

Pilgrimage Report – 3-17-09 to 3-23-09

By Kevin Nester

General Impressions:

My impression of the Lomas area is that it seems to be doing better in some ways. I noticed many more bicycles and motor bikes/cycles than on my past visits. Also, many more people have cell phones. Being only place in the area with electricity, the rectory is the place to get your cell phone recharged for a few Goudes. The young girl who assists the cook seems to be responsible for this operation.

March is a good time of year to visit. The peoples crops are starting to come in. In general it appeared that the people had enough to eat this time of year. Apparently this is not the case in January and February. They are the lean months when the people's food stocks begin to run low.

As far as the rest of the country is concerned, I believe the people are better off living in Lomas than in the cities and towns. Lomas is out in the boonies and is very poor. But at least the people have a chance to raise food to eat. In fact as Jim Pandolfino said, "If the water situation could be improved and you could provide electricity, I'd like to move here." We spent many hours walling through the countryside with our local guides, Garry and Jean-Jean. The people were always happy to see us. The children were especially happy to see Jim, who handed out many lollipops.

The cities and towns of Haiti that we passed through all appeared to be very desperate and sad places. The slums of Haiti's cities are full of young people from places like Lomas who left home hoping to find a better life. I think they would have been better off staying home.

Meeting with the Teachers:

We met with the teachers on 3/18/09. We met with Regulmat Emmanise (Kindergarten – A), Felix Ezania (Kindergarten- B), Junior Ormicil (1st Grade A), and Jean Remy Alteas aka Jean Jean (2nd Grade B). They are pictured below with Garry our interpreter and are the teachers that we are paying this year. The Government has promised to pay St. Joseph Parish's other teachers. According to Fr. Antoine, the government has not provided anything money since January. He is hopeful that the promised money will come soon.

We asked the teachers if the goods we ship are helpful. They said they were. We asked what other things we could send them in future shipments. They asked for the following:

- French / Haitian Creole Dictionaries
- English / Haitian Creole Dictionaries (we gave each of the teachers pictured an English / Haitian Creole Dictionary as a gift)
- Picture books to help the children learn colors.
- Letter blocks (to the help children learn spelling)
- Playground equipment (swing sets, sliding boards, see saws, monkey bars, etc.)

Meeting with Future Well Drillers

On 3/18/0 we met with Fenelus Aronce and Getavien Felix (orange shirt in picture below). They are the men who we will eventually train as well drillers. They are mechanics by trade and were very interested in what we had to tell them about the well drilling rig. Through pictures and our interpreter Garry we explained the well drilling process, the tools that the machine is equipped with, what we need to do before we can ship the machine, the difficulties we well encounter in shipping the machine, and the importance of protecting and



caring for the machine when it arrives in Lalomas. In one of the pictures they saw the rig supported on wooden cribbing. They understood why the cribbing was needed, but were concerned that it would be hard to find and keep that much wood. It would likely become charcoal before too long. We told them that when we get a new truck we will make a change to the machine that will reduce or eliminate the amount of wood needed to support the machine when drilling. This pleased them.

They asked, “If we were sending instructions on how to use the machine when it is shipped?” We told them that our plan is to come to Haiti and show them how to properly use and care for the machine. They seemed happy with this answer. (Along these lines a good teaching aid would be to take a series digital pictures of the set up, operation, tear down, and maintenance of the machine. Add English instructions and captions. Have the instructions and captions translated into French and transposed on a duplicate set of pictures (it will be easier for them to find people to translate from French to Creole than from English to Creole). Make as many copies as necessary. Have them all laminated and assembled into 3 ring binders.)

They asked, “Was the machine being sent to drill 1 well or wells for all the chapels?” We told them that as long as the machine is cared for and protected it can drill as many wells as they want (and can afford). Also, we told them that the machine was built in the 1950’s and that it has been used to drill wells ever since. They seemed pleased with this answer.

They asked, “Who would own the machine and control the work?” We answered that we are giving the machine to the Parish. We were not familiar with how the Parish is governed, but it will be up to the Parish to decide how it will be used. They seemed happy with this answer as well.

Overall we were very impressed with the gentlemen and think the machine will be in good hands if we are successful in getting it to Lomas in 1 piece.



St. Joseph Day Celebration

The day before the St. Joseph Day Celebration, Wednesday 3/18/09 was a long day of preparation for Fr. Antoine and the people. First the church needed to be cleaned. All the benches were removed and the church swept by the school children (school girls mostly). Below is a picture of Fr. Antoine showing one of them the finer points of sweeping. The floor was mopped following this. The kids had great fun carrying buckets of water to the church from the near by well. Jim & I joined in and shamed some of the young boys into helping. After the floor dried, Fr. Antoine spent several hours supervising the choir, orchestra, and liturgical dancers practice. That evening Fr. George, Fr. McKensie, & Fr. Richard arrived. We enjoyed our evening meal together and after dinner drinks of Prestige & moonshine. Fr. George especially liked moonshine.



Thursday began with the arrival of more priests. Ultimately seven priests (including Fr. Antoine) concelebrated the mass. Fr. George was the main celebrant and Fr. Richard the homilist. The mass was scheduled to start at 10 AM, which means it started about 10:30 AM. It was a wonderful experience from the processional, led by about 12 liturgical dancers through the recessional. It held my attention the entire time, even though I barely understood a word that was said. In all it lasted about 2 ½ hours and was filled with music from the combined choirs of all the chapels and the orchestra made up of an electric guitar, bass guitar, keyboard, saxophone, and 2 drummers.

After the mass Jim, Garry, and I mingled with the many people in the church yard. One high point was the arrival of a food shipment from the World Food Organization to feed the school children at Biaou. The next day a shipment arrived for the school children at Premiere Savanne. Apparently the way the program works is the 1st time the ship enough food for all the students. The WFO expects the locals to cover a small share of the costs. So the parents need to anti up. Future shipments will be limited by the amount collected locally. If only 100 families pay the fee, only enough food for 100 children will be sent. This is something we should keep in our prayers. Fr. Antoine is worried that there won't be enough contributors to continue the shipments.

After this we enjoyed meal. That day Fr. Anotine and his staff (mostly the cook and her young helper of about 12 years old) cooked for and fed over 400 people. Keep in mind that the cooking was done over charcoal fires. There are no commercial ranges in Lalomas. It was an amazing fete.



The day ended with a soccer game between the Biaou village team a neighboring village team. It ended in a 2-2 tie.

Concurrent with the week of the St. Joseph Day celebration is the cock fighting season. Just up the road from the church at Biaou was the Bryce Jordan Center of cock fighting in Lomas. Each night leading up to St. Joseph Day, the evening of St. Joseph Day, and the evening or 2 after the fights (and a big party put on by a local politician) would begin a little before sundown and generally continue into the wee hours of the morning. After which the local guinea hens and roosters would begin to crow. Usually about 3 or 4 AM.



Meeting with the Lalomas Cooperative

On 3/22/09 we met with three members of the Lalomas Cooperative pictured below, the Coordinator Amerique Atius (wearing the yellow shirt) and members Lukner Fenelon (far left) and Andre Joseph (far right). They provided the attached hand written report. They explained that they exchanged the \$500 US at Fonkoze bank in St. Michel and received approximately 17,500 G. They deposited the 17,500 G in their bank account in one of the other banks in St. Michel (I forgot the name). Initially they withdrew 9000 G and purchased 74 containers of beans which they sold for a profit. Also they realized 1720G of interest on their deposits. They took the remaining money that we gave them (8500 G), the interest (1720 G), and additional member contributions (3280 G) and purchased 133 containers of pigeon peas which then planted. At this time they are waiting for their crops to come in and are hoping for good yields. In their report they explained their other efforts and their dream of being able to help feed the St. Joseph School Children. We shared our desire to ship the solar dehydrator to them, and they seemed pleased with this. They provided us each (Jim, Fr. Antoine, & me) with a gift of mango marmalade, mango syrup, and granadia (yellow passion fruit) marmalade.

Going into the meeting I wasn't sure what to expect. Needless to say I was pleasantly surprised by the sophistication and professionalism of their report and their overall business skills. The fact that their jars and bottles of marmalade and syrup have labels that expound on the health benefits of eating mangos shows marketing savvy as well.

They were very happy to receive the gift of \$400 US. I explained that we are very happy to be able to help them and told them that they are a good example to their families and community, because they are working hard to make their lives better.

Later that day in one of our walks we visited with Mdm. Thomas (Cooperative Treasurer) at her home. She was not able to meet with us because of a family emergency. She shared with us her taste for peanut butter that she makes and she provided Jim, Fr. Antoine, & me each with a freshly made jar. It's the best tasting peanut butter I've ever eaten. She asked if we knew anything about machines that make peanut butter. She and other locals make their product with hand grinders. If they had a machine they could increase their production and profits. We said that this sounds like a good idea and that we will begin researching it.

Overall I think our investment in the Lomas Cooperative is money very well spent.



Water Project

Our visit to the building materials supplier in St. Michel to see if they had or could get PVC well casing pipe was not fruitful. I need to give Fr. Antoine a list of types of pipe that will work and he will check with his sources in PAP and other parts of Haiti to see what's available.

Friday or Saturday (I can't remember which) we went up a local mountain to look at a spring that used to provide water to the area just north of the village of Pemièr Savanne. The line was broken during a past rainy

season flood. It looks like it would be a very good water source to some of the area. They looked at reconstructing the line with steel pipe, but it was much too expensive. I think there are other possible pipe materials that would cost less, assuming they are available in Haiti. I am researching this and intend to give Fr. Antoine a list of pipe materials to look for.

Fr. Antoine's Next Visit

Fr. Antoine would like to visit the week of October 11, 2009 and he would like to attend the diocesan clergy conference. Also, he asked if it would be possible for him to bring one of the locals on a future trip. He suggested Jean Remy Alteas (Jean Jean).