

Inside ASI

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Evangelism in Your Own Backyard

*Fulfill the Great Commission
right where you are!*

The World— Starting with Haiti

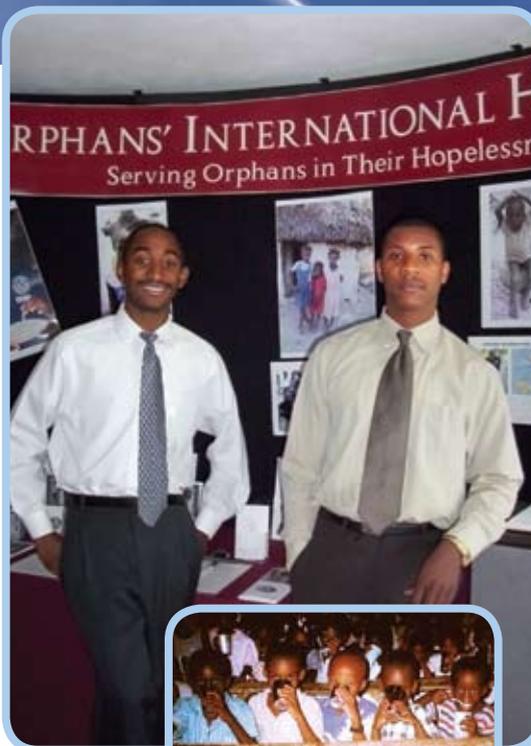
BY ANN PARISH

Jean Florvilus, a theology major at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, knew perfectly well what kind of response his advisers were looking for. He just could not bring himself to make it. “When you have completed your B.A.,” they kept asking, “what do you envision yourself doing next?”

“Going into all the world,” he kept answering, “preaching the gospel to every nation.”

“Yes.” They would sigh. That is the gospel commission of Matthew 28: 19-20, and it applies to all God’s followers. But how, specifically, did Jean see himself as starting to fulfil that commission? As a pastor? A teacher? An evangelist?

What about an evangelist to all the world? That was as close to an answer as Jean could get. Since high school, he had seen himself reaching all the world in ten years. And though he had tried, he could not imagine himself as a church pastor. The sheer breadth and unlikelihood of his dream did not satisfy him any more than it satisfied his advisers.



Putting those troubling thoughts aside, in 2003 Jean—with his cousin Brian Ladiny, also at Andrews studying for his M. Div.—joined a five-day mission trip to Haiti. Jean and Brian were Haitian-Americans with generally cheerful memories of their ancestral homeland.

But this mission trip took them into remote north-western Haiti, and what they learned and saw was unbearable. Routine medical treatment was non-existent. During the mission, families walked up to 17 or 18 miles so the visitors could test their blood pressure. Moreover, Jean and Brian saw tiny children walking the streets with plates in their hands, begging for food. Where were their families? They learned there were none. They learned that, from malnourishment, disease, and neglect, one in four children there would die before age five. Also, this part of Haiti was a center of voodoo practices. These children, if they survived, had

little chance of hearing the authentic gospel of Jesus Christ.

Back in Michigan, Jean and Brian could not get Haiti's children out of their minds. They had to do something, but what? Food and the gospel—both were badly needed. But how? They fasted and prayed for an answer. As the academic term ended, Jean was impressed that they should check their college accounts and, rather than spend everything left in them on clothing and gasoline, dedicate funds to feeding the stomachs and souls of Haiti's hungry children. Brian joined him in this act of faith.

Between them, they sent \$1,900 to the small Adventist church in Bombardopolis with a request that the funds be used to feed the neediest children one good meal a day. The church agreed, committing to the daily feeding of five children. Word spread quickly, however, and soon far more children were showing up for the meal. Jean and Brian told classmates and teachers at Andrews of their project, and they too contributed money and prayers for the program's success. Pastors of local Adventist churches heard, and soon they and members of their congregations were giving to feed children in Haiti and to share with them knowledge of Jesus' love. The program grew rapidly, and by the end of 2004, 213 children in Bombardopolis were enjoying one substantial meal each day.

Also that winter, contributors began asking Jean for letters acknowledging their gifts, for tax-reporting purposes. Oh! Suddenly Jean realized that running a continuing charity required more than prayerfully receiving money in one hand and passing it out with the other. He sought advice from Max Church, a retired professor at Andrews, who gave Jean guidance and introduced him to Arnold Lampkee, experienced with the legal complexities of establishing non-profit organizations.

Lampkee, a member of the Church of God, asked



for details of their program. When he heard they were working in Haiti, he shouted joyously, "Hey! Brothers!" Though not, like Jean and Brian, of Haitian descent, he had been giving to Haitian causes for 25 years. "I will help you," he exclaimed. "I don't care that you are Seventh-day Adventists! If we can't get along here on earth, how will we manage it in heaven?"

With help like this, with more prayer and fasting, and with the blessing of God, the personal mission of two earnest students to "do something" for hungry children in northwest Haiti became in 2005 a 501(c) 3 non-profit charitable organization registered in Michigan. Its official name became Orphans International Helpline (OIH).

Its name and its mission recall Jean's youthful dream of evangelism to all the world. As the OIH website puts it: "There are [more than 6.6] billion people in the world and nearly half the world's population are dying because of lack of food. Six million children under the age of 5 die as a result of hunger and malnutrition every year (UNICEF). More than 78% of the developing world's urban population now live in slums (UN—Habitat)... OIH has dedicated itself to caring for the needy and to coming to the relief of those suffering from starvation."

Along with becoming an official non-profit charity with a 7-member board of directors, OIH hoped early on to join ASI. Not wanting to pay ASI's membership dues with money siphoned from donations to Haiti's children, the directors tried advertising for a partnering sponsor to pay the dues. This attempt failed; but now, only two years later, a more solidly established OIH is financing its own membership and foreseeing the blessings and further growth that learning from fellow ASI members will bring.

Much has happened since that official establish-

ment in 2005. Jean and Brian completed their academic programs—not easy, for both were full-time students, each working at one or two jobs, and also working as full-time volunteers in OIH. “However,” said Jean shortly after his graduation in 2006, “we have learned that education is not only based on books and research papers. We have found a way to make our religious education here at Andrews more practical. Everything we learned from our classes we put into practice—and we never failed any class... All our efforts and techniques are... from what we have learned in school. When we do our research papers, we always try to make them applicable to our ministry and make good grades. Thus despite all challenges that we may face . . . we still believe that it is a perfect time to do such ministry while in school.”

Having received his M. Div., Brian, though still connected with OIH, now serves as associate pastor of Gethsemane SDA church in the Greater New York Conference. Jean works full time for OIH in its Berrien Springs office. Olga Brady of Troy, Michigan, who handles public relations, is another OIH pioneer, having shared this vision since 2004.

Meanwhile, back in Haiti, the work begun in faith and hope continues, on a much stronger footing. Bombardopolis, the once-desolate center of unemployment, hunger, and voodoo, is now becoming a center of nurturing evangelism. There OIH provides housing, food, and Christian love for 60 orphans and runs a school for 375 children, providing rare worthwhile employment for 16 adults—12 as teachers and four as support staff.

The building housing both the orphanage and school—a rented one—has become too crowded, with six children or more housed in each room. OIH has developed plans for a more suitable building on five acres



with 32 rooms—home to 128 children. At this site OIH envisions an orphanage, a school, and an agriculture program.

Plans are in the works for an OIH mission trip to Haiti this summer to emphasize health ministry. Medical doctors, dentists, and nurses are needed as volunteers.

As for going into all the world? That dream remains intact and is much less amorphous than it was when Jean entered college. He now says, “We do have plans to expand our ministry around the world as it is stated in our mission statement. Our long-term goal is to have orphanages in every country and to reach the most destitute orphan child.”

The OIH website quotes Isaiah 58:10-11:

“If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.”

OIH adds: “In response to this calling, OIH provides the word of God, food, clothing, shelter, and educational, medical and agricultural programs to thousands of orphans in underdeveloped areas of the world: Starting with Haiti.”

Visit www.oihonline.org; e-mail info@oihonline.org; or call 800-704-7611 to learn more.

Ann Parish owns the Ethical Ghost, a freelance writing and editing business. She lives in Lancaster, Massachusetts.