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Adoption Story

Sarah Dahlke Muehler

Introduction - We all have our stories of Haiti. There is joy and sadness, tragedy and blessing. And in the midst of it all is a loving, merciful God. This month, my daughter Sarah, is sharing her story. Enjoy! — Pastor Jim Dahlke

I was 5 or 6, one of my earlier memories... hazy, but present. Bright smiling faces, joyful, kind. My extroverted young self immediately loved them. I have carried the way I felt around them forever and it would drive me back to their little country of Haiti one day, believing our children were there.

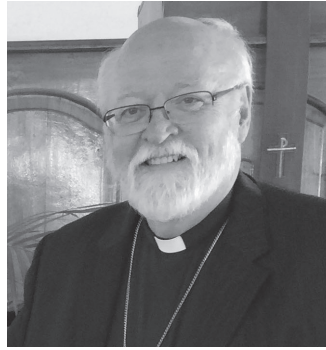
Thomas and Israel were Haitian pastors who my grandparents, Willie and Marge Dahlke, had met during their time as missionaries in Haiti. Thomas and Israel came to the states to study at the seminary. Again, my memory is hazy with brief flashes of moments: walking around campus holding Israel's hand; standing between them, looking from one to the other; their smiles, bright and kind. Mostly my young mind and heart recorded a feeling. I wanted to be around them. **They had something; a kindness, a joy, a brightness, love.**

My grandparent's love for Haiti was always clear. They held positions on the board of Haiti Lutheran Mission Society and this organization would be what started us down the path to finding our children. My parents also were drawn to Haiti and maintained and fostered other relationships, as well. We all mourned when news came that Israel was killed in an accident. I remembered the day the call came that Pastor Louis had been killed in a home invasion. The earthquake and hurricanes years later would lead us to say, "this is too much heartache." I understand why my parents and grandparents are drawn to this little country. When you see and experience people who continue to persevere through "too much" and joy resides, hope persists, and faith abounds in them, you want to come alongside them, learn from them, listen to their wisdom.

(continued on page 3)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ and supporters of Haiti,



Pastor Jim Dahlke

Times are certainly difficult, and many of us are struggling in different ways. Yet an Almighty God remains in control. Praise Him from whom all blessings flow! As president of Haiti Lutheran Mission Society USA, please know I pray daily for those affected by our latest history. We, too, had to reduce our budgeted quarterly funds that we send to Haiti as current giving has decreased and did not cover the normal allotment. Thankfully God has placed another opportunity before us. Thanks to a generous offer to match funds, a gift can be doubled. If God has blessed you to give, please consider this wonderful gift of matching funds.

Thanks and may God be with you!

Pastor Jim Dahlke
President

****Important Notice****

We have a generous donor who is willing to match up to \$10,000 in gifts, now through October 31, 2020. NOW is the time to double your impact!!!

THE CALL

Published by the Haiti
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The mission of the Haiti Lutheran Mission Society, USA is to minister to the spiritual and physical needs of the Haitian people, so that they might be won by the Holy Spirit to be disciples of Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 3:7-15

Adoption Story *(continued from cover)*

I have found in recent years, being around Haitians again, that maybe Thomas and Israel were not unique in the joy they projected. I have found that same kindness, joy and brightness in so many of our Haitian friends. One can only attribute it to a love for their Lord that truly pours from them. I find myself again drawn to them. Haitians, in general terms, have faced more tragedy and heartbreak than many of us can fathom. Constant political upheaval and uncertainty, generational poverty that never seems to relent, daily concerns for food and electricity and security, environmental attacks by hurricane and earthquakes are the norm. This is what many people think when they think of Haiti, but I have such a hard time letting anyone keep that perspective. While these things are true, they tell you very little about our friends... The “stats” tell you nothing of their faith, their joy and their love that transcends the circumstances. It tells you nothing of their resilience and deep understanding that God loves them in and through it all.

When we decided to start pursuing adoption, we took a weird winding road that has been an ultimate walk of faith. Our first stop in trying to “find” a connection to an orphanage in Haiti was HLMS. We looked at the website, emailed the director at the time asking about orphanages and were directed to Kim and Keith Waller. We flew into Port au Prince with the remnants of the earthquake still VERY much present. It was my first international trip. The weeks leading up to that trip, I had gotten in touch with a Haitian pastor in Port au Prince, Pastor Bernard, and began emailing about possible orphanages that they had connections with. The church did not specifically run an orphanage, but Pastor Bernard’s sister-in-law did operate one and the children all attended his church and school. He thought she would be open to having us visit with her and visiting the orphanage. A few weeks before we left, I was telling my dad about this conversation and he said, “You know that’s Thomas, right?” NO, I DID NOT KNOW THAT! Never over the years had I connected a last name to Thomas...He was always just Thomas. And I had not made the connection that it could even possibly be him! There were lots of Lutheran pastors in Haiti!! He, of course, hadn’t known who I was either since I had used my married name! Knowing that we would be seeing him now on that trip made it all the more special and knowing his sister-in-law was willing to talk to us felt orchestrated. We would find out over the following years just how deeply God was orchestrating this adventure for us all.

What a full circle, joyful moment that was to see Thomas. I remembered his face immediately. The bright, wide smile! And still that same joy poured from him. We also finally met Leonard who had served the Haiti Lutheran Church for decades and I remember my parents and grandparents talking about him. He was Thomas’ brother-in-law and over our years in Haiti would be our faithful driver, protector and friend until a tragic robbery took his life just a few years ago. Haiti will never be the same for us and many others without him there. *(continued on page 4)*



Adoption Story (continued from page 3)

That first trip included an afternoon at House of Love and Hope and a visit with Josie Antoine, the director of the orphanage. We had read and researched about adoptions over the years and knew that we wanted to adopt true orphans, children that do not have a living parent. We knew nearly 80% of orphans in Haiti had a living parent and were given up due to poverty and/or false promises of education and care. We knew many orphanages were run poorly at best and many were a haven for fraud, sex trafficking, slavery and profound neglect at their worst. We didn't want to participate knowingly or unknowingly in that type of orphanage. What we found at House of Love and Hope and what has been confirmed over the years is that Josie and her staff love and care for the children well. It is, in fact, a home. There is not a revolving door of children. She did not do adoptions at the time of our first meeting and was not interested in participating in what she considered a corrupt system at all. The children we met that first visit are still there, now nearly grown, loved and well and healthy. Josie speaks about how to help them as they age out of the orphanage and what she will do when "her children" are all grown and "out of the house", much the way we talk about our children as they grow.

Josie told us she would consider getting licensed so we could adopt from her orphanage, but wanted to talk to her council and family first. We left Haiti that time knowing that we definitely did want to adopt from Haiti and we wanted to stay in touch with Josie. When we got home and looked through pictures of that impactful afternoon at the tiny orphanage in Croix de Bouquet, we kept noticing a sweet girl in all our pictures. She was in nearly every one.

Amessanitha, the sweet face in all our photos had a brother, Nickson, and they settled into our hearts early and often. We don't know why, except that God knew they were our children and knew we would need memories and pictures with them. The process has been long and unknown, but the children who are ours have not been unknown. The licensing and then compiling the children's dossiers were both mountains that just this year we learned were FAR more involved than we had known or could imagine. The gratitude and love we have for Josie's commitment cannot be fully expressed.

Over the course of the following years, Chad and I would travel once more to Haiti together and I would take several other trips with groups. Each one taught me lessons and gave me more insight. I was able to share those experiences with my grandma, Marge while she was still alive. There will forever be a bit of sadness that she and grandpa didn't get to meet their Haiti great grandchildren. I know Willie would have been thrilled too.



Having a generational love for Haiti from them to my parents and on to us has been such a beautiful gift. We officially started the adoption process with an agency in 2015. Since then the road has been long and heartbreaking and expensive, full of delays that we are told is “normal” in Haitian adoptions. Our main focus was getting to the referral stage where the Haitian government would send us a referral for Amessanitha and Nickson, which would allow us to travel to see them and let us call them “ours.” The call finally came with our referral December 2019. We were able to visit for one week this January. That week will forever be in our hearts as we got to know our children as our children for the first time. We got to spend precious time with Josie, learning even more how her love for the Lord pours from her and around all in her presence.

One evening in particular shed some much needed light. I asked Josie a question I had wanted to ask for a long time. “Why?” Why did she say yes to us when she could have very easily said no. We barely knew her. We didn’t know any of the children. We would have just gone a different path if she said she would not work to be able to allow for the adoption. Turns out she had asked Thomas about this couple who had visited with Kim and Keith asking about adoption and wanted to know what he thought. “What are their names? Who are they?” She told him and he said, “Oh, yes. That’s a good family. You should.” Now we know he said that not because he knew Chad and I, but because years and years ago my grandparents forged a relationship with him and my parents had maintained and grown that relationship and those would transcend decades to that moment. That will never cease to amaze me. So now, we are here in this moment, almost 8 years from that first trip. Our family has changed so much, and yet we

have all these years held space for Amessanitha and Nickson, knowing one day we would all be together. We know hard days are ahead for all of us as we adjust to our new family. If these years have taught us anything though, it’s that God walks with us and we’re looking forward to the next path.



Letter From Pastor Thomas Bernard, August 11, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Grace and Peace to you from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! We pray that this update on God's ministry in Haiti finds you well. We are thankful to our God for all His blessings and healing during this pandemic. If we are still alive, it is not because we are better than the others, but because of God's unconditional grace. He has a plan for every one of us; if we keep silent, the stones will cry out in praise (Luke 19:40). We are sure that "we will not die but live and tell what the Lord has done. The Lord sharply corrected us but didn't let us die" (psalm 118:17-18).

Church activities resumed on July 12, and this Monday, August 10, all the schools have reopened. As you can imagine, it is challenging to embrace this new reality. New structures need to be put in place as we learn daily and improve our methods. We rescheduled all classes to reduce the number of children present at once. There are a number of challenges that prevent us from properly functioning. It is extremely warm right now; the kids/students who have their mask on cannot keep it for long, and others don't own a mask. We're trying to do what we can; however, the situation is overwhelming. We are continuously working to see if and how we can save the academic school year: 2019-2020. Schools will close on October 30 and reopen on November 9 for the academic school year 2020-2021. At church we have two worships on Sunday morning: the first is from 8:00 am to 9:15 a.m. and the second from 9:30 to 10:30. Wearing a mask is also challenging during service as the warm temperature is very intense. Some of the members don't wear a mask, which can potentially be very dangerous.

We want to take this time to thank you for all your prayers and support as you allow us to make a difference in the community. We know that the pandemic is challenging for people all over the world economically and physically. Many people die of starvation, and some do not survive the impacts of Covid-19. We want to thank you for continuous support through such hard times. On behalf of the needy in our church community it would be such a blessing to help us purchase at least 2500 masks for schools and churches. Food is also a concern, and we would like to ask for some food for the needy. It would be a blessing and would allow us to better serve those whose care God has entrusted to us. The masks and the food would give a total of \$7,500 US. This will allow us to provide a pair of masks to those who need it as some don't own a mask, and others only use that one mask every day. There is a shortage of food in our community, and your assistance would allow us to provide support to those in need.

Regardless of all the changes and limitations, we enjoy doing what we do in his honor; it is a privilege to be God's instruments. The pandemic teaches us many lessons. But no matter the circumstances, we believe God is in control and has the whole world in his hand. Thank you for all you do, and may our Heavenly Father continue to bless us all!

Pastor Thomas Bernard



PRAYERS FOR HAITI

Autumn 2020

Prayers of Thanksgiving:

For the generous donor who is willing to match up to \$10,000 in financial gifts between now and October 31, 2020.

For our teachers and school staff who are working tirelessly in Haiti to help their students finish out the 2019/2020 school year amidst the challenges of the pandemic.

For our dear Haitian workers in our churches, schools and orphanages & for the opportunity to minister to physical & spiritual needs of many Haitians.

For your continued prayer and financial support for the HLMS Mission so that both bodies and souls are fed.

For the faithful leadership of the HLMS Board.

Prayer Requests—Please PRAY:

For additional donations to help us support these mission outreaches at one hundred percent.

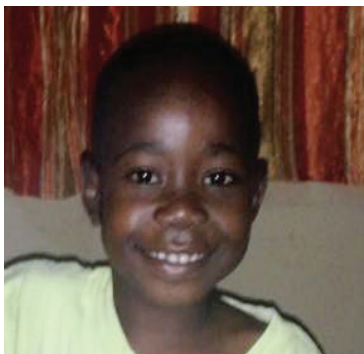
For the continued safety of those in Haiti, for their health and for the stability of the nation.

That God would prepare a way for volunteer teams to once again be able to travel to Haiti.

That God would sustain & continue to grow the mission in Haiti and give continued enthusiasm, wisdom and strength to its leaders.

For God's wisdom and discernment for the board members as they lead the HLMS.

**The next meeting of the
Board of Directors
of the HLMS will be held on
Saturday,
October 24, 2020 at 9 AM
at the office of
Buethe & Associates
Insurance
Lincoln, Nebraska**



HLMS Call

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In order to help us track our readership, please enclose this portion of your newsletter with your financial support or requests for information. This will allow us to make any necessary address changes, forward correspondence and material to you, as well as ensure that we receive your pledge. *Thank you for your continued support and prayers.*

_____ **I would like to sponsor a child to attend school and receive an accredited Christian education for \$130 per year.**

_____ I will continue to pray for the HLMS.

_____ I would like to contribute to the HLMS general fund. Enclosed is \$_____.

_____ I would like to pledge a monthly gift of \$_____ to the HLMS.

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