



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

FOR MY PART, the time since my last letter was more than filled with people and activities. Yes, the holiday season was full, as full as a Christmas stocking! After my Xaverian confreres left [see Br. Mike's letter below], there were two groups of visitors: parishioners from the churches of St. Mark, Virginia Beach, and St. Thérèse, Chesapeake, Virginia. Old friends like Father Jim Griffin, and enough new ones to keep me confused! The fact that they were almost always in motion didn't make the tracking any easier. It was delightful to see how quickly old-timers and boys re-connected!

BESIDES SPENDING lots of time with the boys, the visitors rolled up their sleeves to help out. One result is that we now have a "sand pit" for the smallest of the boys. There was already some sand left from construction, and the little ones were making it their "turf." The new pit is larger, but not luxurious. Well worth the blisters the guys got!

ANOTHER CHANGE: We now have a handsome black and white cat, Noose, so named because we tied her up for security during orientation.

MORE VISITORS on the way, and with them we hope to add Skype to our computer features. If you don't Skype, ask your grandchildren to explain! The technology baffles me too! Which reminds me: why do we say "grand" children? Because someone else changes their diapers, etc.

THE LIST OF CHRISTMAS BLESSINGS is long, but some samples: M&Ms (very popular with kids of all ages--and here we don't eat them by the handful!), seeds, books, photos of my "kids" and their kids too. A visit from the Missionaries of Charity to help the boys celebrate with Mass and with a banquet--that was not the only reminder we had that Christmas is God's gift to us, a divine gift. A truly blessed time.

INVISIBLE GIFTS, too, ones we don't recognize and would prefer not to receive. I'm speaking of the *Sant Zaveryen* now. An \$850-bill for a new inverter (to change solar energy into electric light). Ours was so old that replacement parts were not possible.

THREE OF THE STUDENTS living at the Sant lost a significant part of their support. (When we accept a student, we know how much, if anything, family and friends can help, but things change). Added to that is the scary rise in costs. With all that, we are continuing because sometimes a surprise gift comes our way!

WE ALSO SUFFERED THE LOSS Of one of our non-resident Sant students, Pierre Ernest. His death was sudden and unexplained-- he took sick suddenly and died the next day, not an unusual ending in Haiti, where life is tenuous. We helped with his funeral expenses as we had with his school costs. A "Potters for Peace" family who were here some years back introduced him as a worthy candidate for help. He was in primary school then (2002) and I continued to help him, and then his younger brother. He was a good adjunct member of the Sant. May he rest in peace.

YES, WITH GOD we can and do survive problems great and small, and we know that we have much -- and many people--to be grateful for. We have reason to celebrate! Join us, please!

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LETTER FROM CAMIL CANES

We continue with our series of letters from the young men who either are currently living at the Sant Zaveryen (Xaverian Center) in Port-au-Prince, or did live there while studying at one of the local universities or professional schools.

Hello to all of you our friends in the U.S. who have a fervent desire to help to improve conditions of life in many little countries that are really needy, especially Haiti, by providing help to students who aren't able to go the university after finishing their secondary school.

I have been a resident of Xaverian Center since August 2004. I am in my fourth year studying electrical-mechanical engineering in the Applied Sciences Faculty of the State University of Haiti. Before coming to the Xaverian Center I studied English in the "Peoples' University of Pandiassou", where Brother Harry was the English teacher. When I spoke to him about the problem of my studying at the state university, he made it possible for me to come to the Xaverian Center, where we do things by ourselves, like cooking, washing, cleaning up and so on--things I was able to do before I came. The most important thing in the Center, however, is the prayer every morning.

I am from Hinche. In a family of eight members, I'm the third child. My mother died in '98 and my oldest brother died in '05. I am a member of a Baptist church and sing in my church choir and belong to a singing group in the church. I worked as volunteer with the orphans for one year at the Maison Fortuné Orphanage, where I helped the kids understand better their subjects, taught them what the Bible is, cut their hair, sang, spoke English with them, played with them and so on. Really that was a very good experience for me to understand people better.

Every year in Haiti thousands of pupils graduate from secondary schools, are successful in the state exams and ready to go to the university or to professional schools so that they can serve their community, their family and themselves too. Unfortunately the lack of space at the state university and professional schools makes many of those pupils who don't have this opportunity suffer in different ways.

For instance, they have to do what they didn't desire like working land that isn't fertile enough to bear fruit, or stay home almost every day playing all kinds of games. Sometimes that even makes them enter into an undesirable marriage. So, you can imagine how their situation is! This problem shows how lucky we are who benefit from the advantage of living in the Xaverian Center where we share a Christian community life while receiving a university education so that we can go back home to work in development and to have opportunity to work for the resolution of our country's problems. This is a special blessing from God for each one of us in the Center. The Xaverian community works to rebuild Haiti.

We appreciate and are encouraged by the work that has already improved and continues to improve many lives. So, we're praying and working very hard to have more than one center for young people for a better and a more beautiful life by loving, sharing, respecting, and working. May the blessing of God be on you all.

LETTER FROM BROTHER MICHAEL McCARTHY

From time to time Brother Harry mentions the other Xaverians in Haiti this year—Brothers Vincent Ilungo, Joseph Ngoie and Michael McCarthy. Br. Mike writes from Hinche, where all four spent Christmas.

As the sun greets the new days this week, ox-drawn carts, horses and donkeys crowd the streets juggling for space with the many bicycles and motorcycle taxis. All are heading for the market, where there is much activity and noise as everyone anticipates the holiday. Schools are out, and overly-crowded buses arrive from Port-au-Prince bringing holiday visitors.

Today, the tropical sun quickly warms the day and again reminds me that Christmas 2007 here in Haiti is far removed from most of the others I have celebrated throughout my life. How incongruous some of the traditional carols sound here in Haiti with all the references to a "white" Christmas, sleigh bells ringing, chestnuts roasting, etc. This year I'm celebrating Christmas at the orphanage with Brothers Harry, Vincent and Joseph. Today is Sunday the 23rd, and the "church" today consisted of classroom benches, assembled under the two gigantic mango trees next to the dining room. Paper garlands and multicolored balloons replace the traditional poinsettia plants; a real donkey replaces the plaster one I'm so used to seeing in crèche scenes. The kids, dressed in their best, many sporting new shoes, eagerly await the priest's arrival for our liturgy, followed by some holiday treats supplied by two of the Missionaries of Charity, who in their saris so resemble artists' rendering of Mary arriving on a donkey in Bethlehem two thousand years ago.

Christmas scenes this year are different for me, but I pray the message of this graced season is the same wherever it is remembered: God is with us and invites us to incarnate in our times--no matter where our life-journey takes us--the compassionate and peace-filled presence that the birth of Jesus promises.



Sister Leah and one of her helpers who brought Christmas treats for the children at Maison Fortuné orphanage

FROM THE EDITOR

Just before this newsletter went to press, Br. Harry forwarded, with his endorsement, the following request from two of the young men at the Sant, including Camil Canes:

"During the Easter vacation, we, Accilien Gelin and Camil Canes, students at the Xaverian Center, have opportunity to attend a seminar of formation that will last four days in the Dominican Republic. The seminar will cover:

- SYSTEMATIZATION IN MANAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS (*systematization en gestion de projet de developpement communautaire*)
- STRATEGIC PLANNING (*planification strategique*)
- ORGANISATIONAL REINFORCEMENT.

"There will be other interesting activities like visiting some special projects.

"But, in order for us to take part in this program, which will help us know more and share with the other when we're back, we need \$1,500.

"We hope that will please you and interest you in helping us to participate.

"Thanks for your help. God bless you."

If any of our readers can help these young men attend this seminar, please mark your gift in the note line Seminar Support and send it in the enclosed envelope.