

October 7, 2022

## *Guns, Cholera, Danger, Destruction, and Thoughtfulness*

Congresswoman Val Demings of Florida has introduced legislation to help uncover the funders of gang violence in Haiti. Supporters of the Demings bill said the legislation will determine through investigations by federal agencies the ties between Haiti's gang violence and its financial backers in the States. The aim is to turn off the flow of guns to Haiti.

Surging violence and insecurity have turned Haiti into a "time bomb for cholera," the UNICEF representative in the country said, as aid groups and local authorities ramp up their response to an outbreak in Port-au-Prince. According to UNICEF, 1.2 million Haitian children are threatened due to the resurgence of the illness in the capital, where local health authorities have reported dozens of suspected cases since the beginning of October. The UNICEF representative said, "Many of the poorest Haitian families, they have no option but to drink and use unsafe water ... Garbage is not collected in the streets. Hospitals are closed or unable to operate. All these ingredients have turned Haiti into a time bomb for cholera, and now it is exploding."

Grenada's Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell urged Caribbean nations to help Haiti restore normalcy, saying the political instability in the country is threatening security and stability throughout the region. Haitians fleeing the wave of violence are arriving to the Bahamas, Jamaica, and Cuba. The Dominican Republic is building a 102-mile wall barrier to insulate one of the region's most successful economies from chaos in Haiti and to protect themselves from a potential refugee crisis.

Meanwhile, I return to Haiti on Sunday. Many Journal readers are urging me to stay in Florida until the threat of violence is reduced. Of course, Gabens and his fine staff along with and Dr. Stéphanie are very capable of running Santa Chiara...but not if they have no cash. I'm the mule.

Gabens told me that Officer Richard will escort me from the airport to Santa Chiara, with Michel being the wheelman. Maybe I can make an action movie on the way home. But Gabens had one concern, and it is a big one: they might not have enough gasoline for a round-trip to the airport. In Haiti all you can do is hope and have a Plan B in place. Knowing Gabens, he probably has a Plan C ready to activate.

A Journal reader who once visited SCCC and is a donor to us shared with me an email she had with another ministry in Haiti. In the email, someone in Port-au-Prince, wrote: "There is absolutely no way for anyone to safely move out at this point." They said it was too dangerous to even go to the airport.

Late yesterday afternoon, Gabens sent me a photo of a mob jamming the streets of Petionville. He was a safe distance from the mob. He also said the mob broke into the Haitian equivalent of our IRS and looted it. Some people were reportedly shot during the brawl.

On Tuesday, during a phone call with the treasurer of SCCC, I mentioned that this last month we received just under \$12,000 in donations. Just a few months ago before the violence and protest

accelerated to unthinkable levels, it cost \$25,000 a month to operate the home. The cost has dramatically increased since then due to the skyrocketing price of virtually everything due to the doubling of the price of fuel.

When I went to the post office yesterday for the next to last item before returning to Haiti, the box was empty except for one small envelope. I confess to be disappointed. Inside it was a handwritten note and a check for \$10,000. I could not believe it. For more than seven and half years God has supplied every need. Yet whenever I feel my back is to the wall and a check such as the one I held in hand, I am left speechless and on the verge of tears. The donor, who reads the Journal every day, is 79 years old and facing back surgery in a few weeks. They wanted to get the check to me before the operation. That level of thoughtfulness and generosity is hard to believe.

The donor wrote that I was a “wonderful Franciscan witness.” Every day I try to live St. Francis’ ideal of living a radical dependency on God. It is not easy, and I do not live it very well. Too often I think it is all up to me to keep Santa Chiara afloat. Yet for 7½ what we needed always showed up, even at times at the last second. It is hard not to worry about being able to care for so many kids. It has been a rollercoaster of a ride.

Finally, an essay I wrote about my encounter with a homeless woman was just published in the autumn edition of Notre Dame Magazine. It is titled “The Eyes of St. Francis.” It is a SHORT story. Here is a link to the on-line version of the magazine.

<https://magazine.nd.edu/stories/the-eyes-of-saint-francis/>

