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Local Woman Creates Successful Partnership with Haitian Coffee Growers

Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world with levels of poverty regarded as the most severe in the Western Hemisphere, but one local woman saw an opportunity to help by partnering with coffee farmers in that nation.

Kim Lamberty, who is currently the Director of University and Mission Engagement at Catholic Relief Services in Baltimore, founded Just Haiti, a faith-based, 501(c)3 nonprofit organization in 2007, with a mission of changing lives of small-scale farmers by developing a fair trade market to the United States. Coffee production has always been a principal crop in Haiti but decades of political unrest and devastating hurricanes made many farmers lose the ability to export.

“Most could plant more trees in their lot but didn’t because they were not getting a high enough price for their coffee to make it worth it,” Lamberty said. “The vast majority are living day-to-day. Many are living on less than a \$1 a day. Literally, families of people who are living on less than \$365 a year. Yet, they are coffee growers which is a really valuable cash crop. They just needed to find the right partner.”

Just Haiti is just that partner. The organization provides technical assistance, training, and a revolving no-interest loan fund. Just Haiti’s fair trade-plus model ensures that all profits from the sale of the coffee go directly to the growers.

“There are always profits at the end of the year,” added Lamberty. “The organization is grounded in preferential option for the poor. We place them first. They use the profits for a number of things. Number one is sending their kids to school. The second thing is trying to expand their business by planting a tree nursery or paying a loan for machinery.”

Just Haiti currently works with six different



Kim Lamberty (front left) founded Just Haiti, a faith-based, nonprofit organization in 2007, with a mission of changing lives of small-scale farmers in Haiti by developing a fair trade market to the United States. Four Maryland parishes in the Archdiocese of Washington partner with the organization.

communities of coffee growers and will be adding a seventh this year. Lamberty’s vision for the program began when she was the Social Concerns director at St. John the Baptist in Silver Spring from 1997 to 2004.

“Part of that portfolio was a sister parish in Baraderes, Haiti. I knew they were coffee growers because we drank their coffee when we were there and knew it was potential income for them,” she said. “I did a few other social justice related things after leaving St. John’s and came across a similar coffee-related initiative on the U.S.-Mexico border. They were doing coffee development and I thought to myself we could do this in Haiti.”

St. John the Baptist is still involved, as are three other Maryland parishes in the Archdiocese of

Washington, St. Francis of Assisi (Derwood), St. Mary’s (Barnesville), and St. Mary’s of the Mills (Laurel). All of those parishes help with coffee sales.

“This is living out my vocation as a Catholic and a person who has been called to live out the social mission of the Church. It is very fulfilling,” Lamberty explained. “I was there in December. Every time we go, we have meetings with the growers. The feedback is so overwhelmingly positive. There are always challenges, but in general this project means a lot to them. It has changed their lives. That is what gets me up in the morning.”

For more information on Just Haiti and to purchase their coffee, visit their website at: www.justhaiti.org.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN MARYLAND SERVES AND ADVOCATES FOR THE POOR, VULNERABLE AND THOSE IN NEED NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE CATHOLIC, BUT BECAUSE WE ARE CATHOLIC.