

The Dedication of Saint Gabriel School, Lascahobas, Haiti

The parish community at St. Gabriel had long dreamed of an education past the 6th grade level. A local parishioner, Mrs. Estelle Dubuisson lent her 2-room house to the parish for instruction for students 7th-11th grades. Mr. Fritz André, an active member of the parish council at St. Gabriel, started to teach a few youth in the parish. After a short time there, Mr. André moved the students to the parish community center, across the street from the rectory. The number of students increased. At that time, the students called themselves “*The Nomads*”. In 2006, Fr. Bernard Desras joined the parish, and also dreamed of a secondary school. A parishioner at St. Gabriel, Mr. Emanuel Masenat, donated a piece of lush land on which to build the school. Fr. Bernard immediately put up a sign at the entrance of the school: “*a New School for a Renewed Society.*” During his first visit to his parish twin, Sacred Heart, he said to Father Dan Klem: “...*when I open the door of a school, I close the door of a prison.*”

Seven weeks after the earthquake that devastated Port-au-Prince, Fr. Bernard took advantage of parishioners from Sacred Heart visiting his parish to **break ground, March 1st, 2010**. He said: “*God wants His children to build and create in time of adversity since it is a true sign of faith. God will bless our hard work.*”

Indeed, three years late, March 1st, 2013 the theme of the inauguration of St. Gabriel was *A Miracle of Faith*. Local workers made the cinder blocks; the local youth hammered large rocks into smaller rocks to use in the foundation and cut and bent the rebar. The whole community helped in this huge effort. The work was done by hand, without electricity, running water, and modern technology. To save paying an expensive middle man, Fr. Bernard ordered all the necessary material and coordinated and supervised the daily work.

In October 2011, one year and seven months after the earthquake, students moved from the parish community center to their permanent school, St. Gabriel. Currently, the school consists of thirteen classrooms and two administrative offices. A road was built leading to the major street, 2 fourteen-stall latrines, an outdoor kitchen and a 3-room clinic and a cistern are built or in process. Also a school garden has been planted equipped with an irrigation system with a pump. All floors are tiled to cover the rough cement floor. The school is indeed a dream come true and offers a safe and pleasant environment to the 348 students in 1st and 7th-12th grade.

Fr. Bernard and the parish council decided to schedule the inauguration on the **3rd Anniversary of the ground breaking**. Msgn. St. Hillien, the Bishop in Hinche presided the Mass that preceded the dedication. Fr. Lévêque Bien-Aimé, General Vicar and 16 priests were present. After the Mass, all attending processed to the school lead by the school band. The inauguration started with the Haitian and the US anthems, followed by the school’ song. The Bishop blessed the classrooms and the administrative offices. Fr. Dan Klem was one of the eight guest speakers. Five parishioners from Sacred Heart attended this unforgettable event: Diane Casino, Pat and Neil Walsh, Nicolas Valcour, and Patricia Britz. Also, many catholic schools in the diocese sent a delegation of teachers, parents, and students. Mr. Richard Joseph, Director of the Diocesan Bureau of Education said “It was not easy to get funds to help build this school. We understand through the Media that the US is going through a long financial crisis. We know that a lot of people lost their jobs and that they need to take care of their families. With your strong faith and devotion, you helped bring the funds necessary to help with the building of this school and today we celebrate our Joy. Thank you so much for helping Fr. Bernard to change the lives of the children. Fr. Bernard is a dynamic and bright priest who has a great vision for Lascahobas. Fr. Dan thanked Fr. Bernard, the Parish Council, the workers, the parents, the students, and all who worked and supported the building of the school. He said: “It is good to be here to celebrate with you! In the first reading at the dedication Mass we heard about Joseph and his coat of many colors... Fr. Bernard, like Joseph had a dream and all of you involved in the building of this beautiful school are Fr. Bernard’s coat of many colors.”

After this wonderful dedication, the guests continued the celebration enjoying some refreshments and fellowship at the St. Gabriel rectory.