
HAITI NEWS

SISTER PARISHES - ARLINGTON, CAVAILLON, GROS MARIN

St. Charles Catholic Church

The Rev. Gerard Creedon, Pastor

March 2000

First Impressions

Cavaillon, Gros Marin 2000

It was the first visit to Haiti for several members of the Haiti Ministry visiting our sister parishes this year. Here are some of their impressions:

Beauty, Hope, Poverty, Despair

It is well before dawn but I am awakened by the singing and chattering of those on the road below. Adults and children alike are loading from the side of the country byway onto an already overcrowded tap-tap [brightly decorated but usually rickety truck or bus] that will take some to work, and others to school. Most will not return till well past dusk.

This being the beginning of my third day on my pilgrimage to Haiti, I find the country full of congruous observations and dedicated people doing best they can under the circumstances.

We are residing in Father Jocelyn's rectory, which sits on a hill nestled among the trees above Cavaillon. Large and comfortable quarters by Haitian standards, yet there is no running water, sporadic electricity, and little privacy.

The morning light accentuates the tile-brick

streets and little houses in the town below. Cavaillon is a peaceful, picturesque town. On the other hand one is confronted with pervasive poverty when walking through the town's market and through the countryside.

Most in the town have little material wealth, but the school children are dressed in freshly starch, pearly-white uniforms. In some areas the land produces a cornucopia of food, in other areas the land is as barren as a desert....

So it goes with Haiti. It is a time of renewed hope and a time of frustrating despair. My hope is that peace, faith, and optimism found in the Haitian people can carry them over the barriers to prosperity they face each day.

Jeff Gering

Building Community Leadership

I will always think of Haiti as a land of contrasts--beautiful vistas of and blue skies, and yet one of the poorest places I've ever seen. Seeing truly joyful smiles on the faces of people who may have little reason to smile in their day to day lives.

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Haiti First Impressions

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Visiting a village church with holes in the roof down a dusty, rough road, and being amazed that every child has a perfectly white shirt, immaculate school uniform and the girls have matching ribbons in their hair.

When you hear about the parishes of Gros Marin and Cavaillon, it is hard to get a picture of what the actual needs are, or what has been accomplished.

I found that the process itself is part of the accomplishment in the partnerships formed among these sister parishes in Haiti and the US. The ability and willingness of a community to form a committee and report on progress or challenges is a sign that the contributions made by St. Charles and St. Anthony's are part of an effort that is truly owned by the community, and not just continuing a cycle of dependence.

In Flamand, the American visitors met with the committee to build the clinic, and discussed freely the needs for additional funding and the priorities that led to a decision not to give it. Then, the group met with several local merchants who want to develop a cooperative bank, and were able to begin the discussion and identify the next steps to making that a reality.

In L'Oiseau, community leaders provided a detailed report on the status of a road for which funds were donated, the money spent to assess the actual costs, and the plan for the next year.

Although in the case of the clinic and the road, the projects are not where expected by either group, it is important to see that there is movement forward and accountability in the system. And that communication is vital to these relationships.

Leslie Dunne

Barrette Impressions

Brian Meets St. Charles Sponsored Students

We visited Barette School mid-morning with the classes in session. From the outside they seemed loud but not rowdy. As the younger children yelled ordinal numbers in unison the method dawned on me. Children like to yell so why not channel the youthful exuberance into the learning process.

They were quiet, of course, as the foreigners toured their classes. The instructor would tell who were and where we were from and then we gave out packets of M&Ms as they sat passively in their seats.

Later the entire school gathered for an assembly in the church. I asked to see a couple individual students, one I sponsor and one sponsored by neighborhood B. Francis, my boy, was a bit shy and it was all I could do to get a word out of him. After I asked her if she had pens, pencils and notebooks, Tanosky, neighborhood B's girl, responded that she did.

Indeed the classrooms were spare but there seemed to be enough material to run them. All the children I spoke with said they liked school. Considering their alternatives, it's obvious that they'd prefer being in a classroom.

Brian Francis

St. Charles Catholic Church
3304 N. Washington Blvd.
Arlington, Virginia 22201
703-527-5500 www.stcharleschurch.org

If you would like to find out more about the Haiti Committee, please call one of the following individuals:

Brian Francis (703) 812-8656
 Linda Hill (703) 521-7623
 Josephine Lee (703) 522-5320

Fr. Creedon Plays Wedding "Godfather"

I first met Antonine when our St Charles Group visited Flamand in the parish of Cavaillon. Antonine was the treasurer-secretary of the community committee in charge of the clinic.

I was happy when this intelligent, not unattractive young Haitian woman, wanted to serve as my guide on the trek to L'Oiseau. I had used my high-school French for a month with the Mission de France as a deacon in Angouleme 30 years ago. However Antonine brought back words I had forgotten as she explained the flowers and the community of that enchanting island. With that language of the heart in common we soon extended to one another the hand of friendship.

But there is often a price for friendship I learned, as I listened to her plans to do an accounting degree. I checked it out with Pere Jocelyn and found I could offer a year's graduate education in accounting for less than half a month of a priest's big salary.

On the second visit she shared her hopes to marry Ginius who taught with her in Cavaillon. I was invited to meet her mother. Her father had died long ago. I received a hand-embroidered shirt that joined St Charles and the parish of Notre Dame. Jocelyn advised me on his visit here that I was under consideration as Antonine's "Parain" for the wedding.

Little did I know the implications of a word that translated as Godfather, with the role of "giving away the bride". There was great music, dance and sermonizing

by Pere Jocelyn. Little girls in flowing dresses held flowers aloft as they danced for God through the eucharistic prayer.

After the ceremony, the groom stood to thank me! And to advise me that the community expects me to fix the hole in the Chapel roof. As he handed me the text, I recognized Antonine's script!

Later I discovered that the whole chapel needed renovation at an estimated cost of 15,000 US dollars. I was invited to speak. However I maintained a level of abstraction on the romantic occasion that did not include leaky roofs. I would not touch that one till I discussed the matter with our Haiti Committee!

The next duty of the Parain was to chauffeur the bridal party to the reception. There a repast for royalty was laid out. After further lengthy proclamations on the nature of marriage by the civil authorities, I was ushered to the repast by my co-mere, the godmother.

She advised me to pile up a plate of assorted delicacies. When I asked if this was for the bridal couple, she pointed to myself, picked up an empty plate and spoon and guided me to the Matrimonial Bed where she seated herself. I shared the plate with my co-mere in a situation of close proximity. It seemed that I had become an intimate part of an extended family, cemented by another gift of money! *L'espoir de l'église est l'amour.*

Gerard Creedon

So Much Done, So Many Needs...

Over the past decade, the St. Charles Haiti ministry has done much to help the people of Cavaillon and Gros Marin build better conditions. St. Charles' monthly tithe helps both parishes to maintain their facilities, provide leadership for 24 village chapels, and meet other ongoing needs. In the past few years, the parishioners of St. Anthony's have helped Gros Marin, a new parish created from the original larger parish of Cavaillon.

Education

St. Charles parishioners sponsor children in the village of Barrette, allowing them to attend school. St. Anthony's parishioners sponsor school children in Gros Marin. These programs have been so successful that Fr. Jocelyn Musellier in Cavaillon asked us to expand this ministry to children from the equally poor village of Boileau.

Donations from St. Charles and St. Anthony's built the high school in Cavaillon and its recent addition. St. Anthony's built the Gros Marin elementary school. St. Charles funds ongoing teacher training to improve the quality of education. Other basic needs remain:

- χ A well to bring water to Barrette (\$2,000)
- χ A water pump for an existing well in Gros Marin (\$2,000)
- χ 3 classrooms for children in Boileau (\$6,000).

If You'd Like to Contribute...

You probably already do through the St. Charles monthly tithe. To contribute to some of the special needs described here, you can give as much or as little as you can, and if you like you can designate your gift for a particular project. Make your check to St. Charles Church and note the Haiti Committee on the memo line. You can put it in a labeled envelope in the collection or drop it by the rectory.

- χ A library for the school in Cavaillon (\$3,000)

Building Church & Community

The church is the center for faith and for community. St. Charles' monthly tithe helps support village chapels, and St. Charles has helped with numerous economic development projects. There still remain pressing needs:

- χ A new chapel for the village of Flamand – the old one is structurally unsound (\$15,000)
- χ A sacristy for the church in Gros Marin (\$8,000)
- χ Pews for the chapel at L'Oiseau – wood is very expensive, and they have only a few benches (\$2,500)
- χ A village bank for Flamand to help start businesses (\$4,000)
- χ A photocopier to produce materials for church services, the parish, and the elementary school in Gros Marin (\$2,000)

Health

Health care continues to be available only sporadically. St. Charles provides medicines to several village clinics. A new clinic in the village of Flamand, built with St. Charles donations, will open soon.

- χ A nurse for the clinic in Gros Marin and one for the village of Boileau (\$1,200 to pay a nurse for a year)
- χ A clinic building for Gros Marin – the building temporarily housing the clinic is much too small to meet the community's needs (\$15,000)

Needed: A Few Good Goats

Goats are important in Haiti for food, milk, and commerce. \$50 will buy a goat. Under a special program, a family who receives a goat must pass along its first kid to another family. This means that the number of available goats literally multiplies.