

Williamson

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Faith & Values

Haitian children grip thankful hearts at St. Andrew Lutheran

By Art Toalston

A simple sentence fuels John Hall's commitment to feed schoolchildren in Haiti: "Those children have no hope," a Lutheran pastor there told him.

The pastor was referring to the children at a Lutheran elementary school Hall had visited that day during a 1999 mission trip to Haiti.

"Their faces were long, nobody smiled, they didn't interact. The teachers asked them to say their Bible memory verses; they did, but it was just by rote. They sang and there was no enthusiasm."

Hall was told that the children were chronically hungry. Whereas two other nearby schools had a noontime feeding program funded by a charitable group in the U.S. Midwest, there were no extra funds for the third school.

Hall told the pastor he would raise the money to feed the children at the school and, after returning home, he had no problem securing the donations.

"And then we found that God was just opening doors for us to continue to raise money to feed other schools," Hall recounts. "God just never told us to stop."

Now, more than 7,000 children at 46 Lutheran elementary schools in Haiti and at a Methodist and a Baptist school are being fed noontime meals through the ministry of Trinity/HOPE (named for Trinity, the Lutheran church in Gallatin where Hall was a member at the time and for HOPE, the word spoken by the Haitian pastor that stirred Hall to action).

St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Franklin is one of 11 congregations in five states that has taken responsibility for feeding an entire school. During the Thanksgiving season for the past three years, St. Andrew has partnered with Trinity/HOPE in deepening the congregation's compassion for Haiti's schoolchildren.

But who said there couldn't be a little fun in the process?

A spirited but laugh-filled auction was the much-anticipated highlight of St. Andrew's "Thrivent's Thanksgiving Night in the Hunger Fight" Nov. 16 with cosponsor Peace Lutheran Church



TRINITY/HOPE PHOTO

These are among 160 children being fed at a school in Haiti with funds provided by St. Andrew Lutheran Church.

in Spring Hill. The Thrivent name was central to the event in recognition of supplemental funds to be provided by Wisconsin-based Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.

Among the donations auctioned off by Jack Ficken, a Thrivent financial adviser from Fairview, were handmade quilts; tickets for Tennessee Titans football and Nashville Predators hockey games; and Kris Nethercutt's intricate replica of a steam engine made from parts of a sewing machine, camp stove and other castaway items.

Amid the levity among the 200 attendees, parish administrator Jolene Richardson noted that each \$500 raised via the bidding will provide 2,304 meals toward St. Andrew's support of the feeding program for 160 children at the Lutheran school in Acquier (pronounced ah-KEE) in southeastern Haiti.

The Rev. Eric C. Pearson, who founded St. Andrew in 1974, described Trinity/HOPE as "a good fit for our love of outreach ministry. ... We have always been concerned about ministry in the community apart from being self-contained, worrying solely about ourselves. That community to us means not just our neighbor next door but our neighbor across the world."

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