

Parishioners in Wells Assemble Over 700 Birthing and Newborn Kits for Women in Haiti

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WELLS, ME---Holy Spirit parishioners, young and old, traded a day in the sun on Saturday, May 11, to stay inside the parish hall at St. Mary Church in Wells and help hundreds of people they will never meet have a safer birthing process.

The project is called **Operation Starfish** and offers assistance to Haitian women through the creation and donation of both newborn and birthing kits.

On Saturday in Wells, parishioners assembled over 300 birthing kits and 400 newborn kits (**four pictures below**).



Each of the birthing kits included alcohol wipes, gauze pads, a nasal aspirator, soap, a scalpel, a plastic sheet, sanitary pads, underwear, and medical gloves, while newborn kits contained a washcloth, cloth diapers, pins, a changing pad, a receiving blanket, and onesies.

“Women in many areas of Haiti often have no option other than to give birth in unsanitary conditions. The kits that were assembled provide materials necessary to

offer more sanitary circumstances for a mother and her baby during and after birth,” said Mary Colombo of Holy Spirit Parish.

In January and February, the Social Justice and Peace Commission at Holy Spirit Parish collected the various items as well as donations to purchase additional supplies.



“Mary Jane Grady, a parishioner, brought the idea to the commission,” said Colombo. “Some members visited a parish in Virginia that has been doing this project for over 20 years to see it in action.”

That parish is the Nativity Catholic Church in Burke, Virginia. In 1998, Fr. Richard Martin, then pastor of the church, came up the idea to do something more substantial for the poor in Haiti. *Operation Starfish* was born and the initiative, along with its subsidiary ministries “Fish4Hope” and “Stella Marina,” provide parishes around the country with the opportunity to assist the poor in Haiti.

“There's an old tale about a boy at a beach who discovers thousands of starfish. One by one, he starts

throwing them back into the ocean. He's approached by a man who tells him it's impossible to return them all to sea, there are too many,” said Margaret Hanrahan, who has assisted with *Operation Starfish* in Virginia for years. “He goes, 'There are thousands and thousands here, how will you put them back in?' and [the boy] goes, 'I won't, but I made a difference to that one.'”

Making a difference, one person at a time, struck a chord with the parishioners in Wells, Kennebunk, and Ogunquit.

“The volunteers were so enthusiastic and happy to be involved,” said Leana Regan-Dolan of Holy Spirit Parish. “It was evident in the smiles on the faces of everyone who worked to assemble the kits!”



Thanks to the efforts of parishioners at parishes like Holy Spirit, thousands and thousands of kits have been assembled through the years and the *Operation Starfish* ministries have expanded its assistance in the process, including the creation of 1,400 homes in ten Haitian villages thanks to a partnership with Food for the Poor, Inc.

For more information about the ***Operation Starfish*** initiative at **Holy Spirit Parish**, please contact the parish at **(207) 985-6252**.