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## VOLUNTEER MINISTRIES IN HAITI

May 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](http://www.richmonddiocese.org/haiti/hat111.htm))

### LETTER FROM BROTHER HARRY ECCLES

NOT LONG AGO while waiting in the security-check line at the airport, an attendant called me off the line and directed me to go forward. No explanation, so I was thinking problems: passport, ticket, terrorist. When I arrived at the head of the line, I had to conclude that I was singled out because of my delicate condition. Next time a wheelchair?

THAT EXPERIENCE and some problems with cyberspace explain my not writing last month. Sorry. No, I'm not throwing in the sponge just yet, but I'm mightily relieved that Bro. Mike McCarthy is here with me. Apart from taking over some of my activities, Mike is a real gift. His energy and creativity have opened up more possibilities than I could have imagined. Mèsi, Bondye!

ACTUALLY I'VE been doing more than looking helpless. Since I last wrote, we've had a stream of visitors here at Maison Fortuné, and one group at the Sant. While I made the monthly visit to our young men at Sant Zaveryen, we were blessed by visitors from St. John's Prep School, Danvers, Mass., where I spent six years (1950-56) on my first teaching assignment. What goes around... The visit was uncertain because of Election Day travel restrictions, but it was a great afternoon! Some of the visitors communicated in French, and Sant residents are pretty good--never good enough--in English. It was as animated a cross-cultural meeting as I've witnessed.

THE XAVERIAN BROTHERS connection took place earlier when a group came from Mount St. Joseph High School spent several days finding about their Xaverian "cousins" while they learned about conditions in Haiti. They used the time well.

AFTER MORE than 60 years of Xaverian connections, these visits were in a very special category. I should

add that Xavier High, Middletown, Conn., broke the ice several years ago.

THESE BUSY DAYS included even more Xaverian connections. I spent a busy weekend in Brooklyn at reunions of my "old boys" from Xaverian High School and St. Michael's Diocesan High. Very well connected, indeed! Thanks be to God.

ROUNDING OFF the visitors' roster was an "honorary" Xaverian group from St. Mark parish in Virginia Beach. Pastor Jim Griffin was the group leader, and he's been a Xaverian connect forever.

WITH ALL THIS STIMULATION, I've still been enjoying the signs of the times: longer days, lovely blooms in Brooklyn, the beginning of the mango season, hand-slapping children at the Azil, mini-gardens planted by the boys here at the orphanage, moto-taxi trips to Pandiassou, and what was I saying? Let me think!

YES, I AM BLESSED with many different kinds of connections. Have I told you to read *The Shack*, by Young? A beautiful book suggested to me by an old Trappist friend (and former Xaverian).

JUNE WILL FIND me connecting with family, Brothers, friends. A highlight will be a reunion of former members of the Volunteer Ministries Communities in Blackstone and Harrisonburg, Virginia. I became connected with them back in '79 when Father Bill LaFratta welcomed me to ten great years in Virginia. Your newsletter today is a sprout from that connection. And our Volunteer Ministries in Haiti program is a direct descendent.

ALL OF THESE CONNECTIONS make us think of the GREAT CONNECTOR, the Risen Lord, Good Shepherd, and the Vine which nourishes us all. We are VERY WELL CONNECTED, indeed.

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## LETTER FROM CHOULOUE EDMOND

*Chouloute is a young man in residence at the Xaverian Center (Sant Zaveryen) in Port-au-Prince.*

I am from Artibonite and am studying at the Diesel Institute of Haiti. I am studying electricity and mechanics, a field some people despise because it is a hard manual job. However, I don't like to work at a desk under a boss; I would like to be independent after finishing studying, in spite of the difficulties.

God gave us sisters and brothers who are interested in helping us to change our life. I feel you form another family with us. It isn't easy to find somebody who thinks about the situations of others, but we have many friends in the U.S.A. who show us that they are in solidarity with us.

Each student at the Xaverian Center represents a small Haiti. With the education that we have received by the help of the Xaverian Community, we can transform Haiti into a new Haiti. Because we are very rich in spirit, we can implement this saying of Brother Harry: "The word is not important without any action, but where is the action? Life in Haiti needs more actions and fewer theories."

We can say that what we are going to do after our departure from the Xaverian Center is to work in groups of three or five students to create own firm. For example, at the Sant we have four students from Artibonite, where they are many people who can't go to school.

Let me tell you something about my part of the country: Petite Rivière de l'Artibonite is a town in the Artibonite department of Haiti, located in the Artibonite Valley. One of the important battles of the Haitian Revolution took place there when Haiti was ravaged by the French Army led by Rochambeau. That Battle of Crete-à-Pierrot, was a major battle of the Haitian Revolution. It took place at the fort of Crete-à-Pierrot (in Kreyòl, Lakret Apyero), east of St-Marc, which General Charles Leclerc's French colonial army besieged. The heavily-barricaded fort was defended by Haitian forces under Jean-Jacques Dessalines. The fort was significant because it controlled access to the Chaos Mountains. The defenders, running short of food and munitions, eventually abandoned the fort, but were able to force their way through the French lines and into the Chaos Mountains. The French, although gaining control of the fort, suffered heavy losses.

The Artibonite River is 320 km long, the longest as well as the most important river in Haiti and the longest on the island of Hispaniola. Its sources are in the Cordillera Central in the Dominican Republic, but most of its length lies in Haiti. It empties into the Gulf of Gonaives. The Peligre hydroelectric dam on the river produces the country's supply of hydroelectricity.

Artibonite one of the ten departments of Haiti, and with an area of 4984 km<sup>2</sup> it is the largest department. Artibonite has a population of 1,168,800. The region is the country's main growing area. The main cities are Gonaives (the capital) and St-Marc.

We who are the young men and women of Artibonite have many things to do. I have a dream for Artibonite that includes:

1. Renovation of the professional (vocational training) schools
2. Support for the professionals schools
3. Sanitation for the peasants
4. Irrigation for the transformation of food production
5. Repair of the roads in the middle of the country
6. Work to transform Haitian education
7. Build a technical school for the children who haven't the possibility to come to Port-au-Prince capital to learn mechanics, accounting, nursing, or building construction.

I think if Haiti had ten centers like the Xaverian Center, it would be a big step.

My brothers and my sisters, thank you for all you do for us. With you the youth of Haiti has another chance to implement the four principles that Brother Harry and Brother Mike want to implant in us: preach the gospel, serve the community, get an education, and work as volunteers.

My brothers and my sisters: Haitians can— *yes we can*— change Haiti. So I am happy to beg you to pray for us please, so that we can one day help the others without despising them.