



MAISON FORTUNÉ ORPHANAGE

An occasional bulletin to report progress of the children's orphanage in Hinche, Haiti. It is also available on the internet: www.richmonddioocese.org/haiti

April 2008

THE GIRLS' CAMPUS NEWS

As reported in our last newsletter, we have secured a place for the girls beginning in September. The Foundation is now sending Jean-Louis about \$11,000 a month for repairs to the building and furniture for the girls and the volunteers and guests we're expecting next year.

You know from the letter you received in March from Foundation President Karen DiRenzo that we do not have on hand enough to provide the full \$45,000 needed to ready the place for the girls by September. As usual, you respond amazingly well when you know the need. As we go to press, forty-one of you have sent us \$7,200 of the \$22,000 we need.

Those who have not yet responded, we are confident, will provide the rest. We don't want to have to defer accepting girls one more year, so either send your check to the Secretary in the envelope enclosed in Karen's letter, or use the envelope enclosed with this newsletter, designating your check for the girls' campus.

The boys—and the new girls—are most appreciative! So are Karen and the Board of Directors of the Foundation, and Jean-Louis, of course!

WELLNESS PROGRAM

The first stage of the Wellness Program we have initiated at Maison Fortuné took place last month when, thanks to the local director of the Haitian government's Ministry of Health, all the kids at the orphanage and school were vaccinated.

MEET ADELSON



Adelson Gauthier

As one can easily tell from the picture below, this young man is hardly a wall-flower. Adelson Gauthier is one of the more recent arrivals at Maison Fortuné. Actually he is a returnee. Last year one of his relatives picked him up at the orphanage to take him to a family funeral in Port-au-

Prince. He was gone for a long time but eventually turned up at the gate one day, having been abused by the family member. He found his way from Port-au-Prince and was welcomed back by Jean-Louis and the boys.

Now he seems to be doing fine. He's got lots of friends and is a very outgoing young man—delighted to be safely back "home."

OUR TWO APPRENTICES



Edvy Julien



Francklin Pierre

We know that not all of the older boys are university-bound. Some have other skills, which we would like to encourage. Two of the boys are now working as apprentices at Brother Piet Van Kampen's diocesan workshop in Hinche learning a trade.

Edvy Julien, one of the boys at the original orphanage in the Bois Verna section of Hinche back in 2000, is learning to be a carpenter. Francklin Pierre is learning how to work with metal.

Edvy is back living with his mother; Francklin continues to live at Maison Fortuné. We hope that what they are learning in will help them one day start a new life independently.

A Bit of History... THE FOUR ORIGINALS!

When Lefort Jean-Louis returned to Haiti after graduating from Virginia Tech, he worked a while for the United Nations. During that time he became increasingly concerned with the number of children he saw living in the streets of Hinche and began toying with the idea of an orphanage. It was during this time that he met a woman by the name of Igue Julien. She told Jean-Louis that her sister had just died and left behind a small son named Claudinel. She explained that she had taken in Claudinel, but unable to feed her own seven children, was no longer able to care for him. Knowing he had to do something, Jean-Louis quickly offered to take Claudinel, along with three of the other boys Edvy, Santo (also known as Noula) and Altes Julien.



Claudinel is on the right with his cousins Noula and Altes

Shortly after agreeing to care for Claudinel and the three Julien children, Jean-Louis asked the Bishop of Hinche if he could rent some property from the Diocese so that he could open an orphanage. The Bishop agreed and in February of 2000, Maison Fortuné began in a small building in the Bois Verna section of Hinche. Edvy is now an apprentice carpenter (see above), and the other three boys, none of whom had previously been to school, are now doing very well in the campus primary school.

Development Corner: Have You Eaten Any Dirt Lately?

As strange as the question first sounds, it is a reality for many of the poorest Haitian people. The January 30th edition of the *Richmond Times Dispatch* ran an article titled "Haitians eat dirt as food costs soar." The article goes on to say that the poverty is so great in some parts of Haiti that people can't even afford a daily plate of rice.

Thanks to your generosity, this is not the case with the boys who live at Maison Fortuné. They receive not only daily nutritious meals, but also an excellent education. But just think for a minute where these children would be if Maison Fortuné did not exist. What would these children be eating? Dirt may definitely have been their only option.

Isn't it great to know that it is your generosity that stands between these young boys and crushing poverty!

Here's another question. Do you have any idea what you spent on restaurant meals last month? What about committing just two or three percent of the cost of those meals to increase what you are already giving to the boys at the orphanage?

In reality all of us who support the orphanage are the bridge in these children's lives between hope and hopelessness. Let us give and pray in such a way that these children will never have to eat dirt.

LETTER FROM BROTHER MICHAEL MCCARTHY

Brother Mike is a Xaverian confrere of Brother Harry Eccles, whom he recently visited at the orphanage on a break from his usual ministry in Croix des Bouquets.

I'm ending my second extended visit with Bro. Harry at Maison Fortuné since I arrived in Haiti in September. I enjoy so much the break from my life outside of Port-au-Prince, and I thank God for all the blessings I experience here:

- for the beauty of the billowing clouds gathering in the afternoon announcing the beginning of the rainy season and providing the opportunity for the people here in Hinche to begin their planting;
- for the faith of the people expressed in prayer, song and gesture as they gather for morning liturgy at the cathedral of Hinche;
- for the generator, the pump and abundant water here at the orphanage;
- for the energetic presence of the 100 residents here as they play, study and grow up together in the security of all that is provided to them each day;
- for the marvel of technology that connects John-Louis and the others with so many faithful Board members, visitors, and benefactors from various parts of the world;
- for the generosity of the Xaverian volunteers who are now planning for their missionary year here at Maison Fortuné beginning in July;
- for the faithful presence and example of Bro. Harry, who in his 80th year of life and 19th here in Haiti, inspires us all with his untiring dedication and service;
- for the presence of the Missionaries of Charity and their outreach to the elderly, sick and abandoned at their Azil in town.

I also dream of possessing a magic wand and having the ability to change many of the difficult realities I see here in Haiti.

- I'd return the now-barren mountains of this country into the former splendor of forested hills, thus stopping the serious erosion and the contamination of the rivers with earth and garbage.
- I'd create food banks and nutrition/parenting classes, thus eliminating the need for the second floor at the Azil that serves the severely malnourished and abandoned infants and toddlers.
- I'd create employment opportunities for the many very bright young people who live with little hope of developing their potential as productive, contributing citizens of this country.
- I'd open teacher training centers and flood the schools with creative, well supplied teachers who would challenge the naturally bright and curious youngsters here.
- I'd relieve the women of the heavy burden they carry in eking out a living to support their family's needs of food, clothing, tuition.
- I'd remedy the economic situation that is choking the people with rocketing increases in food and transportation prices. (In one month a sack of rice has increased from \$18 to \$31, and the orphanage requires 14 bags each week; gas in Hinche is now \$6 a gallon, and the generator consumes 30 gallons each week.)

Yes, Haiti is a contagious mixture of blessings and miseries, epitomized everyday in "National Geographic" snapshots of people struggling to survive in the harsh realities that make this country, once the Pearl of the Antilles, now the poorest in the Western Hemisphere. Maison Fortuné stands as a sign of hope, offering security and opportunity to over 100 boys, and very soon to a number of young girls.

HELP WANTED

The Foundation's Development Marketing Committee is looking for members who have marketing or public relations experience. If you have an interest in helping us think of new and creative ways to make our orphanage better known and supported, please call Richard Costello at 804-966-2022 or email him at rcostello@xaverianbrothers.org. For convenience of meetings, it would be best if you live in Eastern Virginia. This would be a great way to make a difference in the lives of others.

A WEEK IN GOD'S CLASSROOM

Michael Kassel, a member of the Church of St. Mark in Virginia Beach, recently visited the orphanage. Here is his report.

Over the past several years, I've thought of going to Haiti with my parish and wondered what it would be like. Would I get frustrated because I don't know Kreyòl, much less French? Not being able to communicate with someone would make for a long week, but I still wanted to go.

Deacon Mike Johnson, Katherine Felter (her second visit) and I left on the Monday after Easter, arriving at Maison Fortuné the next day. The same day we met the boys, we also made friends with Katrina and Ilse, Temple University medical students who were also there for several days. My initial acquaintance with the boys was awkward but I soon learned that the older boys knew English pretty well and soon found myself throwing a Frisbee with the boys.

I learned so much over the next several days. A typical day would begin with walking to the cathedral for Mass at 6:00 a.m. with our gracious host Brother Harry Eccles. It seemed appropriate that one of the readings that week was from Luke and told of the two travelers on the road to Emmaus. They finally recognized Jesus, and throughout the course of the week, I also recognized his presence with us in the scripture, the Eucharist and especially in the strangers we meet--although by the end of the week, I knew no strangers, only friends I hadn't met.

Every day was a "Where will I discover Jesus' presence today?" Even though I didn't know the language, it was a warm experience to have so many people come up and share the sign of peace with us at Mass. Our bond of friendship with the boys grew stronger every day as we played hopscotch, danced to music, played games and watched a movie. By the end of the week, some of the boys and I could do Cat's Cradle, the game where two people make shapes with string and pass them back and forth. They also showed me other tricks you can do with a piece of string.

Several times we went to the Azil, a home for abandoned babies run by Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. The toddlers always welcomed visitors, especially those who would pick them up or play "high five" with them. One day we played with them until it was time for Mass that day. They looked very nice in their white outfits and were well behaved as we waited for Mass to start in the hot chapel. The older children read the readings very well and the presider, Fr. Guency Isaac (whom we met earlier in the week along with Fr. Robert Michel and Fr. Jacques Volcius), spoke clearly so that I could understand a few of the words. When he welcomed us to the liturgy, he spoke in English, which I appreciated. I also enjoyed the tour he later gave us of the Eveché (Bishop's House).

The next day we came back to the Azil, and as we entered the courtyard, the toddlers that were in the chapel came running out to greet us, so excited to see us again. After this special moment and spending some time with them, we once again visited the babies that are battling malnutrition or illnesses. We did what we could to alleviate their discomfort while we were there. Sometimes, that could mean just holding them near a window to catch an occasional soft breeze or walking around cuddling them. For me, it was heart breaking to have to put them back in their cribs when it was time to go.

Toward the end of the week, Brother Mike McCarthy came to visit the orphanage and to stay with Brother Harry. One morning, Brother Mike treated us to pancakes, which we enjoyed. I also enjoyed Brother Harry's oatmeal, especially with the raisins.

Brother Harry teaches English to the boys during the week and several of us sat in on one of the classes. I enjoyed the dialogue, as the class would develop the sentences both in Kreyòl and English. The boys loved to have their picture taken and they especially loved wearing my hat in their pictures. The library was a great place to sit and draw pictures or read books. One boy enjoyed having me read a book that was in Kreyòl. I don't know if I was saying the words right, but he enjoyed it.

As the day to leave quickly approached, the boys continued to draw pictures for me and also started drawing pictures and writing things in the notebook I had brought. I exchanged my email address with several of them, in hopes of keeping in touch.

The day came for us to leave and we gave many hugs and said our good-byes. The whole time I was there I wondered whether my being there made a difference, since there wasn't anything that needed to be "done." Now I know a visitor's presence is much more important than doing. I learned so much from the unconditional love and warmth of the boys and

enjoyed sharing experiences at our meals during the day with Brothers Harry and Mike, Deacon Mike, Katrina, Ilse and Katherine.

Reading through my notebook on the journey home, I realized that the week had impacted the boys as well as us: one boy summed up his feelings with the statement "I am sorry because you will be go."

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27). I feel so privileged to have had an opportunity to be a part of "pure and undefiled religion."

MY REFLECTIONS

From Katherine Felter, also from St. Mark, we have this report.

I knew it would happen. Since I had been there before, I had concerns about being unable to translate my experience in Haiti to people I care about. Pictures do not do Haiti or its people justice. Ilse, a med student who was at Maison Fortuné with us, responded by quoting a Haitian saying, "What the eye does not see, the heart cannot feel." I don't know if this is true in all cases, but for now it seems applicable.

To a recent college graduate, seeker and lover of nature, Haiti was paradise. The lush greenery is tropical and relaxing, something I often dream of. Haiti teaches us so much. I was humbled many times in one day, walking past people just waiting: waiting for a job, waiting for someone to buy their goods or waiting for an opportunity to make enough money to fix the house or a buy a bamboo broom to clean the dust off the concrete floor. On many levels Haiti is very similar to other places in the world; people providing for their families, enjoying leisure time, playing sports and spending time with friends and family.

The language barrier was the hardest part about being in Haiti. I wanted to know what these people thought they needed, or hear firsthand experiences about their trials and tribulations. I had Noë, one of the older boys, around a lot to translate, and I learned so much from him about Maison Fortuné. Not only was he patient and kind to me, but with everyone, giving up a few hours of his day off to visit sick babies at the Azil with us.

It was difficult some days to go through the town of Hinche. A sense of guilt arises at the sight of how some people are living in Haiti on the same planet as people using super-speed computer systems. The electricity goes out at night and you must wait till morning to see light, but it was in the stillness of the night that I found that guilt or pity will not help Haitians or any other poor peoples, only kind love and compassion fueling action and organization.

It is difficult to remember when someone slights you, cuts you off in traffic or steals from you, the immense love that everyone possesses within and that many of the people who are harmful towards others are truly hurting within themselves. We need not overpower someone to help them, rather give them a hand for a moment and let individuals flourish. That is what Maison Fortuné is providing for many boys and soon young girls. Their studies are of the upmost importance to their rising to help Haiti heal and organize. I pray for this.

PENNSYLVANIA EVENTS BEING PLANNED

For several years now our wonderful supporters in western Pennsylvania have organized a golf tournament benefitting the Maison Fortuné Orphanage. This year's outing will take place on **Friday, July 18**. Some of our Virginia Board members are planning to attend this year, and we are thinking about having an event for non-golfers that weekend to bring together our friends in the Aliquippa, Monaca, and Beaver County area north of Pittsburgh.

We'll have more to report on that in the future, but if there are folks in that area who would be interested in helping plan some kind of get-together on either Friday night or Saturday, they could get in touch with the Foundation Secretary, Br. Cosmas Rubencamp, at 804-358-6210 or crubencamp@comcast.net.

MAISON FORTUNÉ ORPHANAGE, HINCHE, HAITI
INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP CONTRIBUTORS: 2007-2008

Listed below are the individuals & groups that contributed between July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008 to the day-to-day operating budget (food, clothing, salaries, furniture, etc.) or to the capital budget (for building construction), through the Haitian Ministry Commission of the Diocese of Richmond. We are most grateful; the orphanage could not survive without them.

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