



**SACRED HEART CHURCH, THE WILLIAMS SCHOOL, AND ST. PATRICK'S
HELP ST. GABRIEL PARISH BUILD MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Saint Gabriel School 1st – 13th Grades

Update: This project is finished. Current need: classroom furniture & textbooks.

Written by Patricia Britz in 2012 Updated by Jacqui VonTersch 11/18/22.

In February 2008 Father Bernard Desras, pastor at the church of Saint Gabriel, Lascahobas, located in the Central Plateau, Haiti came to visit Father Dan Klem at his new twin parish, Sacred Heart, Norfolk. Fr. Bernard is a visionary for a new Haiti, with good nutrition and education for the children. He said: *"When I open a school, I close a prison."* After a generous landowner in Lascahobas donated a piece of land on which to build the middle school, Sacred Heart agreed to raise some of the funds to help Fr. Bernard build St. Gabriel Middle School. This land is set off from the busy main street and the local open market, in a lush and quiet valley. This is quite a contrast with the current facility used for instructions in the Parish Community Center, opposite to St. Gabriel rectory and the church.

Since November 2009, thanks to Sacred Heart's program, known as the Advent Giving Tree, which benefits both the Eastern Shore Migrant Ministry and the Haiti Twinning Ministry, truck and wheelbarrow loads of cement, rebar, rocks, and gravel have been brought to the site of the new middle school. St. Patrick School, Maury High School, and The Williams School (TWS) participated in this project through the One Million Pennies for Haiti project, the Post Earthquake Band Concert fund raiser, and TWS's 2011 Annual Auction respectively.

Groundbreaking started March 1, 2010, seven weeks after the earthquake in Port-au-Prince, Goâves, Jacmel, and the nearby area, when pilgrims from Sacred Heart visited their twin parish. Fr Bernard said: *"When we build at a time of great distress, the Lord will bless our work."* Since then, the foundation was laid, the first and second concrete floors were hand poured over a thick grid of rebar. In addition to a few paid professional workers, many parishioners and students regularly gave a hand to this labor-intensive community project. Many parish ladies provided onsite sweet coffee, and hot lunches of rice and beans. Dedicated students broke rocks into small stones and bended rebar to the proper shape and dimension. One year after groundbreaking, they started building the classrooms on the second floor.

The school has two floors, with twelve classrooms, 1st-13th Grades, and one administrative office. Fr. Bernard also had a small school clinic built. He informally opened the school in October 2011. He invited Fr. Dan and a small group of parishioners to the dedication of the school on March 1, 2013.



Before: Fr. Bernard stands on the donated land, 03/10 After: St. Gabriel School, 03/13

If you wish to assist Fr. Fitho JEAN with some classroom furniture, and/or textbooks, please address your check to Sacred Heart Church and add *St. Gabriel Building and Outfitting Fund/Furniture* on the memo line. Sacred Heart Church: 520 Graydon Ave, Norfolk VA 23507. For online giving go to [donate](#), scroll down to Haiti: Building, and indicate the amount. **100% of your donation benefits St. Gabriel and is tax deductible** Together we continue praying for our Family in Haiti. Any contribution is greatly appreciated. Special thanks in advance to the parishioners and friends who have and will support this project. Together we continue praying for our Family at home and in Haiti. For more information contact:

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