

The Jamaica Medical Mission Overview

In 2020 the medical mission to St. Mary's Parish Church in Port Maria, Jamaica celebrated 30 consecutive years. St. James Episcopal Church in Leesburg became the sponsoring church.

With Matthew 25 being the driving force, annually, volunteers go to the St. Mary's Parish Church in Port Maria, where we set up a make-shift clinic in the church and the parish hall. At the clinic *free care and medication* are provided for the needy in Port Maria and the surrounding communities.

We go to the same place each year as it allows us to maintain a Christian relationship with the church and the community and provides continuity of care.

Mission History

The mission started at St. John's Episcopal Church in Ellicott City, Maryland with the spiritual leadership and guidance of the then Rector, Rev. Dr. William Shiflet, who is still involved. Thirteen years ago when St. James learned about the mission, they eagerly embraced it and St. James became its current home.

The mission began with the suggestion of Stuart Mowatt to start a Mission & Outreach relationship building with St. Mary's Parish Church in Port Maria, Jamaica. Members of St. John's were moved to support the idea of a helping mission outside their borders – a mission they could have a close relationship with.

On the 1st mission there were only two volunteer church members - Stuart Mowatt, and a doctor of internal medicine. They were overwhelmed by the number of people who came for help and distressed by the number that had to be turned away. They saw about 60 people over 3 days.

We have now completed 30 years of serving the people of St. Mary's. With God's help, and the generosity of many, the Mission has grown. In 2020 there were 52 volunteers who traveled to Jamaica. 1,353 people received medical, gynecological, dental, eye care, and Children received pediatric care. This year we also had a psychiatrist to give psychological counseling if needed.

The make-up of those who traveled to Jamaica in 2020 included:

- 1 clergy
- 10 doctors
- 6 physician assistants
- 11 registered nurses
- 3 dental hygienists
- 2 lab techs
- 13 laypeople
- 6 church youth

They came from Central and South Florida, Maryland, Chicago, New York, Pennsylvania, San Francisco, Minnesota and Toronto, Canada.

Funding

The mission is independent of the church budget. Fundraisers and monetary donations from individuals within the parish as well as others are used to purchase prescription medication and supplies, to pay for temporary medical licenses from the Ministry of Health, to pay custom fees, shipping, etc.

We ask parishioners and others for donations of much needed over-the-counter medication and supplies.

Each volunteer pays their own way – \$850 to St. James. In addition, they buy their own airline ticket. The total personal cost to each person is about \$1,300. Everyone makes their airline reservation to arrive and depart on the same day which makes it convenient and less expensive for ground transportation.

The \$850 covers all their mission related expenses in Jamaica – transportation from the airport, housing accommodations, all meals, daily transportation to and from the clinic, and transportation back to the airport for departure.

The Process

There are some formalities that **must** be observed.

- Ongoing communication with the Rector and Outreach Committee at St. Mary's as the clinic is set-up in the church and the parish hall.
- Communication with the Ministry of Health and the Medical Officer in charge of that area as we intend to set-up a clinic in her territory. She does welcome the help as the need is so great.
- Temporary medical licenses for the medical staff must be obtained from the Ministry of Health.
- Each item to be shipped must be inventoried and the inventory sent to the Jamaican Government for permission to bring them into the country, and we must in turn receive written permission from them to clear the shipment through Customs in Jamaica.
- We contract with a small bus company to provide all our transportation needs while we are there. The cost is reasonable and they are very accommodating, we have used them for many years.
- Housing accommodations must be made way ahead of time. We stay at a very modest hotel about 45 minutes from the church. It is clean and safe. Rooms are assigned on a double-occupancy basis. We have breakfast there every morning and 2 dinner meals – the 1st evening, which is a welcome to all and a farewell on the last evening. We have morning worship each day before we leave for the clinic. The hotel provides a quiet place for worship.
- The St. Mary's Outreach Committee is very hospitable and helpful and provides us with lunch each day.
- Arrangements are made with a parishioner who has a restaurant in Port Maria to provide dinner each evening before we go back to the hotel.

The Clinic

Stuart Mowatt goes to Jamaica 1-2 weeks ahead of everybody to finalize all the arrangements, get the shipment from the custom broker, meet with St. Mary's volunteers, and get the clinic set-up before everyone arrives. One or two other volunteers may go down a day or two early to assist with the clinic and pharmacy set-up.

Saturday is travel day for everyone else.

Monday morning, 9:00 a.m., the clinic is ready to see patients.

Each morning when we arrive, there is usually a large crowd waiting in the church yard. They are issued patient registration #s for each specialization. Patients are registered and called to see the doctor based on their registration #.

If medication is needed, the doctor writes a prescription for them which they take to the mission clinic pharmacy to be filled.

Work days are long and intense, and we work in less than ideal conditions. But, there is such a fellowship and camaraderie among us and the St. Mary's people, it is uplifting.

End of Mission

Except for a few patients who may need follow-up, the clinic is closed on Friday for packing and storage of left-over medication, and for putting the premises back in order for Sunday. Church volunteers assist in pulling down the clinic and putting things back in order for Sunday Worship.

Medication that will expire before the next mission is given to the Port Maria Hospital. The others are inventoried and packed away for the next mission trip.

It takes about ½ the day on Friday. The remainder of the day is much needed leisure time for the mission volunteers. Some may go to the beach, others may go walking through the town, and others may simply rest.

Saturday morning we leave for the airport and travel home.

Other Mission Work - Church Roof, Parish Hall, Rectory, Community Help, and Albion Mountain Elementary School.

At the request of Bishop DeSuza, then the Bishop of Jamaica, the Mission repaired the church roof which was in bad shape and leaking severely.

The parish hall was demolished by hurricane in 1951. The church could not afford to re-build and was without a place for parish life. It took 10 years, for the mission effort to build the current Parish Hall which is used for parish life and also for the mission clinic.

Badly needed extensive repairs on the Rectory have been done as part of the mission effort.

The town of Port Maria was flooded due to two overflowing rivers. The Primary School was flooded and they lost all their computers. Through the mission effort, 12 refurbished computers were shipped to the school.

Through the mission effort reconditioned musical instruments have been donated to the St. Mary's High School.

Over the years we have provided dental care to all the students at the Albion Mountain Primary School during the mission.

A scholarship program has also been instituted at the Albion Mountain Primary School. This scholarship provides uniforms, books and lunch to the most needy students who are identified by the Principal, teachers and parent(s). Each scholarship is valued at US\$300 per student. School year beginning September 2020 45 students will be awarded scholarships.

The Mission provides much need help to so many and touches so many lives in so many positive ways. And, in return we are touched in unimaginable ways.

The below was presented to the mission group some years ago.

To: The Congregation of St. James Episcopal Church,
The Medical Mission Volunteers & Supporters.

From: St. Mary's Parish Church, Port Maria, Jamaica.

You are a Wonderful Reflection of God's Special Love.

God's love shines through so clearly in your actions. Day by day, you show His grace and goodness in the helpful things you say; you reflect his care and patience, and you share His wisdom too – God always seems so very close because He lives in you.

Thank You for all the ways you care.

God Bless You!