Bill Larme introduced two inspiring environmental authors to share their insights on climate action and ways to get involved. Gary Gardner, an OLQP parishioner, is a veteran analyst of global sustainability issues and was Director of Research at Worldwatch Institute. He has spoken at many environmental forums, including at the Vatican. His book is ***The Earth Cries Out: How Faith Communities Meet the Challenges of Sustainability***.

Lawrence MacDonald, a member of Temple Rodef Shalom in Falls Church, met OLQP when he helped his Temple replicate our solar energy installation. A former foreign correspondent and Vice President of World Resources Institute, he is now a passionate activist with Bill McKibben's Third Act movement. His book is titled ***Am I Too Old to Save the Planet? A Boomers Guide to Climate Action*** and it makes the case for generational action.

In his opening remarks, Gary warned that we currently live in a dramatic time of "mega crises" that reveals who we are and how we see our place in the world. The author described the sustainability challenges that threaten life on planet earth right now.

They are:

- Massive and global in scope, e.g., climate change, sea level rise, deforestation.
- Unprecedented, e.g., dead zones along coastlines, mass extinction of species.
- Dangerous, as in the case of nuclear war, although some dangers are hardly recognized, like depleted aquifers.
- Connected, an interlocking mix of environmental, social, and economic issues, e.g., COVID's effects that disproportionately impact the poor.



Gary Gardner

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Hear the Cry

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Gary noted that the problems are systemic in nature and stem from overuse of resources. He stressed that these systems must be addressed to ensure the prospects for human development on our planet.

Pope Francis's *Laudato Si* encyclical builds on Catholic social teaching and, in view of today's crises, calls for a conversion to "integral ecology." He affirms Saint Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of Creation," his praise of Brother Sun and Sister Moon and their recognition of nature as part of who we are.

Gary describes what faith communities in the U.S. are doing, not as a road map for all to follow, but as examples of what creative groups can do. The examples in his book are grouped around environmental issues (Hearing the Cry of the Earth), and social issues (Hearing the Cry of the Poor), with a bridge chapter on consumerism.

For example, a small vegetable garden started by Pleasant Hope Baptist Church in Baltimore gave birth to the Black Food Security Network. The project shows the links between organic, regenerative agricultural practices, and social enterprise development to meet the needs of the poor. It is worth reading the book for the examples, each starting with a story of one or more individuals, the project, how it addresses sustainability challenges, *Laudato Si* values, and its overall impact, with a list of resources.

Where we buy our food matters, where we invest matters, and where we do our advocacy matters, he concluded.

Lawrence MacDonald also emphasized the urgency of the crises happening now and the need for large scale systemic change achieved by working in coalition with others. He said that the climate crisis is worse than we think and it requires everyone to act and stretch beyond their personal comfort level.

The author contended that Boomers are most responsible for how we got here and can change the



Lawrence MacDonald

situation. They shaped the disastrous climate policy, he said, yet we all share responsibility. While Boomers launched the first Earth Day in 1970, which led to bipartisan support of major environmental laws, such as the Clean Water and Endangered Species Acts and establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), he asserted that their efforts were countered with the lies of fossil fuel companies and their allies.

Boomers can avert catastrophe and reconnect with their youthful idealism, Lawrence said. He noted that they are still America's most powerful generation: 70 million voters are Boomers and vote in larger percentages than others; two-thirds of Boomers think that the climate crisis is a major problem; and Boomers and elders hold 70% of the nation's wealth.

What we can do begins with individual actions.

- Stop wasting food and eat less meat.
- Drive less.
- Move your money away from fossil fuels.

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Hear the Cry

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- Install rooftop solar.
- Upgrade your car to an EV.
- Fly less—or not at all.

Lawrence’s book has practical examples for each of these actions, but “don’t let personal action distract you from helping to demand rapid systemic change,” he said.

The source of power to change is to work together, he noted, adding that we can use national organizations to find local contacts. Encouraging ecumenical efforts, he emphasized that leaders of all religions advocate for care of the planet and the poor. The author documented efforts by Catholics, Evangelicals, Ecumenical Protestants, Black churches, Muslims, Jews, and Interfaith Groups.

Faith-based advocacy, civil disobedience, and non-violent direct action are also necessary, Lawrence said. The title of the last chapter of his book makes clear the urgency for all of us to act: **“Just do it.”**

The National Black Catholic Congress XIII National Harbor, MD, July 20–23, 2023

By Veronica Dabney

The National Black Catholic Congress was founded by journalist Daniel Rudd and fellow Black Catholic leaders, who felt the need to address bigotry within the Church and help Black Catholics thrive in spite of obstacles. The first gathering was held in Washington, D.C. in 1889, at a time when it was becoming clear that the brief Reconstruction period following the end of the civil war in 1865, was coming to a close.



The National BLACK CATHOLIC Congress

“Two hundred delegates met with President Grover Cleveland and Rev. Augustus Tolton (one of six African Americans currently on the path to sainthood) and celebrated High Mass. One point on the agenda was the recognition of women’s roles in evangelization. The resolution was also made that

‘we express our sympathy with our brethren of the Emerald Isle, who like ourselves are struggling for justice.’¹

Following the first Congress, a gathering was convened for the next four years — 1890 to 1894. The Congress would not be convened again until Congress VI (May 21–24, 1987) in Washington, D.C. on the campus of Catholic University. It opened with a look at the strides made by black Catholics in the United States in the century following the first Congress. Since 1987, the Congress has convened in various cities every 5 years, except for this year’s Congress XIII.²

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National Black Catholic Conference

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Congress XIII was held at National Harbor in Maryland on July 20-23, 2023. The 2023 Theme was: **Write the Vision – A Prophetic Call to Thrive**. In a post-Congress statement the NBCC reported:

“After a longer interim than the usual five years, the 13th gathering of Black Catholics was held post-COVID and brought together 2,500 Black Catholics and those in ministry to the African American Apostolate. The presence of both our Blessed Mother and the Child Jesus were with us as icons and spiritually, and all attendees were blessed by a program that was richly interwoven with African American spirituality, intellectual sharing and discussion, and socialization opportunities.”³

There were 25 in the delegation representing the Arlington Diocese. Of those, 8 were members of Our Lady Queen of Peace: Shiela Harmon-Martin; Veronica Dabny; Maude Holt; Loretta Herbert; Rebecca Jenkins; Gayle Hill; and, Jackie and Peter Smith. As in previous Congresses, there was an ambitious schedule of Masses, Plenary Sessions, and Workshops that were centered around social issues and ministries central to faith formation for African Americans.

Workshops: Approximately 70 workshops were offered at the Congress on a varying range of topics. Among the workshops (and facilitators) they chose:

- *Gentrification, Shared Parishes, and the Evangelization of Black Catholics:* Kathleen Merrick, Catholic Diocese of Charleston, Dir. Office of Black Catholic & Native American Ministries
- *Synodality, Black Catholic Spirituality, and the Racial Divide:* Daryl Grigsby, Seattle University School of Theology
- *Let Our Healing Begin:* Tyson Boudreaux, New York State Office of Mental Health-Bronx Psychiatric Center, Clinical Director
- *Evangelization Across Cultures:* Kathleen Dorsey Bellow, Institute for Black Catholic Studies, Xavier University of Louisiana, IBCS Director, Theology Professor

Mass was celebrated every day, each one by several members of the dozens of clergy and religious attending. His Eminence Wilton Cardinal Gregory, Archbishop of Washington, D.C., celebrated the opening Mass, and was a keynote speaker at a plenary session. At each service, the congregation was deeply moved by not only the beauty of the services, but by inspirational homilies and the soaring gospel music of the church choir. The plenary sessions were led by keynote speakers



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National Black Catholic Conference

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that included clergy and eminent national and local lay influencers.

Many of the Masses and Sessions focused on the six African Americans who are on the path to sainthood: Pierre Toussaint, Mother Mary Lange, Henriette DeLille, Augustus Tolton, Julie Greeley, and Sr. Thea Bowman. (So far, no African American has achieved Sainthood.) In the closing session, six D.C. parochial school students dressed as the Saints-to-be, recited a brief history of the man or woman they represented.⁴

As with every Congress, work is currently underway to analyze survey responses, and write a “Vision Plan

of Action” for the next 5 years. The 2023 Congress XIII Plan will replace the 2017 Pastoral Plan of Action.

For more information, pictures and videos of the Congress, visit: <https://nbccongress.org/national-congresses/>

Endnotes:

- 1/ <https://nbccongress.org/black-catholic-history-timeline/>
- 2/ <https://nbccongress.org/national-congresses/>
- 3/ <https://nbccongress.org/>
- 4/ <https://nbccongress.org/noteworthy-black-catholics/>

SEEC – Shirlington Employment and Education Center

By Alejandra Gonzalez

In 2000, a group of Latinos and other community leaders recognized the importance of offering a helping hand to immigrant day laborers in Arlington and founded the nonprofit organization, Shirlington Employment and Education Center (SEEC). For more than 20 years, OLQP parishioner Andres Tobar has served as SEEC Executive Director.

Initially, SEEC was contracted by Arlington County to help day laborers find temporary employment. While most of SEEC’s clients are Latino immigrants, other individuals looking for short-term employment are also welcomed, Tobar noted. Employers and local residents seeking temporary help should contact the SEEC office (703-933-1101).

Jobs offered include: moving services, landscaping, yard work, housecleaning, tiling, carpentry and handyman services at a suggested wage of \$15/hour. The nonprofit also provides education classes for immigrants who want to obtain a driver’s license; computer classes for beginners; and green housecleaning training. To date, more than 100 immigrants have started businesses, including trucking companies; home and business cleaning; catering; and lawn care services.

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Andres Tobar – recipient of the William T. Newman Spirit of Community Award (2023)

SEEC

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SEEC serves the community at no cost for the day laborer or their employers. It has received donations from OLQP and other local churches, foundations, including the Arlington Community Foundation, Washington Forrest Foundation, and other nonprofits, such as Arlington Thrive. Donations enable SEEC to provide food and rental assistance to day laborers during winter months. The support also comes in the form of bag lunches.

In 2023, Andres was one of three recipients of the William T. Newman Spirit of Community award. “Individually and collectively, these recipients represent the passion, commitment, and community advocacy that define the award and the absolute best vision of

what Arlington can be,” noted an article on the SEEC website.

SEEC is located at:
900 S. Dinwiddie
St., Suite 422,
Arlington, VA 22204
and is open from 8:00
am to 12:00 pm
(Monday to Friday).



For more information about SEEC visit their website:
<https://seecjobs.org>.

Teamwork Saves Lives in Medor Haiti: Cholera Prevention & Treatment Program

By Sue Carlson

Cholera is an infectious disease that causes severe diarrhea and dehydration and is caught by drinking water contaminated by an infected person. If not treated promptly, it can lead to dehydration and death. In our twin parish, St. Joseph of Medor, Haiti, the incidence is more prevalent during the rainy seasons when there is greater fecal contamination of the water sources.

Thanks to the many people who came together to combat Medor’s most recent cholera outbreak, their action and bravery in the face of a deadly disease were life-saving.

On August 11, 2023, Timote Georges, the Director of the Smallholder Farmers Alliance (SFA), the organization that implements the community’s agroforestry program, informed OLQP that one of Medor’s agronomists discovered twelve people in outlying chapel areas who had severe diarrhea, presumed to be cholera, and that one person had died. Timote asked if we could assist with a Cholera Prevention and Treatment Campaign (CPTC).



Transporting cholera prevention and treatment supplies to Medor

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Teamwork Saves Lives

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Immediately several people jumped into action. Within days, Timote prepared a work plan and budget and OLQP sent funds to cover the expenses. An SFA agronomist purchased a water purifying agent and other key ingredients that can prevent dehydration and death and delivered them to a gang-free location not far from Medor.

Bernard Celestin, the director of the Klorfasil Program, prepared 500 bleach powder dispensers and sent them by bus to the same location. Soirisne Saul, director of Medor's clean water program, bought liquid bleach and droplet bottles and arranged for the transportation of all the supplies to Medor.

A circuitous route was taken by boat across a river and then by mule ride to avoid gangs. Father Frantz, pastor of St. Joseph's, arranged for storage of the supplies and made announcements at Mass about the cholera outbreak and the upcoming prevention and treatment campaign.

The supplies arrived just twelve days later. An amazing feat. Soirisne carefully followed specific directions to ensure that the proper concentrations for purified water were present.

Father Frantz, Soirisne, SFA agronomists, the Sisters, teachers, parish council members, and other leaders mobilized the community inviting everyone to training sessions on how to prevent and treat cholera. Six sessions were conducted throughout St. Joseph's 74 square-mile area.

The training described cholera, its symptoms, prevention, and

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Soirisne conducts a training session



People with cholera prevention/treatment supplies

Teamwork Saves Lives

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treatment. Each attendee received water purifying chemicals and the ingredients for making oral rehydration solutions, along with directions on how to prepare and use them. These instructions were shared with all attending the trainings and electronically with everyone possessing a cell phone. Soirisne continues conducting informal training sessions and distributing water purification supplies in each of the parish's twelve chapel areas.

Even though five people died during the most recent cholera outbreak in Medor, Father Frantz and Soirisne said that the CPTC has been effective. They speculate that without it, more lives would have been lost.

We thank every person who assisted in CPTC and played a life-saving role in our twin parish. We also are grateful to OLQP's First Communion Classes, whose donations for Medor's clean water program helped to fund the Campaign. It truly TAKES A VILLAGE.

(An article in the next issue of *The Advocate* will show the human toll taken when a young man, a small child, and a baby contract the disease in Medor.)

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