

## Announcing a Surgical Suite at the Carmelle Voltaire Women's Health Center



Construction of the surgical center

In 1997, after reading about a local peasant's association, David Walmer hiked into Fondwa with a group of Duke medical and divinity students looking for a place to experience rural Haiti. Little did we know that we would develop friendships there that would last for over 25 years. Upon our arrival, we met Sister Carmelle, who had just been recruited to establish the Sisters of St. Antoine, and to serve as the community's nurse. Sr. Carmelle initiated the first continuous healthcare in the community, while recruiting local physicians and medical mission teams periodically, which Walmer and colleagues eagerly provided once or twice a year. This was one of the relationships that led FHM to incorporate as a non-profit in 2000.

Unexpectedly in March of 2012, Sister Carmelle tragically died from liver cancer due a hepatitis infection that she likely contracted from one of her patients. FHM did its best to help the community continue health care in her absence, but her absence left a huge vacuum in our lives and in the Fondwa community.

In 2013, FHM learned that the Building Goodness Foundation had a donor who was looking for a women's health project in Haiti. We presented the concept of a women's center in the Fondwa community, and they agreed to fund the project. It took over a year to locate a piece of property that we could purchase in Tom Gato. With faithful persistence, the outpatient clinic became a reality in February 2016, and was named after

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Construction of the surgical center



Sister Carmelle

Sister Carmelle, believing that we were continuing her work. We quickly expanded our vision to add a birthing center because of the high incidence of infant and maternal mortality associated with home births. Providentially, a baby was born in the clinic on 10/25/2017. However, it took 2 more years to raise the funds to support a 24/7 midwifery staff. The birthing center officially opened its doors on 3/1/2020 and was baptized with our first official delivery 4 days later. Since then, over 500 babies have been born at the center, transforming women's healthcare in the area.

We are proud that the Carmelle Voltaire Women's Health Center serves the community with an all-Haitian staff under the direction of Dr. Danache Thermozier. This year, this center has taken another remarkable leap forward as we just raised the funds to add a surgical suite. The DeMatteis Construction Group (DCG) began construction in March, but had to pause to help build

facilities for the arriving UN Security Forces. The construction crew is now ready to return as soon as it is safe to transit Port-au-Prince, estimating completion in about a month after their arrival. Sensing its completion, our efforts have now eagerly shifted to fundraising for equipment, supplies and salaries to staff the facility, which will be able to provide both elective and emergency surgery services.

Looking back, this is a remarkable story of how one faithful Catholic nun/nurse can transform the health of a remote community by showing up to serve and inspiring others to come alongside in partnership. Life is about relationships. We are so close and a donation to this project now will help us reach another milestone in our commitment to support Haitian communities in their effort to build and sustain healthy families. Thank you for your faithful friendship and support! 🙏

## Kathy Walmer to retire in January 2025

**“It is time to say Goodbye”**

*by Kathy Walmer, FHM Executive Director*

### Dear FHM Family,

After almost 22 years as the executive director of Family Health Ministries (FHM) and being there since its inception, it is time for me to retire. This job has been my identity for much of my career. My work in Haiti has shaped so much of my life, it is hard to believe it is time to move on. It is difficult to leave Haiti when it is under so much turmoil, but I remind myself that I am leaving a job and not my friends.

The first time David Walmer went to Haiti was in 1993. Our twins were turning one, and Brian, our oldest, was almost 10 years old. As I stood there watching the team depart Raleigh/Durham airport, I had no idea how this one trip would change the course of our lives forever.

In the years to follow, we would have two more children of which one would be adopted from Fondwa, Haiti. I would graduate with a master’s in nursing in 2000 and work as an adolescent health care provider until 2003 when I was called to be the first executive director for FHM. I truly believe that God called me to Haiti.

Over the next 20 years I was blessed with many opportunities. I have made many friends and traveled many beautiful places in Haiti. I experienced much growth and achievement of FHM projects, but also experienced hardship, earthquakes, and even death of Haitian friends. I could write a book.

The years have had a huge impact on our family. My husband and I have navigated the road of him being my boss as well as my best friend. Our children traveled many times to Haiti and hosted Haitian friends in our home. They learned early and first-hand the importance of service to others. They learned what it is to live in poverty and what it is to give from the heart.

I have met many of you during our trips to Haiti. I have great memories and stories from our time together (this is book 2). We have worked together on many mission teams. We have treated patients in need, experienced church services in the heat, built houses, cheered on children during VBS, and traveled many side trips on crazy Haitian roads. Many of you have been with me during the last 5 years while I have fought stage 4 breast cancer, which I continue to win by God’s grace and love!



*Kathy Walmer, FHM Executive Director*

It is now time to say goodbye. I don’t plan to be too far away. My heart will always be part of FHM. But it is time for the next phase of life. It is time to travel the world with my husband, learn how to be a grandmother (our first grandchild is due in October), and see what God has for me in the years I have left. I hope it includes time in Haiti to visit friends and maybe work another mission team with you.

Many thanks to all of you who have been on this great adventure with me. I cherish your friendship and I hope our paths continue to cross. We will always be part of the FHM family no matter where we are or what we do. God brings us together in friendship and once friends, we are friends forever. 🌱

Love you all,

*Kathy*



Haiti sans Cervical Cancer (HsCC)

## Haiti sans Cervical Cancer (HsCC)

*Haiti sans Cervical Cancer (HsCC) is an organization that was an outgrowth of Family Health Ministries' (FHM's) cervical cancer work. Cervical cancer was one of the first and earliest programs of FHM*

Haiti sans Cervical Cancer (HsCC) held a two-day event May 2 & 3, 2024 in RTP, North Carolina. HsCC is a consortium of partners located in Haiti and committed to working together to reduce the burden of cervical cancer in Haiti. Formed in 2015, HsCC held conferences in Port-au-Prince in 2016, 2017 and 2018. Consortium partners include Haitian medical leaders, Haitian community advocates, NGOs, and individuals who support cervical cancer prevention and treatment in Haiti. Due to the ongoing circumstances in Haiti, HsCC decided to bring the conference to North Carolina, USA, in 2024. Despite the inability to meet in Haiti, the consortium has continued to make progress by setting up two digital histopathology laboratories, four HPV testing labs, and a REDCap screening database. Other exciting projects are underway to bring the HPV vaccine to Haiti, and to develop cytopathology and palliative care services. This year's conference brought representatives from the Haitian Ministry of Health, PAHO, the Haitian Ob Gyn Society, GSCC (a citizen's group that advocates for cancer prevention and treatment services in Haiti), ASCCP, Haitian hospitals, and many NGOs together for a strategic planning session, which created momentum to work towards a coordinated health system in Haiti. 🌱



Haiti sans Cervical Cancer (HsCC)

## Welcoming the Newest FHM Staff Person



Christian Pridgen

It is our honor to introduce the newest member of our Family Health Ministries staff, Christian Pridgen. Christian grew up in a military family, and her father was in the United States Marine Corps until she was five years old. Once her father was released from the Marine Corps, he went into ministry with the AME Zion Church, and their family settled in Kinston, North Carolina. Christian loves Kinston deeply, as it has served as an inspiration for her educational and professional endeavors.

After graduating from high school, Christian attended the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. During her time there, she became a highly decorated scholar, serving in many capacities. She most appreciates her experiences as a mentor and her mission to travel to Jamaica. Upon graduating from UNC Charlotte with a bachelor's degree in Sociology and a minor in Urban Youth and Communities,

she continued her educational career at Emory University's Candler School of Theology.

Christian entered divinity school with the confidence that she was called to do mission and community work—ministry outside the pulpit. She was intentional in her course selection and picked up her concentration in Pastoral Care. She is honored to have studied under an array of world-renowned professors of diverse indigenous backgrounds.

Shortly after graduating from Emory, Christian began working, but she was confident that the work she was doing was not her true calling. Christian comes to us with great enthusiasm, as she feels the opportunity to work with Family Health Ministries aligns with her calling to minister through acts of kindness, love, and compassion. 🌱

## What it Means to be Part of the FHM Family

### A Donor's Story

## “Haiti and FHM Changed our Lives Forever”



Dr. Elizabeth Pritts and girls

I was in the middle of my second miscarriage and looked at my husband. “I just want to be a mom, and it doesn’t matter how I get there”, I said. He took a deep breath and then began to tell me a story about one of his colleagues, Dr. Dave Walmer, who had been giving a lecture with him at a national conference. At the end of the lecture, Dr. Walmer flashed multiple images of women and children on the screen. They were images of Haitians, and he showcased the work that FHM had been doing there for many years, including supporting an orphanage in a mountain village just outside of Port Au Prince, and supporting a school in this village, attended by over 600 children.

We immediately went online to the FHM website and saw all of the good work that was being done. We looked at the faces of

the children in the orphanage, and our next step became clear. We were going to adopt from Haiti.

A few months later, we were on a plane there with Dr. Walmer. He took us to meet the children in the orphanage and the nuns that had dedicated their lives to caring for them. On the first day of our visit, we met a little girl named Midlyne (18 months old), and knew she was the one.

That same day, my husband (also Dave) went down to the orphanage to play with the children. They were joyful and playful, and loved rubbing his bald head. One child spent lots of time clinging to my husband and asking to be carried everywhere. At the end of the “play-date”, he came back to the guest house

where we were staying asking if we could bring just one more little one home, the “Klingon”. Her name was Taina and she was four years old.

The next day, Dr. Walmer took us on a walk to the home of one

saw their dedication to their families and to the entire village. They worked together to ensure that all the inhabitants of the community were well-cared for.

We were mesmerized.



**Pritts Family**

of the students that attended the school. It was a two hour walk, each way. This child completed the round-trip journey five days a week, just to get his education.

On the third day of our trip, we met people in the community and

Dave and I began to join the mission trips of FHM to help with obstetric and gynecology care. Our lives were enriched as we cared for our Haitian patients, and we entrenched ourselves into the community in which we were serving.

We also worked diligently on our adoption of our two daughters, finally getting our daughters home on December 19, 2008.

In 2012, my eldest daughter joined me on a mission trip to Haiti and her love for her culture was easy to see. The next in line for the mission trip was my youngest daughter once she was old enough. Their connection to Haiti never waned.

In 2016, my husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer; I was terrified. “I have no interest in being on this planet without you”, I told him. But this thought lasted for about two seconds, then my girls’ faces flashed before my eyes. I have been told that I was a gift to those girls, that adopting them gave them the opportunities for a wonderful life. But I knew in that moment that it was the opposite, their presence in my life was the real gift. I loved my husband deeply, and his loss eventually rocked my world, but the presence of my daughters also rocked my world. They are hilarious and fun and funny and for a time in my life they were my only reason for getting out of bed each day.

My husband left his girls four years after his original diagnosis. But thanks to FHM, the three of us have each other. We also have a love for Haiti and look forward to returning to work with our friends once

peace returns to the country.

I will forever be grateful to FHM for giving me my daughters and giving me new eyes to see the world. 🌿



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You can contribute supplies directly to FHM through our Amazon wish list. Wish list items range from medial supplies to items that were damaged by the recent flood. We are not currently traveling into Port-au-Prince due to the dangerous conditions in the city. Because of this, many things we used to purchase there now must be brought in from outside the country.

You can find our wish list by visiting [amazon.com/registries](https://amazon.com/registries). Kind of like a wedding registry, you can easily search for Family Health Ministries, purchase an item, and send it straight to FHM. This is a dynamic list that changes as our needs change, and these donated items are fully tax-deductible.

Save the Date!



## FAMILY HEALTH MINISTRIES' ANNUAL GALA & SILENT AUCTION

**"SUPPORTING HAITI'S FUTURE"**

**SEPTEMBER 14, 2024 6:00 PM**

1705 EAST VENUE  
ON MILLBROOK ROAD RALEIGH, NC

Join us for an unforgettable evening dedicated to "Supporting Haiti's Future" at our 2024 Gala and Auction. Through our shared commitment, we aspire to pave the way for a brighter and healthier future for all Haitian families.



Tickets are \$125 per person.  
Sponsorship opportunities are available.  
Visit us at [familyhealthministries.org](https://familyhealthministries.org)



Flip for silent auction details →

## WILL YOU MISS OUR ANNUAL GALA?

IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO ATTEND THE EVENT, WE WOULD LOVE FOR YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN OUR SILENT AUCTION!

### SILENT AUCTION DETAILS

- Silent Auction will open on-line for bids at 8am on Monday, September 9th, 2024. <https://one.bidpal.net/fhmgala2024/welcome>
- The Silent Auction will close September 14th at 9:00 pm during the live event.
- No HASSLE BIDDING! You can place a maximum bid on your items and Bidpal will continue to up your bid until your maximum price is reached.

• **Items won can we shipped for an additional fee.**  
If you have further questions, please feel free to reach out to us by phone (919) 382-5500 or by email at [kathy.walmer@familyhm.org](mailto:kathy.walmer@familyhm.org)



Visit us at [familyhealthministries.org](https://familyhealthministries.org)

