



# HAITI MISSION NEWSLETTER

## Religious of Jesus and Mary

### Fall 2022



#### HAITI TODAY

While the situation in Haiti seldom made the USA headlines, most American are somewhat aware of the suffering of its people in the past months. The existing government has been nearly powerless against the growing power of gangs whose blockades have disrupted the supply chain, causing crippling shortages of food and fuel, and prohibitively high costs for what little was available.

These shortages, together with an increased threat of robberies and kidnappings, prevented those sisters who had left Haiti for summer home visits from returning on schedule to their missions in Port-au-Prince and Jean Rabel. The delay, while frustrating, gave Sr. Curin an opportunity to know the situation of Haitians now in the Dominican Republic, while Srs. Valle, Rosario and Farzana accepted the invitation from Sr. Mary Bourdon to come to Washington. Their presence in DC enabled the sisters there to benefit from helpful conversations about our Haitian missions.



Srs. Valle Chías González-Blanch, RJM, Rose Kelly, RJM, Monica Joseph, RJM, (Superior General), Carmen Muñoz, RJM, (Assistant General), Curin García Calvo, RJM, and Núria Cuadras, RJM (General Councilor) shown during the General Visitation in May.

Happily, within the last few weeks, each of them has been able to return safely to Haiti. And, while things there have improved somewhat, conditions remain unstable and insecure.

Ms Geri Lanham, a former volunteer now serving with *Mercy Beyond Borders*, reported some weeks ago that “families do what they can to hold onto hope amidst the general chaos of insecurity fueled by gangs in all regions of the country.” While the local crops of avocados and mangos are available for food, market prices for staples increased dramatically, e.g., “the price for a family-sized portion of rice increased by 80%.” Families have less to eat, many children are too weak to walk long distances to school, and fuel costs put the use of motorcycle taxis out of the reach of many. This, together with heightened levels of insecurity along the roads, means that many children lack access to school, as well as the food provided there.

From **Jean Rabel**, Sr. Rose Kelly writes that “food and supplies are arriving in from the north, as the southern route is still blocked. All the schools are open, and there is an increase in attendance this week. However, food is still very expensive and there are families who are starving. We ensure that the schools have food.” When she wrote, Sr. Rose was expecting the arrival of a Spanish doctor, an ophthalmologist, who will spend a fortnight treating cataracts and helping with the mobile clinic.

Meanwhile, the situation in **Port-au-Prince** remains fragile, with killings, kidnappings, hunger and disease. Sr. Farzana Philip reports that “we hear gunshots almost every night and news of kidnapping and killing are a part of every day’s talk. There are a few schools open....[as well as] supermarkets, and fuel is available. But the streets are almost empty....the emptiness of the streets has hidden fear of something worse to happen. It makes one a bit frightened...”

These few reports offer only snapshots of realities that are constantly changing, situations where our sisters are doing all they can to offer concrete relief, as well as the support of their presence.

On page 5 of this newsletter, we offer a reflection from Sr. Middia Doute, a young Haitian Religious of Jesus and Mary serving in Gros Morne. Sr. Middia shares her experience of living and ministering in this challenging time in her country, and her hopes for its people.

**SUMMER CAMPS - Gros Morne, Jean Rabel and Port-au-Prince**



In Gros Morne, Postulant Marie-Jo Desir organized a 3-day summer camp for 87 children and teens. The last day had two soccer matches and a cultural presentation of dances, songs, a skit and hymns. Our thanks to donor Jean Nadeau, who made the skirts worn by many of the younger children. Camp was also held in Jean Rabel for 210 children. In Port-au-Prince at the Pas-A-Pas camp, 52 children participated in educational activities, games, handcrafts with recycling materials, and 30 youth even took dance lessons! (July and August, 2022)



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## **YOUTH GATHERING - Gros Morne**

Thirty youth had their second *Jesus-Mary Youth Gros Morne* gathering to share their dreams for their country and what they could concretely do to bring them about with the means they have.

From the discussions in their small groups, they decided that even though the environment was of pressing importance, it was even more urgent for them to do outreach to the hundreds of children in their several neighborhoods. Schools have not been able to open here due to lack of fuel and food and the widespread insecurity. On November 3, they met with Sr. Middia Doute to finalize their plans.



On Sunday October 23, two members of J-M Youth Gros Morne, Marie-Anne Dese and Jiefttha Love Termitus, shared via Zoom with J-M Youth in other countries. Both young women found the experience enlightening and enriching and look forward to further sharings.

- Srs. Middia Doute and Pat Dillon (November 4, 2022)

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## **GENERAL GOVERNMENT VISITATION IN HAITI**



From May 24 - June 29th, Sr. Monica Joseph (left), Superior General of the RJM, along with Sr. M<sup>re</sup> Carmen Muñoz (in front page photo), Assistant General Councillor, and Sr. Núria Cuadras (right), Councillor and Econome, visited the USA and Haiti to meet with each sister and to see the apostolic works and challenges first hand.

In Haiti they visited the 2 schools in Gros Morne and 7 schools in Jean Rabel where sisters are actively involved; the Mobile Clinic and Atelier art and sewing center in Jean Rabel, Bon Samaritan home for indigent elderly, Kan Klodine summer camp, and the Grepin Center with its agricultural programs and reforestation project in Gros Morne, Pas-A-Pas after-school learning program and the Workshop for Prosthesis and Orthosis in Port-au-Prince, as well as other ministries including pastoral work with youth, visits to the South of Haiti for earthquake relief, emergency help for immediate needs, etc.



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## **LEADERSHIP TEAM SIGNS LETTER TO USDA**

The RJM Leadership Team recently signed a letter to the US Department of Agriculture, asking for the reversal of a policy that negatively affects mango growers in Gros Morne.



A large number of people in the Gros Morne area depend upon the mango industry for their livelihood. The policy would be devastating to a population already suffering from out-of-control inflation.

The petition was initiated by the Quixote Center in Greenbelt, MD, which is a partner organization, also working in Haiti. Here is a link to the Quixote Center's "Action" page, if you would like to join us in contacting Congress about policies that negatively affect Haiti: <https://quixote.org/action#/>.

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## **OUR TRIP TO THE SOUTH OF HAITI - to check on earthquake relief**

We want to share with you the experience we had on our July 23-25 trip to a village in the area of Les Cayes: Tobèk, to see how they have used the material that some of families received to rebuild their houses that had collapsed in the earthquake of August 14 last year.



We made the trip free of cost in a UN helicopter that is at the service of the Institutions that work in Humanitarian Aid. It was a great experience. We were very impressed by the landscape, so mountainous. The helicopter had 24 seats but we were only 7 travelling.



First landing was in JEREMIE and the 2nd in LES CAYES. Brother Marc Sony of the Sacred Heart was waiting for us at the airport to accompany us directly to Tobèk, 1 hour by car and then a fairly steep climb on foot. Thinking of me, Brother arranged for a donkey so that I could climb without getting tired. I mounted the donkey, but it was not possible; I felt unstable and thought that I might fall and make the donkey fall too. So I decided that Farzana and Brother would go up to the town and I waited there with a family on the road where I chatted with some young people and children.

Here is one of the families that has rebuilt their home with funding provided by you, after the 2021 earthquake.

They need schools for the little ones, health centers... We have a great mission field everywhere. The gift of Haitian vocations would be wonderful.

We were surprised because all those villages have a source of drinking water brought from the mountain. A great work of the State! Our Sisters of Jean Rabel are doing the same in various towns in their area, where neither the state nor local authorities have arrived yet. Water projects are super needed because Water is life.



*Interesting: young people who have finished high school and who cannot go to university because for that they need to go to the city, find accommodation, pay tuition, transport, eat... and it's impossible to find money for all that... They stay in the village doing agriculture work with their families. They are the candidates for illegal immigration.*

Monday we went to the airport for our 15-minute return trip from Jacmel to Port-au-Prince. At 3 in the afternoon we were already home, very happy and animated, with great hope. The trip has been worth it.

Does anyone dare to come to this country, to work in the Mission of Haiti? I remember that it was a similar invitation that Nazareth Ybarra sent us that made Isa Solá come to Haiti. We were having dinner together in Ebibeyín when we read her letter and I can't forget her quick reaction. God's ways are mysterious... Thank God. Suddenly, several paths open up for Jesus and Mary.

- Sr. Rosario Fumanal

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**HAITI: Crisis, Anxiety and Hope**  
By Sr. Middia Doute, RJM, in Gros Morne

Facing our current political reality, any reflection on Haiti proves to be a very difficult task. I feel paralyzed by both anguish and fear. This Haiti in which I live today is no longer the one my ancestors taught me to discover. Schools and universities no longer function. The country has become a massive prison where everyone is locked in at home. I feel weakened to see my family so diminished and desperate.

Is there any situation more debilitating than seeing children deprived of their right to education; or young people left to fend for themselves, seeking refuge abroad where they may face contempt and indignity; to be witnessing my people asphyxiated by its own leaders? This situation challenges me in the depths of my heart and leads me to question not only my civic participation, but my baptismal commitment as well.

Although our horizons seem distant and unattainable, I find much-needed support and courage in the company of my sisters here in our community of Gros Morne. They help me find the inspiration I need to identify with our people who continue to hope for a reversal of the situation.

In the wake of recent events plunging the country into a cycle of recurrent violence and misery, our community here has chosen to LISTEN to the youth in our area, “*jeunes Jésus-Marie*.” In September we launched a series of assemblies for them, with the aim of creating a space for reflection, sharing, and growth. With each gathering, we watched as this listening space transformed itself into a community of commitment, solidarity and thanksgiving.

How did this happen?

First, the young people themselves examined and analyzed their society, and were able to identify for each other the causes of the various evils that cause our suffering as a people.

Then, with great freedom, they named the emotions that arise from ongoing deterioration of their socio-economic and political conditions. Among these sentiments, they listed anger, helplessness, desire for revenge, revulsion, sadness, frustration, confusion.

Then, they examined their own hearts for elements of strength to give them courage to act and “be the change” they desired. Among these strengths we listed joy, hope, love, openness to others, the ability to reflect, patience etc.

Our young people then identified an action of solidarity: a project to provide instructional support to children, tutoring them in mathematics, French, Creole, social and behavioral sciences. For these young women and men, this project serves as a concrete way to live their baptismal commitment by serving the least and those in need. They developed a process and structure that now includes more than 200 interested parents and 170 children receiving tutoring in sessions that began November 14<sup>th</sup>.

Pope Francis affirms that hope is like oxygen; it is necessary for life, gives meaning to life. As a community we have experienced this through the commitment of our young people.

We are convinced that the mission of the Religious of Jesus Mary in Haiti faces this challenge of sowing hope. We dream of a mission that accompanies our people on the path to self-sufficiency and autonomy. We hope to develop in them their inventive and creative abilities for life, even in the face of misery, despair, injustice, and death. We see part of our mission here to effect the beginning of real social change by encouraging reflection and problem solving through dialogue. We want our people to value themselves, their gifts; we hope they develop love and patriotism, keep their dignity, grow in defense of their rights. Above all, we want to help Haitians rediscover and renew their ancient pride as a people.

May the Lord help us to be creators of joy, and bearers of hope and dreams through our presence and service in this country, so that every Haitian can be inspired to move forward.



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## LIVING THE MISSION IN JEAN RABEL

Hello to all the people who are interested in our life and mission in Jean Rabel!!!

First of all, thank you for the support and closeness we feel from many who make yourselves present in many different ways. Although we are at the other end of the world, we feel you are here next door.



The community has expanded since the beginning of March. Dr. Laura Casallas García, a volunteer 23-year-old Colombian who just finished her studies in medicine, joined us until July. She participated in several projects: the mobile clinic, the malnutrition project, the workshop and also basketball. It is a richness to count on having one more person to share life and mission. Here Dr. Laura stands on the far left with Srs. Curin García Calvo, Valle Chías González-Blanch, and Rose Kelly.

Along with Dr. Laura, something else important arrived: a microscope that will allow us to start a microbiology laboratory very soon that will help in the diagnosis of some of the patients of the mobile clinic. We hope that in a few months the laboratory will be in operation. For this project, two laboratory technicians will be hired and they will facilitate the training. We also hope to have some volunteers from Spain who will come for a while to support such training.



During Holy Week, a group came to carry out, once again, an eye exam campaign in Jean Rabel. We have counted on the presence of optometrist Enrique Ordiñaga Monreal, ophthalmologists Jonhy Javier Castelar and Jorge Peraza Nieves, technician Albert Montañés Mambrona, nurse Carmen Verdugo García and Dr. Dolores Herrero Mendoza, known as “Dr. Loli” (who coordinates this whole project and who, thanks to her perseverance, continues to make it possible). It has been intense work. They carried out 28 operations and checked the sight of more than 300 people.



It is impressive to see many patients who come accompanied and practically blind, leave without a cane, able to walk by themselves. An experience of true Resurrection! It has also been possible to examine and assess the case of a girl from the school near us that worried us a lot since she has a hole in one eye. Thanks to the ultrasound scanner donated to us in August and thanks to this campaign, they were able to detect that the retina is not detached and we hope that in a few months she will be able to travel to Spain to have the operation she needs.

In other news, basketball kits arrived with the Ophthalmologist team! There are already four groups in Jean Rabel and we also train at the Koton school. Actually we have one coach and two trainers. Young people from the area are putting in a lot of interest and dedication. Soon we will play our first games.

The seven schools we run are completing their school year. The truth is that the work of the teachers is impressive with the few means they have. In June, we had trainings for preschool and primary teachers.

We also want you to know that the house-building project continues. We have already started 6 new homes for families from various areas (Kolet, Koton and Kasepye).

We also remain committed to moving forward with the water project for the area of Akadyen and Gwo Sab. It will mean access to water for more than 4,000 people! We are already very close to achieving it!

- A hug, Srs. Rose Kelly, Valle Chías González-Blanch and Curin García Calvo (April 30, 2022)

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## **MY EXPERIENCE VOLUNTEERING - Jean Rabel**

Coming here just after finishing med-school has been a wonderful and very deep experience for me. I had never in my life considered coming to Haiti, but I am sure now it has been a beautiful present from God.

I am a Colombian medical doctor, 23 years old, who believed in Jesus and was involved in catholic groups at university, but I think I have never felt Jesus as near as I have found him being here.

I am saying goodbye to this experience after 4 months of volunteering, and I can say that it definitely made me actively search for that God who does not abandon, who supports and embraces. Sometimes I start to get upset and want to run to my comfort zone, to my safe place and to where I have control... but then, I see myself pushed by Jesus to stay, to keep insisting; to sharpen my gaze and recognize Jesus' face in each person, each child, each grandmother here. I witness that an "if God wills" or an "only God knows" is more valuable and sufficient for them, than a scientific, medical or probabilistic explanation; to be part of an Eucharist sung with fervor, wearing their best or only gala dress with their most charming shoes; of the overflowing kindness and anguish to give three times more of what you have asked for them, what you need or what they think will be good for you... of looking at you with a deep and loving gaze, just as Jesus looks at us every day.



Today I thank God and all the people with whom I was able to share some of this. It has been an experience that has expanded my horizons and has rebuilt me with a different sensitivity towards the least, the marginalized, the forgotten and the most needy, but also the most faithful, the most compassionate and the unconditional to the Lord. Thank you Haiti and thank you Religious of Jesus and Mary for allowing me to come here.

- Dr. Laura Casallas (July, 2022)

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## **BASIC KITS ASSEMBLED WITH SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS - Jean Rabel**

Sherline Petit-Homme, Modena Marcelin, and Celestine Cereste are preparing 16 very basic kits for families who are in extreme circumstances. They are using recycled and cleaned plastic bottles for oil, putting beans into strong paper bags, and rice into locally made bags.

They have also made a commitment to avoid buying food in single-use plastic bags, or non-reusable containers, preferring to bring their own reusable containers.



Little by little, change is taking place! They are prudently distributing.... asking people to come at different times to collect a bag. Thank you to all our supporters and donors. People are starving and these kits are lifesaving.

- Sr. Rose Kelly (November 8, 2022)

**STAY TUNED!**

The Haiti Mission will soon celebrate **25 YEARS in Haiti!**  
Watch for stories honoring the occasion and news of festivities,  
in the April newsletter.

**THE AMBASSADOR OF ARGENTINA VISITS PAS-A-PAS GROUP - Port-au-Prince**

On the afternoon of May 27, the PAS-A-PAS group, received a visit from the Ambassador of Argentina, Mr. Cesar Alberto Faes. The intermediary was Agustina Fasolo, director of the Papal SCHOLAS Foundation in Haiti, who is also Argentinian.

Ambassador Faes wanted to celebrate with a group of Haitians, the Independence of his country which was on May 25, and at the same time to learn something of what Argentinians do in Haiti.

At the expected time there was a torrential rain, which delayed them almost an hour. But there was no problem. We had prepared the reception in the courtyard in front of the *Workshop for Prosthesis and Orthesis* but the rain forced us to use the inside of a class of the Parish Professional School. They came with pâtés (typical Haitian



food) and juices to invite us all. We put up a "WELCOME" sign with the Argentinian and Haitian flags. We also prepared a short speech in Spanish that was read very well by one of the students who is 12 years old and who comes to the Spanish classes. The two children of Dieuseul (a worker at the *Workshop*), who go to music class at a Port-au-Prince school, played the national anthems of Argentina and Haiti on the violin. SCHOLAS volunteers prepared a group game in which even the Ambassador participated.

We hoped that the Ambassador's wife would also come and we had prepared a bouquet of flowers for her, but due to insecurity she did not come.

Before leaving, we invited Ambassador Faes to tour the *Workshop for Prosthesis and Orthesis*. Shown above on the tour are Dieuseul Jean Baptiste, Jean Louis Carlenry, Sr. Farzana Philip, Mr. Cesar Alberto Faes, the Ambassador of Argentina, Sr. Rosario Fumanal and Esna Nicolas. He like the workshop and expressed a desire to collaborate, perhaps with the collection of crutches, etc. We believe that the Ambassador will be able to help us with something. It was a very positive visit for all of us and he left very happy.

- Srs. Farzana Philip and Rosario Fumanal



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