

Haiti Twinning Based on Relationship

January 19, 2016

At the beginning of the twinning relationship between Sacred Heart Church in Norfolk and Saint Gabriel in Lascahobas, Haiti, the Haiti Twinning Ministry (HTM) communicated with Father Bernard Desras, pastor at St. Gabriel by e-mail. They soon found out that the use of e-mail even though indispensable was not reliable. They also wanted to keep in touch with the St. Gabriel's responsible (parish leaders) they had met during their pilgrimages. Thus, they started to send Fr. Bernard and the responsible, letters and documents to his mail box at the Rectory in Hinche through Virginian regular telephone calls, letters and prayers are the base of a strong relationship. It is the kind of relationship we treasure with our family in the United States and overseas.



Additional members of the HTM expressed a wish to also correspond with Fr. Bernard and the responsables at St. Gabriel. During their first pilgrimage to St. Gabriel members of the HTM took pictures of twelve responsables willing to have a pen pal among the members of the ministry. They asked them six questions in French to compile a short introductory biography. The ministry then made two booklets; one for Sacred Heart and another for St. Gabriel. Writing and receiving news from a spiritual friend in Haiti is exciting. The letters sent and received include prayer requests, details regarding the life of the church, family news, observations of current programs such as the School Cafeteria Building, the Lunch Program for children, the Teacher Program, and Medical Assistance Program. The letters sometimes contain family pictures and holy cards.

Since there is no postal service in Haiti outside of Port-au-Prince, the ministry has developed, through an ongoing network with other catholic churches in Virginia, an informal list which shows the names and details of potential messengers. This helps St. Gabriel to know who is going to Haiti throughout the year. The ministry makes contact with the group going to Haiti to arrange sending them an envelope with letters and documents for Fr. Ady Mytial, pastor at St. Gabriel.

Currently 22 members and friends in the community correspond with 22 responsables and teachers at St. Gabriel Parish including three students. A gentle reminder is sent every month to each person who has a pen pal. Letters can be sent to the chair of the ministry at Sacred Heart or Francesca Smith, Pen Pal Coordinator, by e-mail, post or brought to monthly meetings. Letters are sent to Haiti each month and replies are received a couple of times a year. Pen pals in the US know not to be discouraged when they do not receive regular letters from St. Gabriel since *it is in giving that we receive*. It is best to write whenever possible without necessarily waiting for a reply. Using a few words in Creole or French in the correspondence goes a long way. It shows interest and respect to our Haitian family. Also the site Google Translate is most useful. It is fun to write to our family in Haiti.

If you wish to have a pen pal in Haiti or obtain more details about this program, please contact

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Picture: Teachers from St. Gabriel parish schools writing to their pen pals in the US