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VOLUNTEER MINISTRIES IN HAITI

March 2009

A monthly newsletter to report on developments of the Volunteer Ministries in Haiti, a program of the Xaverian Brothers supported by the Diocese of Richmond. Further information is available from the Haitian Ministry Commission, Diocese of Richmond, 7800 Carousel Lane, Richmond VA 23294 (telephone: 804-359-5661) (fax: 804-358-9159) (e-mail: pschwermer@richmonddiocese.org) (website: www.richmonddiocese.org/haiti/hat111.htm)

LETTER FROM BROTHER HARRY ECCLES

MY LORD, WHAT A MORNING! This morning's Mass was a special occasion for us. Our celebrant was Father Kesner Joseph, and he brought with him the eleven seminarians from Pandiassou. There were already eighteen visitors from Penn State U., and after a beautiful celebration, we were able to gather for English practice at the guest house. Brother Mike and I teach English at the seminary twice a week, but this was their first visit here. "A good time was had by all!"

SATURDAY MORNING the Penn Staters came to our traditional English class. Again an opportunity for practicing English, understanding different culture, and finding new friends. The class is supposed to end at 10:30, but the die-hards were still at it an hour later when it was time for the PSU group to visit the market. In the afternoon there was the traditional football match, and the home team trounced the visitors. Lots of teasing, but a good time.

I KNEW THAT THE WEEKEND would be busy when I returned to Hinche on Thursday after several days on retreat in Florida. It was good to be in Venice again with my Xaverian brothers, and there was time for R & R, shopping, and even a movie! Life has to have some challenges, and once again "Freezing Florida" hit me with 40-degree weather some days. Not too bad for you in the Upper 48, but for me 70 degrees is sweater weather. I survived, and came back to a Haitian "cold wave." Even the visitors were surprised.

AS ALWAYS, warm greetings on my return. At the airport two of the men from Sant Zaverien waited an hour outside while the baggage carousel went around and around. I can remember only once when I found my bags with relative speed—it's more usual for me to begin wondering if my things went to another destination. The tap-tap ride to the Sant took an hour, as the three of us held my baggage in the company of 16 other passengers. Crowded, yes, but good natured too. I had a good overnight at the Sant, where the men were getting into the second semester after several days of exams and Kanaval.

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE was the movie I saw in Florida. I heard people talking about it because of the Oscars, so when I had the chance, I grabbed it. Afterwards someone asked me if I enjoyed the show, and I couldn't say yes. It's not that kind of story. I am glad I saw it though, for as simple and improbable as SLUMDOG is, for me it turned a spotlight on the kind of poverty we can relate to in Haiti—and too many other places in the world. The energy and good nature of people who struggle to survive is an inspiration to me, a reminder of how well-off I am. A story to think about, especially now as we spend Lent with Jesus as we

prepare to celebrate his victory over sin and death and all the other things that we encounter. The finale of the movie had an echo for me when I returned to a wild welcome from the children at the Azil. Little ones with big problems but able to enjoy life. Lots to think about and pray about!

May the Lord of all bless us all.

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LETTER FROM BROTHER MICHAEL McCARTHY

One of Haiti's gifts for me is when scripture jumps off the written text and smacks me in the face! What passages in particular? So many of the common, everyday activities that make up the Haitian routine reflect the various lessons Jesus spoke about.

For example, early on Thursday mornings as I bike to Pandiassou from Hinche for an 8:00 English class with a group of seminarians, I pass several public spigots—wells where mostly women and children gather to collect water for the day; I see no men and very few boys. It's a woman's job to get water, as it must have been in Jesus' day as he greeted "the woman at the well." Such a gathering is very social: the women chat away as they fill the buckets, put them on their heads and head home. Jesus was right there at the center of life—fetching water, and made it a moment of grace for the woman with whom he dared to speak. That scene comes alive to me each week. I pray to be bold enough to enter more intentionally into the common, ordinary flow of everyday life here.

On that same bike ride I usually pass three to five ox-drawn carts, folks hauling sand from the river to the many building projects going on in town. I see the heavy wooden yokes burdening the oxen as they toil with their heavy load of wet sand. "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" says Jesus, and I think of the little burden I have in Haiti compared to the difficulties the people are facing each day trying to keep food in the house, their kids in school and their families intact. How humbled I am whenever someone answers my question of how he or she is doing, and I hear, "Pa pi mal, grasa Bondye." Not bad, thanks be to God. Gratitude for what they have far outweighs any impatience with the burdens they carry each day. I pray for increased gratitude for all I have been given.

Goats are ubiquitous around Hinche, and many of the nannies are followed by the cutest little kids—usually twins, trying to nurse or frolicking along the road. If I see a sheep with her little lamb, I'm amazed at how identical the little ones are; how difficult it

would be to separate the 'sheep from the goats.' Jesus' famous account of the final judgment found in Matthew 25 when he will separate the nations one from another, as a shepherd separates his sheep from his goats, comes right to mind. It's the nations that will be judged on their efforts to alleviate the world problems of hunger—'you gave me to eat'; clean water in the environment—'you gave me to drink'; health care—'you visited me when I was sick'; immigration and prison policies—'you welcomed me when I was a stranger or visited me in prison'. My country's policies will be judged, and I ask myself whether I am I doing enough to help shape and influence them.

The scriptural passage to hit me the hardest came during the offertory procession during the celebration of a rural parish's patronal feast of the Presentation in early February. An endless number of people danced down the main aisle of the church carrying the many gifts they had brought from their homes. The first were baskets, loaded with fruits or vegetables, some beautifully balanced on the heads of the women, others carried in their arms. The folks danced with joy as they approached the altar to present their gifts to the priest. I was amazed when I saw chickens come next—again some in hand, others 'on heads.' Then came the goats—one dead, the others alive, all carried on the shoulders of the folks processing. The priest had his hands full as he accepted the gifts and passed them on to others in the sanctuary. (Now I know where the ritual of hand washing in the offertory originated!)

The scripture that humbled me at that moment was Jesus' exhortation about whether we give from our want or our abundance. As I reached into my pocket and took out a crumpled bill from my abundance for the basket that was coming around, I wondered how many of the people were giving from their need: was it their only goat, only chicken; was it that night's dinner of vegetables or fruits? Indeed I was humbled in seeing how joyful so many people were, and proud as well, to offer to their God the real fruit of their labors, the very necessities of their lives, always trusting that what they give will be replaced a hundredfold. Thank you, Lord, for letting your words penetrate my life at a deeper level.

LETTER FROM ACCILIEN GELIN

We continue with our series of letters from young men living at the Sant Zaveryen in Port-au-Prince, a Christian community setting for young men studying at universities in Port-au-Prince.

I am very happy to write you this letter in order to thank you for all you have done for me and for all Haitians.

Today, I am very happy to note an important thing: Brother Philip Eisenaur did well by beginning this Sant, because thanks to it Haiti has some good hope through us.

Sometimes I think I am dreaming but it is real because thanks to the Sant Zaveryen the dreams of all young people in the Sant come true because we are able to prepare for our future. In the Sant the main points to respect are prayer, community, service, and studies. We value prayer because without it we would not have this Sant and the opportunity to go to the University every day. So each morning, we wake up at 5:00 in order to pray to God by asking him to bless us during the day.

Brother Harry and Brother Michael give prayer a lot of importance, and this is why they always remind us each month that prayer is important for people who want to become leaders of this country.

What about community service? Each member of the house has a different responsibility. Some of us help tutoring in math, physics, chemistry, biology, or English with some rheto and philo students [12th and 13th graders]. Some of us go to the orphanage near us so that we can help kids and young children to ameliorate their health (the medical students), and some us go to visit sick people in some hospitals.

What is my special responsibility in community service? I help rheto and philo students. I also talk to some street kids in order to remind them that God does not forget them.

What kind of future Haiti do we have in the house? We have medical students, accountants, engineers, etc. I am a future engineer and this is my last year in my university. In July, my studies will be completed and I will also live what I have learned here as I go back home to work with young people who can't have the opportunity that I have now. This is one of the goals of the Sant: to prepare a future Haiti by helping people in need. You know if Haiti had more people like Brother Harry, Brother Philip, Brother Michael, and Brother Cosmas, I am telling you the truth, Haiti would have a better future.

I remember when I completed my secondary studies that I didn't have the opportunity to go to the university, today thanks to God, I am a lucky, lucky, lucky engineer because I represent the future of Haiti.

What is my plan (project) for Haiti? I will go back to Hinche after my studies in order to help my country to have good water. Even if I don't have a huge opportunity to realize my project Jesus will help me. This is my dream for my county (Hinche, in the Central Plateau). And I also want to help some kids to go to school as I did during the last five years at the Sant Zaveryen.

Thank you for your support my friends. May God bless you.

FORMER VOLUNTEER NEWS

In our last newsletter, we featured the benefit event Initiated by former Xaverian Volunteers **Benjamin** and **Jana Robbins** at the First Presbyterian Church of Snohomish, Washington, on behalf of the Sant Zaveryen.

Recently we became aware of the need for a water purification system for the girls' building at the orphanage—up to now their clean water came in buckets carried by the boys, whose campus has an excellent Aqua Sun system.

No sooner did former Xaverian Volunteer **Ryan Kenrick** (now in his final semester at the College of William and Mary's school of law) hear about the need and the price tag (\$4000), than he got in touch with his friend Zach Crowe, who got in touch with other friends, and the full amount was in hand within a few days! The system is now on order; soon the girls should be drinking their own clean water!

Thanks, Zach, Ryan and your families and friends!