

EDITORIAL

La Salette

VISION & MISSION



By Fr. Thomas Vellappallil, ms Vol 15-2012# 8

Dear Co-missioners,

By publishing the second part of the journal of Fr. Joe Gosselin, MS in this issue, we will be concluding the report on Haiti. Thanks to Fr. Joe for his valuable contribution. The pictures published in this newsletter are taken during his recent visits to Haiti. It is certainly an eye opener when we dig deeper in to the current issues and dark realities of Haitian life after the earthquake of 2010. According to the statistics, 316,000 people died in that disaster and 1.8 million people are left homeless. 70% of the people in Haiti are unemployed and 90% of the people live in abject poverty. There are thousands of children and child-slaves who are abused and thrown out into the streets with no money, no education, no friends and oftentimes no families to belong to. Who can instill hope in their lives? They too are part of our growing human family. I believe every child born into this world deserves a future. I can only admire the work of the two La Salette missionaries who are making progress in building a school for those children who are left alone. I wish them well and pray for the success of everyone who is engaged in rebuilding Haiti torn apart by this tragedy.



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JOURNAL #4

The first time one visits a local public market (held twice a week here) one wonders “How can this possibly work?” It just looks so chaotic on the surface. Picture the scene.....farmers, men and women, from all over tarnation coming in on foot, many balancing heavy loads on their heads, some on donkeys, on motor bikes with up to four on each....., many piled on trucks, then squatting on tiny market spaces of real estate, surrounded with mounds of rice, vegetables, meats, fish, you name it, nothing shrink wrapped of course and food competing with sales of all manner of books, clothing, shoe's, etc., people elbowing each other.... hot..humid... aromas that challenge you Well you get the idea. But know it really works.....Commerce happens: capitalism thrives.....as people meet, talk loudly, argue, laugh, trade gossip, bargain and connect with each other even when all know what the bottom line is. Quite a sight!

A COOL MILLION, FROM OUR LADY OF THE CAPE PARISH

Fr. Baris, pastor of Our Lady of the Cape parish in Brewster visited here a few weeks ago with four or his people. They came to renew their bonds of friendship with a number of local people and have a look-see as to how their financial gifts were being used here in Marchand-Dessalines.

They are continually impressed with how well their generosity is being marshaled against need. In the past nine years Fr. Bernie estimates that the parish has raised an estimated one million dollars. Quite impressive for one parish!



VOODOO

Just about all of us associate Voodooism with Haiti. There is a lot of truth to that. Here in our town of Marchand-Dessalines it is flourishing. Sunday afternoons they parade in force. Two groups were out yesterday. They sing, dance, play instruments and stop within yards of our compound. It is ear-blasting, but for a visitor totally spell (no pun intended) binding. The religion itself is very complicated.....a mixture of African belief and Catholicism. I would not attempt to explain more than that and refer you instead to Wikipedia.

CEMETERIES

Haitians have a tremendous respect for their dead. Funerals are often lavish, paid for in part by Haitians living outside of Haiti (two or three million depending on who is counting). Each town has a cemetery with elaborate structures built cheek to jowl to each other. They are fascinating to walk through. No one I know here though would ever walk through them at night. Would you believe that sometimes I tease them about that inviting them to join me in visiting them at night. No takers yet!

LA SALETTE MISSIONARIES

Two Malagasy (from Madagascar) La Salette Missionary priests have reopened an abandoned parish roughly an hour from here. Two more may join them this year. A hundred years ago our French priests landed in Madagascar to evangelize. And now the native priests have become evangelizers themselves. And so the wheel turns. In our Western, ever more secularized world, the number of priests has dropped sharply; but overall, world-wide, the number has grown 78% in the past quarter century to roughly over 450,000.

MY FIRST HAITIAN CREOLE SERMON

It was meant to be last Sunday. It was the Feast Day of St. Joseph, the patron saint of one of the Mission Chapels, some five miles away. But when I saw the very, very large crowd gathered for the Mass I bravely chickened out and gave it in French with a sprinkling of Creole. By the way the Mass lasted well over two hours. Dull? Anything but, with drums, dancers, music, colorful decorations: the heartbeat of a people who know how to celebrate. Believe it or not, not having watches can be a blessing.

AND SO LIFE GOES ON

Visiting the sick, walking the streets, counseling youth, being fascinated by Soccer that every Haitian male plays well into their twenties, people-watching, taking pictures, reading books and well researched papers on Haitian culture, attempting to learn Creole, seeing how these good people cope with a history, politics, foreign military interventions,



military coup-d'etats, being falsely maligned as a country (no they did not start the AIDS epidemic) and nature that have been pretty mean to them over many, many decades. To know them is to love and admire them their unbelievable resiliency.

JOURNAL #5

STATE CHURCHES ARE NOT ALL WHAT THEY ARE CRACKED UP TO BE

It would come as a surprise to most of you as it did to me, that Catholicism is the quasi state religion of Haiti. Now that sounds like a pretty cushy little situation. Well, not quite. For instance since our parish Church here has historical value and with two hundred year old walls buckling, the government has torn it down and is replacing it with an earthquake resistant one. Any expansion (which there was) was to be paid for by the Church. So far O.K. but then with the slightest shift in political winds, ongoing construction funding was suspended, and that happened. Stay tuned it's far from finished. And then inconvenient problems pop up such as the time Papa Doc decided, when the Jesuit priests were vocally and forcefully opposing his tyrannical reign, to unceremoniously boot them out of the country into exile. Whoever pays the piper calls the tune.....

WHAT KIND OF HOME DO YOU LIVE IN?

I live in a good one, even here. But in town there are perhaps a couple of dozens of really nice homes that you would feel comfortable in. Most of you would consider the majority of them shacks at best. And a good many are essentially hovels.

Most are made of cement blocks with some type of steel door. Few, if any, have screens. And dust is everywhere. But however modest a home may be to you and me it is a home that means a lot to someone. These are places where people have a sense of security and family wellbeing. Almost without exception Haitians have pride and valiantly try to maintain them as cleanly as humanly possible. I admire their grit. Due to social factors that I really don't pretend to know much about, many, many families are blended, with many, many missing one of the two parents. Many young men grow up without the benefit of a father present. Tough, real tough! Talk about the father-wound!



You could continue your support of our Missions by including them in your will.

Should you wish to do so, our legal title is:

North American La Salette Mission Center, Inc.