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VOLUNTEER MINISTRIES IN HAITI

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

SOMETIMES MY E-MAIL efforts are like throwing a bottle in the water and hoping it gets through! Generator, satellite, and I have a hard time working together. My mailbox is full: some letters not opened, others not answered. For all of which I am heartily sorry.

MOST MEMORABLE IN OCTOBER was the absence of Br. Mike McCarthy and Jean-Louis. We "survived" but the tempo of life was different, and we're glad to have them both back. Usually we get the visitors; it was good to send some to you!

RIGHT NOW we're blessed to have Susan Schrack, Sandy Hearn and her son Brent with us. A veteran and two new fans! The day they arrived, Linda Goy, mother of the first Xaverian Volunteer, and her friend Peggy Howard left after a visit to Pandiassou, where Linda's son David is buried. (David died of cancer a few years after his year in Haiti, 1990-91.)

EARLIER IN OCTOBER, Greg and Elizabeth Mason visited us. Two veteran volunteers. Susan Pleasants and Kathy Faw, veteran health providers, came with new friends. It's never dull!

FOR ME, the school-year schedule has finally fallen into place with the reopening of St. Paul's Seminary, Pandiassou, where Br. Mike and I take turns teaching English twice a week. And something new here at Maison Fortuné: we've started having an evening library hour, especially for boys who want help with English. Still some touches needed on the schedules, but we are on the way.

ONCE AGAIN Br. Mike replaced me visiting the Sant Zaverien. I like going there, but I'm happy to share--and I'm slowing down. That doesn't mean stopping, but it has presented me with another avenue. Living at the orphanage has made me a frequent visitor to the Azil, Mother Teresa's Sisters' refuge for sick and malnourished children and older people. My focus is on the children, where my arrival is often greeted with a chorus of "Papa, Papa, Papa." Sisters and staff have tried to teach the kids to say "Frè Ari", but it doesn't work! On entering the ward I put my glasses in a safe place and then make the rounds for a

favorite activity, hand-slapping. They don't get tired of it, but they do have attractive alternatives. One is taking off my XBSS cap, trying it on, throwing it to each other, and hitting me with it. I'm defenseless because by then I have a group climbing all over me. Less active kids are happy just to be held and/or take a nap. It's an activity I fell into, and I'm glad I did. I invite you to look for a place where rent-a-grandparent can be good for you and for kids who are missing something we take for granted.

SPENDING TIME WITH THE weaker children isn't as exciting, but it is satisfying to see them responding to simple attention. Of course, the children are well cared for, but having a stuffed animal to play with is a nice extra, and the staff now brings me kids who need help in adapting.

MAY GOD RICHLY BLESS YOU who support our efforts to alleviate the problems of this country.

br_heccles@yahoo.com

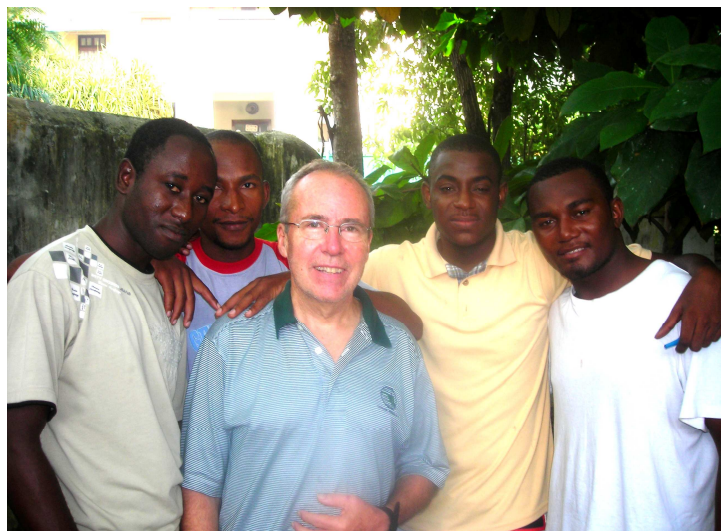
LETTER FROM BROTHER MICHAEL McCARTHY

Brother Mike lives with Brother Harry at Maison Fortuné Orphanage in Hinche and also shares responsibility with him for the Sant Zaverien in Port-au-Prince.

When a church school outside of Port-au-Prince collapsed in early November, resulting in the death of many students and the arrest of the pastor for neglecting proper engineering standards in the construction of the school, Haiti made world news for a third time—food riots and hurricane devastation being the first two. In such articles there is always a reference to Haiti's being the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. I was at the Sant Zaverien when the school tragedy took place, and I was reading the news on internet with Pierre-Louis Joizil, a Sant resident, who looked at me with painful eyes and asked, "Is Haiti really the poorest country in the world? Isn't there a country in Africa that is poorer than we are?" I was very taken by his question and readily felt his pain and perhaps embarrassment. How it must hurt to hear or read over and over that your country is so poor.

Joizil and I spent the next thirty minutes talking and researching facts about world poverty, global statistics,

learning about how many people live on less than one or two dollars a day (not just in Haiti), about how poverty is defined and eventually how such labels are given. He was amazed at the statistics we found on Haiti's economy, but was especially taken by the fact that only 30% of Haitians have access to proper sanitation; that life expectancy is 52; that the illiteracy rate is still a very high number and graduating from high school is the exception. He was startled to discover the number of infant deaths caused by diarrhea due to contaminated water.



Brother Michael McCarthy with the Sant Zaveryen leadership team: Joizil Pierre-Louis (coordinator), Ginel Mathieu (procurator), Chartelin Isaac (treasurer), and Jonas Elizier (housekeeping)

I felt we really connected as he turned to me and expressed his appreciation for the Brothers' leaving the States to come to Haiti to assist him and others in moving the country ahead. He then shared with me his own life dream: when he completes the university in 2010 he wants to return to his very rural community to build a high school so the students there don't have to walk for hours each day to complete their high school education. He looked at me again with those big eyes, this time not filled with embarrassment but pride, and said, "Once I build that school, I will be free to die. I will have made my contribution to my community and my country. My life will have had a meaning."

My heart swelled with awe at this young man who will eventually put his education into practice in his home town; I felt his dedication and passion. I felt much affirmed in our commitment to sponsor the Sant and give Pierre-Louis Joizil and thirteen other Haitian young men the opportunity to further their dream for their country, and perhaps begin its journey out of the economic base-ment of our hemisphere.

LETTER FROM PIERRE-LOUIS JOIZIL

And here is a letter from Joizil himself from the Sant Zaveryen, a community setting for young men studying at universities in Port-au-Prince.

I am from the village of Fontaine near Pignon, and I am studying business administration. This is my third year at the Xaverian Center.

This year Haiti has known a very difficult life: cyclones, drought, famine, black destitution. We had three cyclones in a short time and a lot of people died. Animals, trees, houses have been destroyed specially in Gonaives, Les Cayes, Arcahaie, and Jacmel. Because of this situation, the schools could not start in September, but most of them opened on October 6th. But even now there are some children who cannot go to school because of money. This year life became more difficult because most people in Haiti waited for the rain to plant or to harvest but we had a terrible drought, and life becomes very, very expensive. The cost of living is going up from day to day. We do not have enough words to explain the situation. Only God can do some things.

In April we bought a big sack or bag of rice for H\$ 280. Now you need H\$ 600 to buy it, and it is the same for everything. The young seem to have almost lost hope. Everybody is asking where life will go.

We know the life is not easy in USA too but we know that you are never discouraged from helping us. So we thank you a lot for your generosity. We think with us Haiti may have a chance, and as the Bible says we receive freely so we have to give freely. We are hoping to contribute to the change our country needs.

We are fourteen young men in the house, and we have a team or a little group to lead this house under Br. Harry and Br. Mike. I am a coordinator of the house and I am a member of a group we call University Pastoral, which is led by Father Andre, a French priest. What does University Pastoral do? We work in social service, human training and religious training. We have already built about 150 houses for poor people in the Cité Soleil area and in Croix des Bouquets. I left Port-au-Prince on October 17th for a pastoral visit to the Dominican Republic in order to share our experience with some Dominican youth who are members of a Dominican University Pastoral, with whom we have a relationship.

I hope to finish in two years, and my principal idea is to go back to Fontaine and Matabonite to try to change the life of people in these towns. I will continue to work with Gaby Thélus in Matabonite and also with Father Carlo in Pignon to improve the situation of people who live in those areas.

We thank you a lot for your help and we hope you continue to do your best to take care of us. Seriously, as Br. Harry wants, you may believe in us because the money that you are spending won't be lost because we will collaborate to change our country. We love you all.

I also have many friends here who support me a lot: Withny Mondelus and his wife Enise, Veniel Saintus, Emanio Joizil and my brother Daniel Joizil. A word of thanks for all of them!