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VOLUNTEER MINISTRIES IN HAITI

January 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

A HAPPY (BLESSED) AND HOPEFUL NEW YEAR to you!

BROTHER MIKE McCARTHY is in Pandiassou for an overnight retreat with the "God Squad", his team of young men who work hard and creatively to maintain a Christian spirit at Maison Fortuné. Bro. Mike's presence has been a great gift to all of here, but especially to me.

GOD NEVER TIRES of blessing me! A few minutes ago, Camil Canes, an engineering student living at the Sant Zaveryen, stopped for a chat before he returns to the Sant [Editor's Note: see a letter from Camil below]. Earlier, Jozie Zephyr, a now pharmacist thanks to the Sant, came by for a visit. Before that, Gabi Thelus and Shane Barrett paid a surprise visit. Gabi is the "dynamo" of Matabonite who studied at Virginia Tech. Shane is another Hokie, and he is spending the year working at Matabonite. Energizers like these are more potent than vitamin C!

I'D LIKE TO SHARE ANOTHER ENERGY SOURCE WITH YOU. A good friend recently sent me a copy of Engaged Spirituality by Joseph Nangle OFM (Orbis). It's a readable and powerful reflection on the Gospel for our times. Bro. Mike and I are using it and a similar book, Unexpected News by Robert McAfee Brown, (Westminster) to spark our daily prayer with the Gospel. We are finding these readings a stimulating mix. Try it!!

LAST MONTH I VISITED the Sant Zaveryen, and this month Bro. Mike will spend time with the students individually and as a group, joining in their daily prayer, and paying the bills. It is a great encouragement and energizer to us that your generosity has kept pace with rising--always rising--expenses. We realize that these are not the best of times, and we ask God's blessings on your generosity, your sacrifices. Of course, the cost of living in Haiti is low compared to the States, but the fourteen residents and more than that number of externs do strain our finances.

NO WAY am I going to remember all that I'd like to say, but let me give it a shot: Nick McCann married Rya Naylor on January 3. Nick was a volunteer here in 2006-07. Katie Gordon returned to the States after five months of distinguished service here. We all, especially the smaller boys, miss her and thank her for her work and presence. Deacon Mike Johnson from St. Mark parish in Virginia Beach, and a former college roommate of his, Cam Thornton, spent a good visit, with time at Maison Fortuné and at the Azil. Susan Schrack and Susan Pleasants, frequent visitors, were also here since I last wrote, as were other friends, Linda Jaglowski and Fr. Robert Cummins, pastor of the Church of St. Thérèse in Chesapeake, Virginia.

NOOSE has been on mouse patrol for a year now. Two months ago she presented us with two kittens. I've taken to shuffling rather than walking, but the critters can be entertaining. The kittens will move on soon.

BRO. MIKE AND I are regular visitors at the Azil, and we find it a good balance to our life here

with healthy, lively boys. I make my visits to the children's ward, where hand-slapping is the big game. There are others, and sometimes it is only a matter of holding a listless child. This is very rewarding when one of them perks up, smiles, and interacts with the others. At the other end of the spectrum, Bro. Mike and I have added extra English classes during the Christmas break. Some sessions for the residents and others for local students. The time with them is "Teacher Appreciation Time."

POLITICAL UPDATE: All the Haitians I know were excited about the US election results. Some are less than thrilled by what they see as the UN "occupation" here.

BEFORE THE GENERATOR goes off, thank you for being part of our experience in Haiti. My God bless us all!

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LETTER FROM CAMIL CANES

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.

It's always great to have the opportunity to develop our ability of writing. Each time we write you we want to let you know something of what is happening in Haiti, especially at the Xaverian Center.

This year is my last school year before getting ready to develop my project and finally to be an engineer in electromechanics. Since all that is because of your support, I give thanks to you for making this possible.

Sincerely, we appreciate and encourage the strong willingness you have to help. In spite of the economic problems that have had an important impact over your whole country, you always are thinking about Haiti and especially of

us in the Center, in our professional studies. So, we want to assure you that this investment will continue to bear fruit as it has before. The examples are those who were before us--for instance, Dr. Belimaire who is serving the people in the area of health care with the organization Medecins sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders); Dr. Johny in the Artibonite; Thomas Prophil, an officer with Fonkoze (a micro-credit service to improve the living condition of many market women and many families throughout our whole country); and many others who are serving the country in different fields. So, you have done much very good work.

I think that you know the difficult situation that our country is facing now, how we have been hit by about three hurricanes that devastated a part of the country where hundreds of houses have been destroyed, people lost their goods, and hundreds of persons died. Those cities are almost unlivable and many parents are unable to send their children at school. This constitutes an important waste to the country and even increases the rate of poverty. We acknowledge you who were always with us during those difficult moments. God bless you.

I believe that you are informed about an event that happened in the country in November when a school collapsed at 9:00 a.m. during the school day. That was really a sad event: about ninety-one pupils died and hundreds were injured gravely. Some parents lost more than one child and some of the parents even had the intention to kill themselves. So, you can understand how hard the situation in the country is.

I congratulate you for the intelligent choice you have done when you chose Obama to be the President of the United States. We hope that with him things will change.

The peace of God be with you.