

Report of January 2012 Visit to our Twin Parish of St. Michel, Saltadere, Haiti



The noise level at the St. Michel Rectory has increased since our prior visit. This is a result of the earthquake, the cholera epidemic, and poverty in Haiti. There are now about eighty orphans living on the once quiet, park-like rectory grounds. They range in age from 1 to young adult. The young boys like to run around and dare each other to jump or shout. Typical boys. The girls help with the cooking.

All the children of school age are attending St. Michel School. They wear varying school uniforms—either the ones they had at their former schools, St. Michel's uniform this year, or one of the former St. Michel uniforms. The children change out of the uniform when they arrive back home at the rectory. Then they wear regular clothing.

How did these orphans come to be at St. Michel? Father Ilric Louis Jeune, the new pastor of St. Michel, had established an orphanage at his former parish in Lahaye. When Bishop St. Hillien gave him his new assignment, he asked Father Ilric to extend his mission of serving orphans to Saltadere. Father Ilric has brought the orphans to St. Michel rectory. Some children sleep in auxiliary buildings on the rectory grounds, many are sleeping in a makeshift tent in the middle of the backyard of the rectory. This is adequate temporarily but will not be suitable shelter during rainy season.

The presence of so many people puts a strain on resources for nutrition, hygiene and sanitation. Father Ilric, with a staff of primarily older orphan girls and local women, is accomplishing marvels. Drying clothes on line can be seen across the



yard, a kitchen annex (an outdoor charcoal cooking fire) has been set up in the yard along with a long trestle table where the orphans can take their meals.

As soon as feasible, Father Ilric would like to be able to provide his extended family of orphans with more permanent housing. He would like to build a proper orphanage with separate provision for girls and boys. As he is new to Saltadere, he has not yet decided where might be the best location for the orphanage nor how it should be built. Certainly, he is hopeful that we, his twin parishes in Charlottesville, will be able to help to make the orphanage building a reality. The orphanage does have a name already, Foyer (Creole for Orphanage) Blessed John Paul II.

Father Ilric has answered the call of his people to take care of children who would otherwise receive no care. We at St. Thomas Aquinas parish have been given a wonderful opportunity to be part of young Haiti, to help these youth to grow and prosper spiritually, physically and mentally, in the village of Saltadere.

As the Bi-Parish Haiti Committee gathers more information, meets with Father Ilric and learns about what is needed, we hope to have the ongoing support of our parishes in accomplishing the task of building an orphanage which we expect will serve God's people in extraordinary variety.

Reported by Anne Knasel for the Haiti Committee

Look for announcement of a Friday evening presentation after the K of C Lenten soup supper.