



VMH

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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

Brother Harry has been having internet connectivity problems as we go to press, so we will not be hearing from him in this issue. He's fine, though. We do have letters from Xaverian Volunteer Katie Gordon and Sant Zaveryen resident and medical student Martineau Isaac.

LETTER FROM KATIE GORDON

Since the last time I wrote, much has happened. The start of school was the most exciting new event and has brought a different scene to the orphanage. The first day of school was complete chaos but a lot of fun. All of the Catholic schools went to the local Cathedral for the Start-of-School Mass. By the time our crowd got there the Cathedral was so full that Brother Mike and I had to stand outside with most of the boys—no room inside for us! After all the chaos and excitement to get everyone ready for the Mass and the first day of school, there wasn't even any school after the Mass! Nevertheless, the excitement for school continued, and the boys and girls are studying all the time. It is amazing to me to see how important school is to them and how hard the boys study, especially the older boys (I never studied that much when I was in high school).

The boys that attend St. Martin secondary school have "club" every night and friends from school are allowed to come over and have study sessions. Every week each grade goes back to school two or three days in the afternoon (in addition to the normal morning school time, 7am-1pm), and each grade has a test each week in different subjects such as Spanish, English, French grammar/literature, Kreyòl literature, chemistry, biology, physics, algebra, calculus, etc.

Here at the orphanage our primary school is doing a

great job with the younger boys and girls, including the approximately 120+ students that come to our school from outside the orphanage. School begins at 8am and, with recess and a midday meal, they finally finish at 1pm. I have picked up a few more activities to help out with during school including helping the pre-school teacher a couple of days a week, running the library time (with help from Frenèl, our activities director), and helping out the computer teacher. I enjoy all of these activities and it gives me an amazing chance to learn many new things about Haiti.

I am still continuing to work on the other activities that have occupied most of my time before the start of school such as working in the clinic here on the campus fixing up boo-boos and acting somewhat as a case manager, keeping up the budget, and continuously trying to sort out biographies of the boys and help out with anything that our sponsors in the States may need. Most importantly, I still spend much of my time playing with the youngsters and helping kids with English, or other school subjects that I know. My love for the boys and girls here has grown much and I have gotten to know so many different things about the kids and what life in Haiti is like. The kids have brought a special new light to my life that I would not be able to have found anywhere else this year.

I have also had the wonderful opportunity of getting to know employees of Zanmi Lasante/Partners in Health who work at the local hospital. Dr. Cruff, the physician who helps out with any health needs for our kids, has been a tremendous help. I am still learning how to manage the health (past, present and future) of about 130 kids, and it is not an easy task. I have hours that I allow the clinic to be open, but as soon as one kid sees the door open the word is out and everyone has a problem. Sometimes it's as simple as a stubbed toe or being hit by the soccer ball, but at times it can be as complicated as a persistent cough or a high fever and night shivers.

In early October, during one of Susan Pleasants' visits, I had the opportunity to help out the Zanmi Lasante social work team put together resettlement packages for the patients who were most affected by the flood.

It was a lot of fun putting the packages together, but a lot of chaos on the day we handed them out. There were many people who wanted something from us, but we only had a limited amount for the certain people who were on our list. It was hard to see so many suffering and not being able to do something for everyone.

During this activity I met Kate Oswald, an employee of Zanmi Lasante, who has lived in Haiti for almost two years. She is close to my age and holds a job similar to one that I hope to find someday. It has been a blessing to find a girl to chat with and share some experiences in Haiti. We are working on finding more time for me to come up to the hospital and help with different social work programs and organizing community health activities. It will be a great experience for me and something that I look most forward to. During this time in Haiti I have begun to think more about continuing my studies in public health.

I also have an even greater respect for the Sisters at the Azil, a home run by Mother Teresa's Sisters, the Missionaries of Charity. They have beds for children and adults and also run a clinic once a week where people from outside can come in and get medicine. I decided that I wanted to try and help them out with their clinic day. The second week I was there for only an hour before I ended up overwhelmed. In Haiti, using the phrase "I'm sick" can mean something as small as a little blister or as big as constant fever and pain. People always want to take medicine for the smallest things, and that is not always good. During clinic time at the Azil, the patients will tell you what they or their children have and you just pick a medicine to give them. Now, I am definitely not a doctor! I have learned a lot from running the clinic at the orphanage but not enough to just randomly pick what medicine to give someone, especially an antibiotic. On top of that many of the people were telling me stories about the child such as, "His mom is dead and I'm his aunt and I don't have enough food for him." It's overwhelming to hear a story like that over and over again, the people looking at you with a lost face and hopeful eyes, trusting that you will give them the answer to their problems. Finally, I had to tell the Sisters that I didn't think I could handle clinic work, but would continue to come to visit the children and play with them. I also told them that I was not sure how they do this job every day and that I really respect and congratulate them. I hope that God continues to bless them with the ability to do all that they do for the people.

The year continues to be successful and always filled with things to do as the day moves on. I cannot believe that November is halfway through and that before I know it I will be visiting my family for the holidays. We have many different groups coming for visits during November and December, so it will be quite busy.

I would like to continue to thank those that support our volunteer program and have given me the opportunity to spend my year here. I hope you realize how important is your support for the Xaverian Brothers Volunteer Program and for Brother Harry's ministries.

LETTER FROM MARTINEAU ISAAC

We continue with our series of letters from young men living at the Sant Zaveryen in Port-au-Prince, a community setting for young men studying at universities in Port-au-Prince. Brother Harry is its director, and spends four days a month there.

I am a 25 year-old young man, the oldest of my family. My parents are from the southeast of the country, but now they live at La Plaine, near Port-au-Prince.

I studied at Louverture-Cleary School (LCS) for six years and now I am a medical student at the Université Notre Dame d'Haiti, and am in the sixth year, the last year before I enter the internship.

Life in the Sant is not too different from life in LCS. In LCS we used to clean our rooms, the classrooms, the library, and we also did community service (helping people in the neighborhood learn how to read and write). However, we didn't cook; this is the big difference. In the Sant we have prayer early in the morning and practice English while we are eating and also in the house so that we can improve our English. Prayer and community service are the main programs of the Sant. Prayer helps us to grow spiritually, to have a good relationship with God, and it also helps us to be a model in the house and in the university.

What about community services? I remember when I was at LCS we had a motto: "We receive freely, so we need to give freely" from Matthew's Gospel. This is why each Sunday afternoon we forget our studies and other activities to help young people in the neighborhood in math, physics, chemistry and biology, and also help sick children in the orphanage next to us.

After my studies I would like to help my country to become healthy. Most Haitians don't have the opportunity to go to the hospital to be helped; they have to drink tea or see a traditional doctor. This is why I have a project with four other LCS medical students to build a medical complex to serve sick people and those who are not able to eat before taking medicine. The idea is good, the project is huge, and the results will be perfect—but we will need help for this project, which we are working hard to complete in four years.

I want to thank you for your help in Haiti and for the way you are helping in education. May God bless you and America.