**Haiti is Beautiful**

August 2011

Following a blessing by Father Dan Klem on the weekend of July 23-24 Patricia Britz, Frank Daniel and Neil Walsh visited their twin parish of Saint Gabriel’s in Lascahobas, Haiti, for two weeks. Frank actually spent one week at Lascahobas and one week at Trianon with Father Jean Serdieu who was the associate pastor at Lascahobas and now has his own parish. The Sacred Heart pilgrims were warmly welcomed and are now treated as family. They participated in all aspects of St. Gabriel’s parish life including singing, dancing, family visits, a wedding, a funeral, baptisms, an ordination, and breaking bread together. The journey also served as a retreat for the three Sacred Heart visitors allowing them to reflect on their own spirituality and blessings. In addition, they attended meetings with the Bureau d’Education and the Fourth Annual Hinche Diocesan Education Conference. Family meals with the parish “responsibles” in their homes were a highlight that demonstrated how the relationship between Sacred Heart and St. Gabriel’s has grown.

There were many visits to the middle school construction project, daily afternoon rain, and daily reflection and prayer for the three. Other highlights were the awarding of school scholarships to five of the highest achievement students who were the hardest working and demonstrated the greatest need at St. Gabriel’s college (grades 7-11). Also, a continuing education scholarship was awarded to the parish school system headmaster Mr. Fritz André. The pilgrims joined in celebrating the feast of Père Bloch (the founding French pastor of the parish), delivered 40 handmade dresses to local young girls, turned over much needed medical supplies to the parish nurse and school supplies to the local school supervisor Mr. Lafleur Pierrot.

With Fr. Bernard they visited the two sustainable development vegetable farms and the relocated goat park which are close to the shores of beautiful Lake Péligre. To date the sustainable farming projects under Fr. Bernard’s supervision have received a matching Battaglia Fund grant of $5,000 and have applied for a second matching Battaglia grant of $5,000 and a third matching grant from CRS for $10,000 for latrines and dry season irrigation in the second farm. Also, they visited outlying communities in Fr. Bernard’s parish including Mât Bâtiment, Juampas, Morène and La Colline. Mât Bâtiment means mast of the boat and this area is named such because the Haitians that live there say that Noah’s ark rests in this place. Patricia and Neil were warmly welcomed by the people who live there, and Patricia experienced her first mule ride to the top of the mountain and down. The pilgrimage also included visits to St. Anne parish in Trianon and a stay at the Gwo Jean Re-treat Center, a suburb of Port-au-Prince.

There is reconstruction, growth, restoration, renewal and hope. The resilient and faithful spirit of the Haitian people is truly inspiring, and the three pilgrims are deeply enhanced by their visit. Although the stay in Haiti was two weeks, the three so enjoyed their journey that the visit seemed more like two days, creating in them a deep resolve and definitely the desire to return. If you are interested in being a fellow pilgrim on any future journey, please talk to any one of the three or any member of the Haiti Twinning Ministry (HTM). Many people do not realize how beautiful the country of Haiti is. Its tall mountains, flowing rivers, expansive Lake Péligre, just to mention a few are truly breath taking. Ayiti Bel! (Haiti is beautiful).

By Frank Daniel, Member of the Haiti Twining Ministry