

Guidelines and Template for Haiti Twinning

Overview and Rationale

As is stated in the Pastoral Plan and, following the example of St. Vincent DePaul, the Church of the Richmond Diocese is committed to sharing faith and resources with a developing country. Recognizing that the Church of Haiti is rich in many gifts but economically poor, our Diocese has respectfully chosen the country of Haiti for this outreach.

As one part of the outreach, each parish in the diocese is encouraged to consider entering into a twinning relationship with a Haitian parish or other entity such as a hospital, school, orphanage or other group.

This twinning relationship should be based on recognition that the many differences between Haiti and Virginia can provide opportunities for growth for each partner, since both possess equal dignity and equal human value.

Haiti's long history of struggle for self-determination, its proximity, its poverty, and the powerful spiritual health of its people make Haiti a unique asset to our spiritual development and fulfillment. In understanding Haiti and developing relationships with Haitians, we can better understand ourselves and the interdependence of humankind - beyond national borders.

But if we are really going to be in solidarity with the Haitian people, it is a lifetime commitment, biblically inspired and based. The American approach of going in with lots of money is not what they need and does not work. The people of Haiti know what they need. We need to listen to them and hear.

Objectives of the Twinning Relationship

- To develop a sense of solidarity between our sisters and brothers in Haiti and the parishioners in our diocese;
- To provide a sense of the universality of Christian community for both partners;
- To discover ways in which members of our Virginia communities can share their time and talent with the people of our Haitian twins, and to facilitate that sharing;
- To discover ways in which members of our Haitian twins can share their faith and hope with people of Virginia, and to facilitate that sharing;
- To be a voice and an advocate for the people of Haiti in the U.S. and to support the actions of the U.S. that will improve the quality of life for Haitians;
- To provide sharing of the material wealth of our Virginia twins with our Haitian twins, as we listen to their needs and desires.

Characteristics of a Healthy Twinning Relationship

- A process that begins with careful listening to the hopes and concerns of the Haitian people;
- Mutual empowerment; an awareness of and concern for the interdependence of the Haitian and U.S. economic and political systems;
- Regular communication that involves several persons from both twin communities through e-mail, letters and visits;
- In both communities, a broad awareness of and commitment to the twinning relationship and its objectives;
- A sense of concern for both the material and spiritual well being of those in the twinning relationship;
- Creative projects that provide vehicles for the mutual sharing of gifts;
- Regular visits of members of each twin to the other.



Process for Establishing a Twinning Relationship

The primary responsibility for establishing a twin rests with the Office of Justice and Peace and Diocesan Haiti Twinning Committee.

1. **Decision to Twin** – At any time, after careful discernment, a Diocese of Richmond (DOR) parish or a Diocese of Hinche (DOH) parish can decide it wants to begin a twinning relationship. In the case of a DOH parish, a Twinning Questionnaire must be completed by the parish priest and forwarded to the Director of OJP in the DOR. The Director of OJP or the Diocesan Haiti Twinning Committee may also approach parishes directly to encourage them to consider twinning.
2. **Selection of a Twinning Partnership** – The Director of OJP, in collaboration with the Diocesan Haiti Twinning Committee, reviews the DOR and DOH parishes that have requested twinning partners and decides on a suitable match. This is subject to the approval of both parties.

Note: If DOR parish is small and/or with limited financial resources, this should be made clear to the DOH parish before their decision is made and the question asked, "Do you still wish to twin with this parish, knowing that their ability to provide financial support may be limited?"

Part of the approval process includes a visit to the DOR parish to discuss the twinning relationship and expectations for twinning with the leadership and staff of the DOR parish. The Pastoral Council and Pastor/Pastoral Coordinator of the parish approve the establishment of the twinning relationship and form a Haiti Committee. A Haiti Committee is essential because it is the responsibility of the committee to bring the message of Haiti to the parish and to facilitate the sharing of the relationship between the twinned parishes.

3. **Establishing Communication** – There can be no relationship without communication. It is the foundation of any healthy, successful twinning partnership. The DOR parish, and the DOH parish that has been recommended by the Director of OJP, should establish communication, preferably by email, and exchange information, providing a description of themselves for the prospective twinning partner. If the DOH parish does not have email, regular mail can be used but this can be very slow. If the Haitian pastor depends upon a cyber café for email, that may also slow the process. Many DOR twinned parishes have found it beneficial to acquire satellite access for their DOH twin. If no one in the parish speaks Kreyol, and the DOH pastor or leader does not speak English, find someone who speaks French. Most Haitian pastors speak French and you can further communications that way.
4. **Approval of the Twinning Partnership** – After the DOR and DOH parishes have communicated and feel that they are a good fit, the twinning partnership is approved. The Director of the OJP informs the Bishop who writes a congratulatory letter to the newly twinned parish. An announcement is then sent to the [Catholic Virginian](#) so the relationship can be celebrated across the diocese. A similar process (Steps 2,3, and 4) should be carried out by the DOH parish.
5. **Parish Orientation** – Since the goal of twinning is to benefit both parishes, not just the few folks who might make up the Haiti Committee, it is important to hold a well-publicized orientation for the entire parish to introduce the new ministry.
6. **Haitian Pastor Visits** – An important beginning in the twinning relationship is the invitation to the DOH pastor or leader to visit the DOR parish. This is important for several reasons:
 - a. It establishes face-to-face communication between the two parishes and lays the foundation for future communication.
 - b. Face-to-face dialogue begins to solidify the relationship
 - c. The Haitian pastor's presence at parish liturgies, meetings, and special receptions



exposes to new Haiti Ministry to parishioners beyond just the Haiti Committee.

7. **Pilgrimage to Haiti** – After the Haitian pastor’s visit, the DOR parish should begin planning a visit to the twinned DOH parish. Consider these trips as pilgrimages. Participants should be personally moved to participate. The travelers should be prepared on a spiritual as well as practical level through a series of pre-trip meetings. A well-formed community travels with the attitude of a pilgrim, open to individual personal transformation. It is important to avoid our natural cultural tendency to find and fix problems, even problems we could not possibly fully understand. These visits are opportunities to explore and share the gifts and needs of each parish. As we journey down a difficult road together, both parishes experience an increase in FAITH and HOPE.
8. **Cultural Differences concerning Accountability** – As communication continues and the relationship develops, specific projects may be undertaken. When this time arrives, it is VERY important to remember the following:
 - d. Allow the DOH twin to tell the DOR twin what their needs are rather than the DOR twin asserting itself to tell the DOH twin what it needs and how to accomplish it. Listen to the people; they know what they need.
 - e. If money is involved, establish a mechanism whereby the DOH parish can report back to the DOR parish how funds are actually spent. Be aware that deciding how funds will be spent and reporting back on actual expenditures is a sensitive matter for the DOH parish.
 - f. There are major cultural differences to be bridged here. Haitians are not used to the planning, budgeting, and reporting requirements that we take for granted. Understand that this is not natural for a DOH parish that rarely finds itself with the financial resources to look past next week (or even tomorrow). Haitians consider gifts, even money, to be freely given with no strings attached. Also, Americans expect funds given for a particular purpose to be used for that purpose – not diverted to something different. If Haitians are asked to account for funds donated for a project, they may feel that the American partner doesn’t trust them. This quickly becomes a matter of personal dignity.
 - g. The DOR parish must communicate, as sensitively as possible, that parishioners who contribute funds care deeply about the project for which the funds were donated, and they cannot continue to contribute if they see no financial accountability. Experience suggests it is best to address this issue early in the twinning relationship and create clear expectations.
9. **Basic Projects** – There is often a natural progression in the types of projects worked on in a twinning relationship. This may depend on the financial resources of the DOR parish:
 - a. Haitian parishes are materially impoverished and often do not have the basic infrastructure needed to adequately sustain parish life. There may be no rectory or church. If buildings exist, they may be in disrepair or without electricity. Depending on the condition of the parish, the pastor may identify these basic needs as priorities.
 - b. Haitians value education and health care. Often, the next level of need will be a school, clinic, or water project so as to provide potable water for people in the area.
 - c. DOH parishes with schools often need operating funds for teachers’ salaries, books, supplies, etc. Many children come to school hungry. It is difficult to learn on an empty stomach, so a feeding program may be a priority. A Student Sponsorship Program is a practical way for the DOR parish to support a DOH school financially.
10. **Sustainable Development Projects** – Once basic needs are being met, both parishes can turn to more sustainable projects. “Sustainable” projects are those that can sustain themselves both economically (without ongoing external financial support) and environmentally (without doing harm to the environment). Sustainable projects help the people of Haiti provide for themselves the basic necessities of life without having to depend on



the charity of others. A twinning strategy that includes this type of thinking respects the inherent dignity of our Haitian brothers and sisters who currently live in day-to-day survival mode.

Some examples: Heifer Project, businesses built around computers, sewing machines, baking equipment, or health care and training for jobs already in existence. FONKOZE micro-finance training and micro-loan programs as well as DOH Caritas programs are useful assets.

Programs to improve agricultural practices or to promote reforestation can also be examples of sustainable development projects.

NOTE: The DOR parish and Haitians themselves ultimately want Haitians to be able to provide for themselves. Even in the early stages of twinning, when parishes may be focused on basic needs, it is important to keep the idea of sustainability in mind. The DOR Twinning Committee and the DOR Sustainable Development Committee can be a guide and resource to parishes as they begin to twin and throughout the twinning relationship.

11. After twinning begins:

- a. You will be included in the Diocesan Haiti email list and mailing list
- b. You may continue to utilize the Diocesan Office of Justice and Peace, regional twinning representatives from the Diocesan Twinning Committee, and other parishes in the area that have twinning programs for continued support and resourcing.
- c. Take advantage of information contained in the Diocesan Twinning website
- d. Remember that you are NOT alone! You have a network of support!
- e. Whenever possible, raise awareness of the reality of Haiti and encourage people from other parishes that are not currently twinned to consider twinning. Refer interested parties to the Diocesan Twinning Committee.

Dynamics of Groups Already Twinned

- Co-twinning: Decisions considering co-twinning with another Virginia parish are exceptions to the guidelines and are processed through the Director of OJP.
- Changing twins is also an exception to the guidelines and is processed through the Director of OJP.
- All fund raising for your Haiti Twin should be limited to your parish, unless approved by the Director of OJP.
- All foundations and committees under the Haiti Commission must receive approval from the Director of OJP in order to solicit funds from parishes in the Diocese.

All groups or individuals in the diocese planning trips to Haiti must notify the Director of OJP. In addition to parish trips and Diocesan Retreat trips, this would include medical trips, college trips, and trips connected with the Haiti Commission's Foundations or Committees.

