

Connections

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SALESIAN SISTERS IN HAITI

Salesian Missioners Join Relief Effort

Sr. Gloria Mar, FMA

The 7.02 earthquake that hit Haiti on January 12th and left untold destruction affected our Salesian Family very deeply. A Salesian priest, two Salesian Brothers and about 500 of their pupils perished in Port-au-Prince. All our Sisters and pupils survived but the Sisters' convents and schools were demolished and their belongings destroyed. The Sisters live in outdoor tents as they care for about 20,000 persons who lost loved ones, their homes and all their possessions. Immediately the Salesian Rector Major, Father Pascual Chávez Villanueva, and our Mother General, Mother Yvonne Reungoat, called for solidarity to aid the Haitian people. Both Fr. Chávez and Mother Yvonne went to Port-au-Prince. At once headquarters were designated to promote the relief effort, giving priority to the basic needs: water, food, medicines, mobile hospitals, doctors, nurses, tents, mattresses, clothing and volunteers to distribute food and necessary items to the thousands of victims.

Our Province sent monetary help to our Headquarters in Rome. As VIDES director I was able to send two volunteers, Carmen Medina Castellón, Sr. Guadalupe Medina's sister, and Molly Fahn from San Antonio to



help the Sisters. They remained there a month. After a brief time Carrie Roudebush and her sister, Irma Ortega Bijarro, past-pupils of Saint John Bosco, San Antonio, went to help. These courageous and generous missioners share their experience in the following pages.

Representing the United States Bishops' Conference, Archbishop José H. Gómez of the San Antonio Archdiocese visited Haiti to distribute the money donated by United States Catholics. On his return he acknowledged our Salesian Sisters and the over twenty thousand Haitians they are ministering to in tent camps in several locations.



“WHEN HAITI BECOMES YESTERDAY’S NEWS, THE SALESIAN SISTERS WILL STILL BE THERE.”

Reprinted with permission from “Today’s Catholic”, newspaper of the Archdiocese of San Antonio.



Carrie Roudebush

*From: San Antonio, Texas
Mission Site: Dominican Republic/Haiti
Service Interest: Earthquake Relief
Length of Service: 2 weeks*

Irma Bijarro (my sister) and I responded to a call for volunteers to help the Salesian Sisters in Haiti. We were educated by these Sisters and we joined VIDES (Volunteers International for Education and Solidarity) a volunteer organization that lends support to Salesian missions all over the world. There we met with Carmen from Mexico and Molly also from San Antonio.

We departed for Santo Domingo on February 8, 2010 and entered Haiti on the 9th. To say the situation is sad and chaotic is an understatement. The Haitians had already been living in such misery before the earthquake and now the situation is most dire. Before the quake, they received very little help or support from the government. There has never been trash pickup. Trash and flies are everywhere, though most do burn their trash. They cook with charcoal because it’s inexpensive, trees are cut down for this and cause erosion; consequently the air is always polluted and a blanket of haze is always over the cities. Children are given free education up to the fourth grade, after that it is up to the parents to continue sending them to school. People usually earn \$1 dollar a day! The schools are shut down so all the young people are idle, not a good situation. The market place has always been somewhat filthy and polluted, a situation that the quake made even worse. What was left of the shanty towns of Haiti is now intermingled with the newly created tent cities. With building codes almost non-existent before the quake, we were made aware of the increased damage to school because of non-concrete mortar used in construction. Even today we know there are still students under much of the rubble. Residents told us about the horrors after the quake hearing cries for help from the entombed students that went unanswered

due to the inability of people to move the rubble without heavy equipment. The days passed and the cries and pleas for help...these became less and less, and then silence. I cannot even imagine the pain and panic of being a parent whose child is buried alive and who helplessly tries to dig and scratch with hammers, hoes, sticks, and bare hands.

Through all of this the Salesian Sisters have risen to the occasion. Their best schools suffered serious damage. But plucky they are and plans were already being made to reconstruct and continue their mission of educating the young and aiding the poor. The Economer General from Rome was already there deciding



Irma Bijarro

*From: San Antonio, Texas
Mission Site: Dominican Republic/Haiti
Service Interest: Earthquake Relief
Length of Service: 2 weeks*

on the priorities and we were lucky to see and meet the Rector Major, Father Pascual Chavez, SDB, who is the direct successor of St. John Bosco, founder of the Salesians – the first non-Italian successor who just happens to be Mexican! Not only that, he also seems to be the Sisters’ rock star. The moment they saw him, they were all atwitter, cameras at the ready. There is a video of Father Pascual’s trip to Haiti online at http://salesianmissions.org/howcanIhelp/emergency_haiti_bulletin_links.html.

You can use this URL to view it or search “Salesian Sisters in Haiti” or “Rector General visits Haiti”

Frankly, I have never prayed so much in my life. Each day at the Provincial House (PH) our efforts began with prayer at 7 am followed by Mass in the open square The PH is the headquarters



In this Edition...

<i>Salesian Sisters in Haiti</i>	1
<i>Today’s Catholic Article</i>	2-4
<i>Reflections on Haiti Mission</i>	4-5
<i>Developments</i>	6
<i>Around the Province</i>	7
<i>Mass Enrollments</i>	8



for the Sisters. This I did enjoy because the volunteers, nuns, Sister candidates and some of the orphans would go to the destroyed parish down the hill from the Provincial House (PH) and attend an open-air Mass in solidarity with the people. Having gathered our strength for the day, we worked with the Sisters and the people establishing some sort of living environment for those who have

Rainy season is coming soon and I just can't imagine what will happen then. I must say that when it rained I would think about all those in the camps and I just wanted to cover my head and not see or hear the rain.

Along the way, we met wonderful, self-sacrificing people whose talents help make the world better. There was Sarah, a young woman of 24-25 working with the World Doctors who helped us register with the UN and UNICEF and later delivered 10 waterproofed family sized tents to us. The French later delivered 10 more, also waterproofed. Each time we set up a tent, Irma would pin a medal of St. John Bosco. There was Penny from Brittan, who was in charge of logistics at the camp where the International doctors were set up. She had her fingertip on all that was going on. She even knew the Sisters had received four generators, so she bartered; lend her a generator for the surgery room in exchange for food. Done! We then received a truckload of sugar and high protein biscuits. She also sent doctors to the Provincial House to tend to the residents and tent city dwellers. Jorge and Ramon from Puerto Rico

rallied the little towns around where they live and ended up filling five trailer trucks with food, water and medical supplies which they ferried first to Santo Domingo and then trucked into Haiti for the Sisters.

Then there are those we also met who already had been working to create a better Haiti. Buck Close has worked closely with the Sisters since he was 17. His family has had a relationship with the Sisters for over 50, years which started with his Mother. He runs 1000 Jobs for Haiti Program. An enterprise started by the Sisters to create jobs in Haiti. The workers produce embroidered pieces, which are taken to Rhode Island and sold. 100% of the money returns to Haiti. The workers earn \$5 a day, great wages compared to the \$1 or \$2 per day that most locals make. The workers are to be paid while not working and their houses are being rebuilt. He was the one to bring the much needed, large generators.



lost everything. Then in the evening, we gathered in evening prayer again at 5:30 pm followed by the rosary, the Sisters, the volunteers, the people and all 33 orphans were present. Our Lord filled us up in the morning and quieted our hearts and minds in the evening that we could rest and be thankful for the progress of the day.



Maria Carmen Castillon

*From: El Oasis, Chihuahua, Mexico
Mission Site: Dominican Republic/Haiti
Service Interest: Earthquake Relief
Length of Service: 1 month*

We worked with Sister Monique a Haitian native who is definitely full of energy. Besides aiding all the displaced people who were on the grounds of the different Salesian schools, we had 900 people across from the PH. All of these were supplied

with water and food and eventually tents. It broke my heart to see the little children, especially if they were my granddaughters' ages living in such squalor. Not even the simplest sanitation was available, but everyone did the best they could. The French let us have four large tents. We set up the first one after Sister Monique identified a family with a baby, a toddler girl and two little boys living under a tree with only a plastic cover attached to several trees. It had rained the night before and the ground was wet and steamy. To make matters worse, the some of tents were not waterproof.



(l to r) Volunteers: Carrie Roudebush, Carmen Castillon, Irma Bijarro & Molly Fohn with Salesian Rector Major Father Pascual Chávez, SDB in Haiti



TODAY'S CATHOLIC ARTICLE

continued

Angel and Emmanuelle from Spain and France respectively, were with CUME, a Spanish foundation, which helps educational institutions. Prior to the earthquake, they were already working on an approved project to build six classrooms for the Sisters in Jacmel, Haiti. He said it was a pleasure to work with the Sisters because they are totally organized and give quality education.

When Haiti becomes yesterday's news, the Salesians will still be there toiling with what little they have, partnering with other generous people and institutions. The losses are monumental for so many, and many have sacrificed much. Sr. Monique said, "We cannot let the sacrifice of so many who died be wasted, we will create the path for a better life for the ones left behind." On that note, in addition to all her other duties, Sister began the work to establish another camp across the street. Plans were already in place to clear the site, dig a trash pit for burning away from the tents and woe to anyone that did not keep his newly acquired tent clean. "Yes, Sister!" Some families posed proudly in front of their new "homes."

Thanks to Lee and Mary for a generous donation, with it, we bought a suitcase full of baby and children's Tylenol, Motrin, and allergy medicine which came in handy when the French doctors immunized the camp children. The children had fun with the band-aids printed with Elmo, Princesses, and dinosaurs, which we also took. Thank you, American Airlines for only charging us \$100 for all our six oversized bags, three of them over weight. Thank you, Santo Domingo for waiving the \$10 fee for our visa and AT&T for letting us have free phone calls until the end of February. Also thank you to Molly Fohn's (another San Antonio Haiti volunteer) little sister, who gathered stuffed animals from her friends that in turn were given to many of the orphans living with the Sisters on Valentine's Day. All in all, it was a humbling and learning experience. May God bless Haiti, her people, and the generous people of the world who have shared so much.



REFLECTION ON HAITI MISSION



Molly Fohn

*From: San Antonio, Texas
Mission Site: Santa Rosa de Copan,
Honduras
Length of Service: Chalchuapa (1 year)
El Salvador (6 months)
Haiti (1 month)*

I stayed at the Provincial House of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Salesian Sisters in Port-au-Prince for one month. I am a volunteer with the volunteer organization VIDES, supported by the Salesian Sisters. The Haiti Province has six houses in the affected area and the Provincial House was the only house that stood. None of the sisters, nor students in the sisters' schools, were killed by the earthquake because school was not in session. The schools, however, were all destroyed and will need to be rebuilt. Meanwhile, people of the surrounding communities are living on the campuses in tents, and the congregation is struggling to feed and care for about 20,000 people.

I didn't have much time to prepare myself before I left for Haiti. In fact, I didn't even realize I was going to Haiti. I thought I was only going to the Dominican Republic. But once we arrived in Santo Domingo, DR's capital, I was told I'd be resting one day before leaving for Port-au-Prince. And that's about the time I started dreading my decision to come. I was terrified of what I'd see, do, experience, and wanted to turn around and go home. Or at least just to stay in Santo Domingo and help from there.

Throughout the entire nine-hour bus ride to Port-au-Prince, I was knotted with fear and regret; sure I was getting myself into something that I would regret. I didn't think I'd be able to help, and that I'd just end up using what little resources were available and wasting everyone's time. I wasn't happy about the time length either. A month seemed too short to be worth it and too long for an emergency setting. Everything about the situation just didn't feel quite right and it was very unsettling.

My time in Haiti was a tightly wound spiral. I started out focusing on the only thing I knew: myself and my own fear and misgivings. I was very concerned with how I'd be able to handle the situation, seeing all the poverty and suffering, knowing that I had no search and rescue training, knew nothing about surgery or medicine, had no contacts in high places to ask for donations. Then, two days in, I met fifteen-year-old Sandra. She was trapped for eight days in the rubble of her school, already mourned for as though dead and received by her family with such suspicion after she was pulled out, it was as if she were just an illusion. The joy of recognition and the miracle of her survival was enough to open my spiral a little wider.





When we took her to the University of Miami's tent hospital at the airport to treat her fractured hip, we saw exhausted volunteer doctors, exasperated nurses, and patients staring into space or curled up within themselves. Back at the house, we had forty orphans who were all home when the earthquake hit. They hadn't even been outside the walls to see the damage on the other side. Their schools had been flattened and they had no family. They had nothing. But, oh, can they sing! When we decided to take the orphaned girls on a field trip to see their own history, we swung by the airport to sing there. Everyone stopped what they were doing. The smiling doctors and nurses brought out their digital cameras and started filming. The patients became alive with the sound of their own singing, songs that were a part of them. Their spirits were lifted, their cups filled, and my spiral opened a little wider.

When we moved Sandra to a different hospital for therapy, we brought with us some donations we'd received that we couldn't use, mostly medical equipment. It was exactly what the doctors had run out of the day before, and they offered to trade us some baby diapers and food that they couldn't use, but we could definitely make use of. As we traded goods and donations with the doctors there, I realized we would have to do things for ourselves. If we waited for the government or some other leading body to take



charge, it would be a losing effort. By taking the responsibility and the action into our own hands, we were making the experience our own and finding solutions to seemingly impossible riddles. With that friendship in place, my spiral opened a little bit more.

Later that week, we brought the doctors to the camps we were feeding. We had 8,000 people under our care and needing attention but we couldn't take them all to the hospital. So we brought the hospital to them. Having the team of doctors in our driveway, performing major surgery under the tarp, and watching them help the people in a way we were unable to, was a small victory as well, and the spiral opened.

Being there on my birthday away from family and friends, away from a celebratory atmosphere, without internet and no way



for people to contact me, I was expecting a dismal day. However, I had just the opposite experience. All the sisters congratulated me, they offered the Mass for me in the parish, the girls sang to me, gave me a hand-embroidered cloth and a party with singing, dancing, poems, and general silliness. It was the icing on a more delicious cake than I expected or deserved, and was a reason to celebrate amidst the sadness. My spiral was opened wider yet and stayed wide throughout the rest of the trip.

By the time I had to leave, I was exhausted, but fighting the urge to offer to stay longer. Knowing full well that my mission was over, that I'd come and done all that I could do, nothing more and nothing less, I left with a sense of peace. But with such a love for Haiti's people that I can't forget them or their needs, the time we shared, and will continue my mission of loving them even if it has to be long distance. My self-centered spiral had grown so large that I myself disappeared in the infinity of the experiences around me.



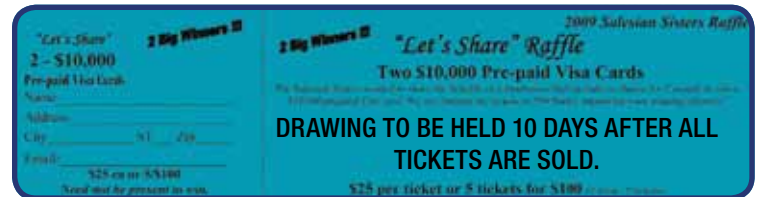
DEVELOPMENTS

Retired Sisters need Special Bus

WE NEED YOUR HELP! Of the 500 books we have about 200 books left to sell. Since this drawing has been going on for about 8 months, we will continue to work to gain enough participants for a June, 2010 drawing. Thank you for your support! With your help we hope to accomplish our goal!

\$20,000 Jumbo "Let's Share Drawing" to Fund Purchase

As announced in our last CONNECTIONS, the Sisters are having a drawing to raise money for the Province. Only 500 books @ \$100 each were printed in hopes of raising enough to help our retired Sisters. This makes the chances of winning for the purchaser of one book 1 of 250!!! Of the money raised, \$20,000 is to be used to present two lucky winners with \$10,000 Visa Gift Cards each. The Sisters wanted to share the benefits of their fund-raiser, especially in these economic times. The original date for the drawing was September 28th, but not all books sold. So, since those who have purchased tickets (about half are already sold) still wanted to have the drawing and preferred to keep going, the Sisters have decided to continue ticket sales until all 500 books are sold. Once sold, each ticket holder will be notified as to when and where 10 days before the actual drawing for the two first prize gift cards. Also, we have decided to forego this year's annual appeal and instead continue the ticket book sales.



The transportation of more than one or two Sisters has created some issues, especially for those in wheelchairs. We need to provide transportation for at least 8-12 Sisters at a time in a safe, comfortable, and accessible vehicle. We have found the vehicle, it is a 14 passenger bus with accommodation for 2 wheelchairs, a lift, safety belts, adjustable chairs, skid proof floors and does not require a commercial license to drive (see picture). The vendor, Church Bus, a division of MidWest Transit (www.churchbus.com), has given us the best quote for a brand new one at \$49,900. They are holding the price for us while we raise the money.

We hope to raise \$30,000 from the raffle, and anticipate that the raffle will attract more participants. To that end, please find the ticket purchase flyer inserted in this issue and return in the envelope. We will continue to sell the ticket books until they are all sold, and we are looking for grant opportunities, donations, and/or sponsors for the balance. Any offering toward purchasing the 14-passenger Bus for our retired Sisters at the Provincial House is much appreciated. Please keep this project in your prayers and thank you for your generosity.



"AROUND THE PROVINCE"

7 Students receive Scholarship Awards



Angela



Midori



Zuvanny



Stephanie



Anabell



Tristan



Cody

Congratulations, Students, we are all so proud of you!

Thanks to your support, the proceeds from our Annual Golf Tournaments have greatly contributed to making this year's Educational Awards possible.

*"Friends of Don Bosco"
Education Fund
Scholarship Awards*

Midori Chavez—8th Grade

Angela Rincon—8th Grade

Zuvanny Macias—8th Grade

Stephanie Bustamante—7th Grade

Anabell Gimena—7th Grade

Tristan Govea—6th Grade

Cody Hinson—1st Grade

We invite you to join us again this year!!!

2010 Salesian Sisters 7th Annual Golf Tournament (Benefiting Children's Education)



When: Monday, September 27, 2010
Where: Hyatt Hill Country Resort & Spa
San Antonio, Texas
Register: www.swing4ed.com or call (210) 431-4999

Connections Page 7

Photo by Linda Drum



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Development Office
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DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

6019 Buena Vista St. | San Antonio, TX 78237-1700
Ph: (210) 431-4999 | Fax: (210) 431-0944

sswdevelopment@sbcglobal.net

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CONNECTIONS EDITOR

Nanette E. Dion

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Sr. Olga Munoz, FMA

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS

Sr. Rachel Crotti, FMA

Sr. Sandra Neaves, FMA

Nanette E. Dion

Carmen Santiago

Linda Drum

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Give the Gift of Prayer

