



missionary animation afm

NEWSLETTER № 11

16th January 2010

Visitoria HAITI Bl Philip Rinaldi (1935) 1992

Dear Confreres

The situation in Haiti must be well known to you and perhaps some have been in contact through 'austraLasia' and 'ANS' and so know in some way the reality for the Salesians Family at this time.

The first direct news was sent by the rector of Petion-Ville, south of Port-au-Prince to a Fr Esteban (Esteban in the Dominican republic?):

"Thank you for your message of comfort and solidarity. In fact the earth quake had greatly affected us (in Don Bosco Port-au-Prince [10] founded 1935). ENAM (The National School for Arts and Trades), OPPEPB (Work of the little School of Father Bonhem), LAKAY are the most affected of all our works. Salesians are injured but Brother Sanon and more than 200 pupils remain underneath the rubble. The provincial house (Drouillard [9]) and that of Fleuriot-Tabbare ([6] Post Novotiate and Philosophy) constitute a great risk for those living in them. Two young Salesians (Wilfred Atisme and Valsaint Vilbrun 3rd year postnovitiate) who were at the University remain missing (since found dead).

Thorland: The Sisters are well but their great hall and reception centre have collapsed. It is the same with the halls of Gressier

Petion-Ville: The Sisters are all right. The buildings are very cracked.

It is a difficult situation Today (Wed 13 Jan) we are going to try and pull out bodies of the dead and bury them and search for the two missing salesians.

Thanks for your being with us in spirit and solidarity.

Hasta pronto. In Christo Resusitado. Fr Sylvain Ducange."

Fr Klement Vaclav , Councillor for the Missions, tells us that the Congregation is "slowly organising the provision of a really world-wide Salesian network of help to meet the emergency and later on for rebuilding.

Fr Guillermo Basanes, our Regional Councillor for Africa, adds: "get ready to be generous towards this very poor country: 95% of its sons and daughters are from Africa!"

In this NEWSLETTER 11, I give a summary of information received which will help you promote in all our works, especially schools and parishes, solidarity of prayer and practical financial support for our confreres in Haiti.

Sincerely in Don Bosco, Fr John

SALESIAN PRESENCE IN HAITI [HAI]

Our first presence in Haiti was St John Bosco in the capital, Port-au-Prince, and at the initiative of President Vincent who in 1934 seeing what the Salesians were doing in Santo Domingo invited them to do the same in Port-au-Prince. The result was the prestigious *Ecole Nationale des Arts et Métier* (ENAM). The other works being done in this house are the Reception Centre for Street Children (LAKAY) and the Fr Bonhem Primary School (OPEPB).

Haiti was linked in various combinations with the other countries of the Antilles, but in 1992 it became a vice-province under the patronage of Blessed Philip Rinaldi.

We have three other presences in Port-au-Prince apart from St John Bosco [10]. The provincial house in the suburb of Drouillard [9], The post-novitiate in Fleuriot-Tabarre [6] and to the South, Pétion-Ville [8] where they have a primary school and secondary school and an aspirantate.

Just West of the capital and also affected by the earth quake is a Youth Centre at Carrefour-Thorlands [4], where they also have their pre-novitiate.

Up in the North there is Cap-Haïtien [2&3] which has a big educational complex for primary, profession and agricultural education and a language school. Part of this presence, on the West coast is a professional school at Gonaïves. There is also a novitiate but there are no novices at there at present. To the East on the North coast is a technical school, radio station and TV centre at Fort-Liberté.

The most Westerly house is along the Southern peninsula at Les Cayes where there is another professional school.

Most houses have Oratories or Festive Oratories. (*Details from annuario 1 2010 pp.194-198*)

At the time of the earthquake there were 66 Salesians in Haiti in nine communities. The first Haitian Salesians were Fr Serges Lamaute 1946 and Br. Hubert Sanon 1947.

The Salesians are linked to various groups of the Salesian Family, especially the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, who also arrived in 1935. The FMA are now a province of 79 Sisters in 14 communities. They work among a big population of young people and children.

THE SITUATION SINCE THE EARTHQUAKE

The earthquake occurred at 16h53 local time. The epicentre to the West of Port-au-Prince was 7.3 on the Richter scale. Gressier, where the FMA have a house seems to be the closest to the centre. Cayes to the West and Cap Hatien, Fort Liberté and Gonaïves to the North would have had a much lighter experience without any damage. It would be the four houses in Port-au-Prince and Pétion-Ville which suffered the most damage.

The biggest loss of life has been at the Mother House of St John Bosco. Brother Hubert and many of the boys and staff have died under the rubble of the collapsed building. Many Salesians have been injured and the situation regarding the number of students attending the school who perished is unclear. Estimates have put it at something above 200 but this has been revised as being up to 500 buried under the collapsed building. At the St Francis of Sales postnovitiate, another two salesians died, both third year students, Wilfrid Atisme and Vibrun Valsaint, when the University they were attending collapsed. They were buried last Thursday. The very latest bulletin confirms that three Salesians have perished and another is seriously injured.

In Petion-Ville the FMA are sleeping outside and the elderly Sisters evacuated. They offer protection for local people and children to sleep. And were found preparing food for the resident children and people entrusted to them.

In my letter, I gave the appeal that has been made to us. Relief is being organised from the New Rochelle Mission Office which has the capacity and contacts to deal with the relief. Three satellite telephones have been brought into Haiti to improve communication and the salesians have the structures on the ground for assisting especially its many works for street children.

In order that AFM are able to make a significant donation to the fund, you are asked to start now to collect funds and channel them to the SPDO to deal with them. Father Eddie O'Neill will be letting us know later how this is to be done. The immediate salesian response is in good hands in the new Rochelle office but they will need support to carry out the longer term support that will be needed.