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# FOOD FOR THE POOR

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## **SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

Mount Pleasant Seventh Day Adventist (S.D.A.) Basic School



Mount Pleasant District, St. Margaret's Bay P.O., Portland

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*"As often as you did it to one of the least of my brothers  
and sisters, you did it to me." Matthew 25:40*

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## **Overview/Background**

The Mount Pleasant Seventh Day Adventist (S.D.A.) Basic School is found in the community of Mount Pleasant, less than seven minutes from the main road of St. Margaret's Bay in Portland.

The institution has been in operations since 1979 where lessons were conducted in the Halls of the Mount Pleasant SDA Church.

Principal and Founder, Mrs. Vita Dunk, mentioned that, "It was my desire to make a difference, which led me to start the school. Though there was a previous basic school in the community, many parents complained that their children weren't doing well academically and I wanted to help improve the situation. I am happy to say that it's the love for my students that has kept me going over the years."

Over the years, administrators have had to contend with several challenges, which prevented the institution from acquiring registration status as an infant department. One of the major issues back then was the lack of space.

Mrs. Dunk explained that, "We tried on our own to source a bigger facility, but our efforts were unsuccessful, though the need was great. As such, we were forced to conduct classes from the Halls of the Church, which was far from ideal."

In explaining some of the challenges, Mrs. Dunk said, "The bathroom and the kitchen were separate from the Church building, which posed a major problem when it rained. When it was raining teachers had to use umbrellas and raincoats to move from the Church Hall to the bathroom. In addition to that, the ground would be flooded, which meant that teachers and students had to walk in water to get to the bathroom and children would sometimes get sick as a result. It got to a point where parents opted to keep their children at home whenever it was raining. The Cook had similar challenges because the kitchen was not attached to the Church Hall. Being in the heat, in the kitchen and then having to walk in the rain was not safe for the Cook. Normally, the cook delivered the lunches to the students but when it rained she was forced to wait until the rain subsided to avoid getting ill, which meant that meals were late.

# **SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

## **Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School**

### **Mount Pleasant District, St. Margaret's Bay P.O., Portland**

Thanks to Food For The Poor (FFP) Canada who intervened, a brand new, spacious, comfortable and ideal structure was built through our compassionate and dedicated donors, 'Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation'.



***Above:*** Donors, Contractors and FFP staff pose for photo at the end of a successful build in 2018.

***Below:*** Students and staff stand in front of the newly-constructed Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School.






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## **Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School**

### **Mount Pleasant District, St. Margaret's Bay P.O., Portland**

#### **Impact Stories**

 In speaking about the new facilities, Mrs. Dunk mentioned that, “With the construction of our new school, our worries of having to walk in the rain to get to and from the bathroom and kitchen are no more. I love this design because the bathroom and kitchen are attached to the building and there is a covered corridor.”

Mrs. Dunk continued, “Parents are very happy with the new facility especially because it is spacious. Now that we have adequate space inside the classroom, the children are more relaxed. They are not as restless as they use to be in the past because they can now move around freely. We have proper ventilation, so we are not as hot as before and we are more comfortable because we have a better learning environment. I have seen improvements in the children since moving here. For one, they don’t complain that they are bouncing into each other or that someone stepped on their toe. There are also less fights, again because we now have a spacious building. Socialization among the students has also improved drastically, which is attributed to our new environment.”

The school’s current student population as of January 28, 2019 is 25. Prior to moving into their new building, the population was 35. According to the principal, the institution has had a maximum of up to 60 students in the past.

In explaining the decrease in the population, Mrs. Dunk said, “Our new location is a little farther than where we were coming from at the Church. In addition to that, the other early childhood facility in the area that was once a basic school, recently obtained certification as an infant department. This means that tuition is no longer required at that institution. As such, we have realized that some of our parents have since transferred their children to that institution because it is closer and they don’t have to pay school fees.”

Even with the minor setback of losing some students, Mrs. Dunk is optimistic that they will soon have an increase in the student population, which is partly attributed to the new building they received. She went on to say, “Parents who support us are quite pleased with our teaching, values and morals. And so, though a school fee is required, we still get support from those parents. As a community-based institution, we depend on the school fees and lunch money to carry out the

# **SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

## **Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School**

### **Mount Pleasant District, St. Margaret's Bay P.O., Portland**

day-to-day operations. The money collected from lunch goes towards paying the Cook as well as purchasing groceries to prepare the meals. The school fee goes towards paying salaries for the teachers, purchasing learning materials and cleaning supplies and anything else that the school might need.”

In speaking about plans going forward she mentioned that, “We are hoping that we will be able to get the school registered as an infant department. While at our previous location, we were granted permission from the \*Ministry of Education (MoE) to operate as a basic school, but we could not gain certification as an infant department because we could not meet the standards required. Though we still don’t have all that is required, getting this type of structure from Food For The Poor will, no doubt, assist us greatly.”

She further said, “We are working on our fire plan, after which we will submit a request to the Fire Department for an inspection. We are also waiting on the Health Inspectors to visit and do their assessment, but I am certain that we have all the things in place now that were missing and would have previously resulted in a failing inspection. We still have quite a few things to accomplish before we can send a request to the MoE, but I am hoping that within the next five years, we would have accomplished all that is outstanding to gain certification as an infant department. Due to the economy, parents tend to gravitate more to schools where they don’t have to pay school fees. We are hoping that we will one day be able to offer similar services. In addition to that, if our school gains certification as an infant department, we will be able to receive additional benefits. For instance, the staff will be paid by the ministry and we will be able to access grants for purchasing our learning materials.”

The staff comprises of four teachers, including the principal and a Cook. The principal explained that “Myself and two other teachers have acquired our certification in early childhood education from the \*National Council on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET). The fourth teacher has been successful in obtaining a university degree in the profession.”

# **SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

## **Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School**

### **Mount Pleasant District, St. Margaret's Bay P.O., Portland**



*Mrs. Vita Dunk showcasing the new staff bathroom that was also included in the project.*



*Mrs. Vita Dunk sits comfortably in her new office thanks to Food For The Poor and donors.*

In expressing appreciation she said, "Many thanks to Food For The Poor (FFP) and the donors for the opportunity you have given us. Our building has comfortable and spacious classrooms, bathroom facilities, kitchen, office and a sickbay. You (FFP and donors) have given us a facility that we are proud off. We are really looking forward to a day when we will have fencing and play equipment. Having play equipment will help students to develop physically, as well as teach them how to share with each other. The fence will eliminate the issue we now have when goats and pigs walk on the corridor and sometimes pass feces."

She continued, "We are happy that the kitchen is under the same roof as the rest of the school. When it rains, we don't have to walk outside in the rain to collect the lunches as we did in the past. We received water from the \*National Water Commission (NWC) in December 2018 and we received electricity on January 23<sup>rd</sup>. We love how things are coming together nicely."

## **SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

### **Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School**

### **Mount Pleasant District, St. Margaret's Bay P.O., Portland**


In expressing gratitude, Mrs. Dunk said, "Getting our new school has helped tremendously. Thanks to Food for The Poor and the donors, the students are more comfortable and parents are pleased that their children have a spacious and comfortable school."

***\*The Ministry of Education (MoE)** is the government entity responsible for the management and administration of public education in Jamaica. The Ministry was first established in 1953, as the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare. Currently, the MoE carries out the Government of Jamaica's mandate of ensuring a system which secures quality education and training of all citizens of Jamaica to optimize individual and national development. <http://www.moey.gov.jm/about>*

***\*The National Council on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET)** has the responsibility to develop standards, accredit programmes, develop assessments and award certificates and diplomas to individuals who have demonstrated competence in vocational areas.*

***\*National Water Commission (NWC)** is National Water Commission is the governing body responsible for providing potable water across the island.*

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 **Mrs. Francine Farquharson-Lynch started her teaching career at Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School one and a half years ago. She currently teaches seven students, ages five-six.**

In explaining her surprise on day one of her tenure at the institution, she said, "That morning I took up my bag and was about to leave because I was in shock about the working environment. The facility was not what I expected. Space was limited, there was little to no ventilation, the bathroom facilities were poor, everything that a school should have for their early childhood area, was lacking. There was no play area, children couldn't play outside due to lack of space."

## **SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

### **Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School**

### **Mount Pleasant District, St. Margaret's Bay P.O., Portland**

I was also saddened by the passing of my husband on the first Saturday after I started working at the school and decided that I would do my best to try and work with the teachers as a means of uplifting my spirit. Talking with the staff, I learnt that an application was made to Food For The Poor (FFP) for a building and that we were in the waiting process. That also gave me some hope that things would get better soon. I remember going to Kingston to collect my degree from the Mico Teachers College when I received a phone call saying that a representative from FFP had visited. The teachers were filled with excitement, even though when I spoke with the representative, he mentioned that the land space we had was too small. Three weeks had passed, and we didn't know what to do in terms of getting another location."

She went on to say, "When we finally secured a piece of land, it was like a woodland, but that was the first real sign that things started looking up for us. I was so excited when our request was finally approved. Seeing the donors participate in the build made me happy to know that there are people in the world who are trying to help in whatever way they can. When I saw the bus arriving with the team and then they got their protective gears, everyone was looking lovely. I stood at a distance and watched the team working and I started crying with joy and pride."

*Mrs. Francine Farquharson-Lynch assisting a student to use the hand-wash basin in the new student bathroom.*

*Mrs. Farquharson-Lynch said, "I always dreamt of having a nice classroom and now I finally do. I feel good about this new facility. The students have spacious and age-appropriate bathroom facilities. The staff also has a very lovely bathroom."*





**SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**  
**Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School**  
**Mount Pleasant District, St. Margaret's Bay P.O., Portland**

In speaking of the improvement since moving into their new school, Mrs. Lynch mentioned that, "I have observed that the children are really enjoying the spacious classroom and outdoor space to play. I know that they are really looking forward to getting play equipment. Academically, students are gradually improving."

She continued, "Five years from now, I am hoping that we will be registered as an infant school and that all our teachers will be professionally trained, which is also required for us to gain infant status. I really think we need to progress from a basic school to an infant school, as we will be able to access better support from the MoE. As it is now, our school is really struggling financially. This community is of a poor back-ground with most parents being unemployed. As such, in many instances, it's a challenge to get tuition because the parents are unable to pay. Sometimes, parents can't even pay for lunch. And as a community school, we depend on the school fees to cover operations, such as, purchasing learning supplies and to pay salaries."

Mrs. Farquharson-Lynch has big dreams for the school and explained that, "My aim is to become an Education Officer and I see myself pushing Mt. Pleasant SDA Basic School further than where it is now. I hope to assist in garnering more students here and we are trying to market our school academically. This means that we are trying to offer a well-rounded program, which will expose our students to some areas that other early childhood institutions in and around the community don't offer, such as introduction to the basic school championship. We are also planning to offer speech and drama classes, which will help the students to develop their skills for performing in public, which would in turn help them to interact more with their peers."

In closing, she remarked, "I want to say, 'a very big bunununu,' (an informal term used to describe the magnitude of the appreciation for an invaluable gesture) thank you to Food For The Poor and Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation who came forward to help us here at the Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School by giving us this facility. It is greatly appreciated. The children, parents and the teachers of this institution do appreciate your kind effort and we thank you immensely for what you have done and the participation you have contributed toward education. May you continue to do the good work for education and for the children in our country."

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# **SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

## **Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School**

### **Mount Pleasant District, St. Margaret's Bay P.O., Portland**

✚ Another teacher at Mount Pleasant S.D.A Basic School, is Ms. Pauline Williams, who has been at the institution over three years. Ms. Williams currently teaches nine students from the two-three age group.

She shared similar confidence that the student population will be increased. She said, "I attribute this positive notion to the fact that our new location is better. The environment is quiet and free from the indecent language that people passing by would sometimes be shouting aloud and we no longer have to deal with noise from motor vehicles. We are very happy in our new school."

In speaking about the other issues back then Ms. Williams said, "The previous school was cramped. When it rained it was difficult for the children to use the bathroom, which was separate from the main building. I'm very comfortable being in our new school. I give God thanks. We have everything for our own comfort, especially because back then I wasn't so happy going to school."

*Ms. Pauline Williams and her students now have a spacious and comfortable classroom. She said, "Now that we have adequate space, I am able to sit and play with the students during floor activities."*



# **SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**


## **Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School**

### **Mount Pleasant District, St. Margaret's Bay P.O., Portland**

She continued, "Another thing I really love is that we finally have our own building. I now have my learning charts displayed permanently. At our previous location we would set-up the charts in the morning, but then we had to take them down in the evenings, so the church could use the Hall. If we left our materials out on a Friday evening, in some instances, they would be missing when we returned on a Monday morning and we couldn't complain much because we knew we were only granted permission to use their facility and that it didn't belong to the school."

Ms. Williams ended by saying, "I would really like us to get more children at our school. The road leading to the school is very bad and I believe if we had that road paved, then it would be easier for parents and children, as well as taxis, to get to the school. We are like one big happy family here, all teachers, parents and students. I believe that keeping the school well-maintained and clean and ensuring that every child receives good quality teaching, is one of the best ways that we can show our donors how much this school means to us. Having this new facility is a big difference, as it uplifts the Mount Pleasant community. I thank God for this school. I want to thank the donors and Food For The Poor for giving us this school, and may God continue to bless you because without God, this would not have been possible."

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 **Ms. Denistine Thompson has been working at Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School for the past 27 years. She currently teaches the four-year-old class. She was delighted to state that, "This is my very first teaching job and I have loved it ever since."**

Ms. Thompson spoke about one of her greatest concern when operations were held by the Church. She said, "The bathrooms were outside and not attached to the Hall and when it rained it was a problem. If it was raining and students wanted the bathroom, we had to use an umbrella to cover their heads or they were forced to urinate on the ground close to the building. Parents would complain that their child would get sick whenever it rained, which they often said was as a result of the leaking roof we had. I would have to place containers inside my classroom to catch water that leaked from the roof. I had to move the children to the corners that didn't leak and place the containers in positions to catch the rain water."

# **SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

## **Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School**

### **Mount Pleasant District, St. Margaret's Bay P.O., Portland**



*Ms. Denistine Thompson and her students enjoying the new classroom, which has been outfitted with colourful and age-appropriate desks and chairs for the students.*

Ms. Thompson was pleased to say, “I live in a neighbouring community and I can say that this is a good upliftment for the community. The residents talk about the school and some people even started donating things to the school since we received this structure. They see that development is taking place and they are showing more interest in being part of the progress.”

She expressed gratitude saying, “I would like to say a very big, ‘thank you.’ I appreciate this very much. If it wasn’t for you (FFP and donors), we would still be in that cramped space by the Church.”

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✚ **Ms. Hermin Gaynor has been cooking at the school since 1993. She spoke about the conditions under which her duties were carried out stating that, “it was very difficult back then. The kitchen was located upstairs and I remember having to walk up and down the staircase for everything, even to catch water from the tank that we had. We didn’t have piped water back then.”**



## **SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

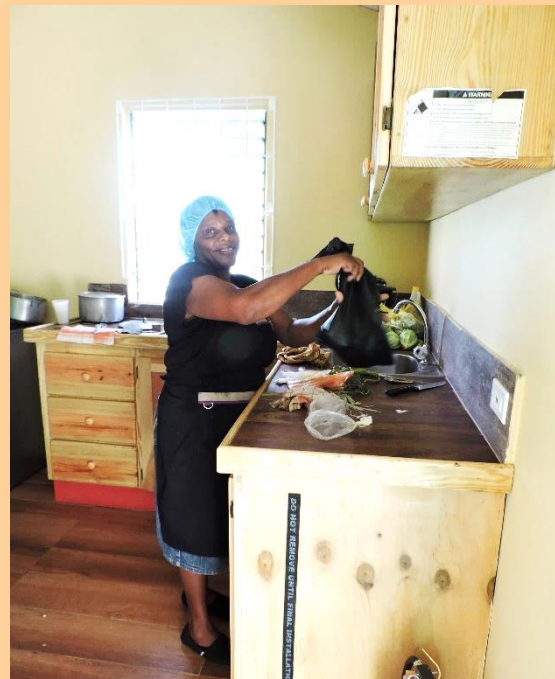
### **Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School**

### **Mount Pleasant District, St. Margaret's Bay P.O., Portland**

She added, "The church used a separate kitchen, but I had to walk through that kitchen to get to kitchen that the school used. They were very kind and we had a key, so even if they were not present I had easy access to our kitchen. Even in instances when our gas finished in the middle of cooking lunches they allowed us to use their stove. We were like one big family. We had our own stove and refrigerator back then as well and we didn't have to share any resources."



*Ms. Gaynor using the stove donated by FFP to prepare lunches. She said, "I am happy we received this stove because the old one we had (left corner) is not working."*



*Ms. Gaynor smiles brightly as she is happy to have adequate storage space with counter in her new kitchen.*

With tears of relief, Ms. Gaynor said, "I was hard working in that kitchen back then. I am so happy that you (FFP and donors) blessed us with this new and beautiful school. I really love my new kitchen."

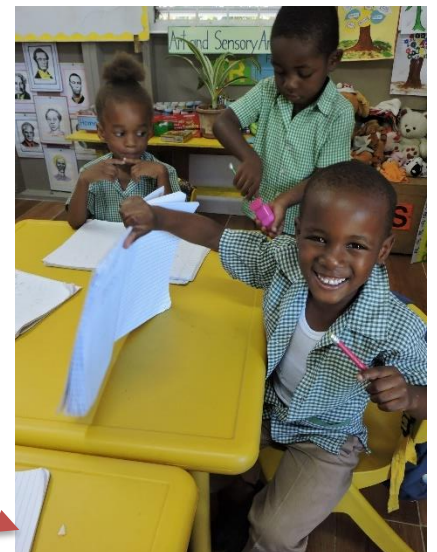
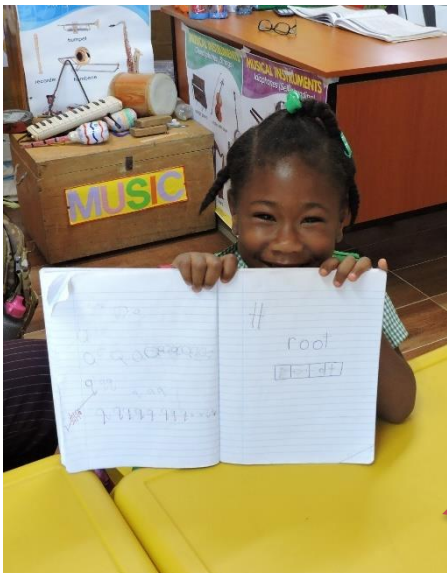
# **SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

## **Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School**

### **Mount Pleasant District, St. Margaret's Bay P.O., Portland**

#### **Pictorial Highlight**

*Students and teachers standing in-front of sign installed at the Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School.*

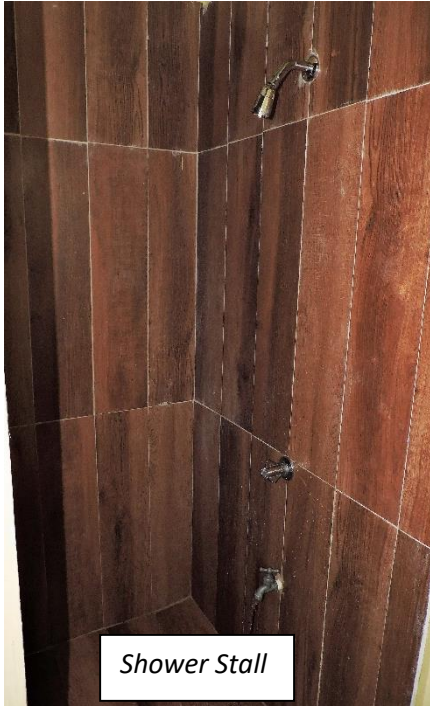


*Students enjoying their new classroom*



**SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**  
Mount Pleasant S.D.A. Basic School  
Mount Pleasant District, St. Margaret's Bay P.O., Portland

*Student's Bathroom*



*A brand-new refrigerator was also donated to the school. The previous one they owned was very small and the administrators decided to donate it to the Church.*

**-End-**