

Is the Spirit Calling Us to Confirm our Common Apostolic Mission discerned in September 2010?

The title of this article is the theme of the Spring Council Meeting of Central Region. Eleven out of seventeen CLC communities were represented at the meeting held on June 4th at St. Joseph's Elementary School in Streetsville. The theme was *mission* and it specifically focused on the Central Region commitment to support displaced Haitian children through education in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, a decision made by Council in 2010. This followed a process guided by a working group three months in advance of the meeting to evaluate the Mission for the region from 2010. It was time to decide how to approach this mission for the next five years. We know that the Jesuits will continue their project there until at least 2020. We might ask ourselves, *how have we done? How has it impacted the balance of all three of our pillars- Spirituality, Community, and Mission? Are we growing together? Are we growing as individuals? Are we planting the Love of Christ in the midst of those less fortunate to give them spiritual, not just corporal, sustenance? **This article will give the reader some insight into the process of evaluation and the history of the mission.***

It is important to use a framework to give structure to a process. Stage Four Members presented a summary of the Life, Death, and Resurrection Cycle that would inform council of the process development for mission in the last five years. It was related to how the region responded and what outcomes existed for the region to consider in its discernment to continue. This took the form of three visual handouts and discussion about the easy road and the hard road of our journey together, about the road to rejection and the road to acceptance and rejoicing. This decision is so important to the region that it was decided to work further with those communities not participating, so that the greatest consensus possible be achieved at the Fall Council meeting.

Fr. Macobi,sj., our special guest speaker from Santo Domingo and administrator of the school program, gave a ppt. overview of the current status of La Cienaga, the low lands swamp area where a large number of Haitians have migrated to. The school is called Centro Educativo Loyola. We saw an aerial view of La Cienaga, obviously situated in a land depression in Santo Domingo. Imagine the muck in the rainy season! He estimated that there were 13,000 Haitian families settled in 5,500 houses made of wood and cement primarily. With approximately 24,000 persons needing housing and having such an inadequate supply, there might be two to three families sharing one two room house. The majority of adults have precarious work, dependent on work availability.

Looming social problems include child, domestic, and gender violence and alcoholism. Sexual education is lacking, a leading cause in child pregnancies. One can relate to these demographics anywhere in the world where there is extreme poverty. In Santo Domingo, general education is not available for the Haitians, since many are not eligible for government school admission. Age is an issue for older children who do not fit in when they are so far behind. A majority have lost their documents in the earthquake in 2010. Work is hard to find.

Haitians in both Haiti and Santo Domingo are greatly conflicted in their loyalties toward the Dominicans (and vice versa) and discrimination is deep rooted. Many see the jobs given to an alien as a theft of a job for an indigent. Yet, despite all of these problems, there exists sensitivity toward the immigrant Haitians by the many Dominicans. They have organized outreach programs for daily living needs for them. They visit the sick and they try to assist immigrants. This shows signs of solidarity. In this milieu, the Jesuits established the *Projecto del Centro Educativo Loyola*.

About the School

The goals of the school were influenced by two desires. First, to help children of Haitian descent who were unable to access education in government schools and second, to provide a place to learn that would increase self confidence and help them to become independent.

The general age of the students is eight to thirteen years. There is a morning class and an afternoon class in which 47 to 60 students participate. Documentation arrangements are made for them. There are two teachers for a curriculum that includes Spanish, Reading and Writing, Math, Social Sciences, Environmental studies, History and Intercultural Relations, the latter being a unique program not offered in the government schools.

Extracurricular activities include such activities as a meet and mingle for mothers, museum visits, and a visit to a recreational park.

Since 2012, the number of students receiving formation was 157. A large number are being admitted to government schools. Also the documentation process, slowed for lack of funding, continues.

Ongoing Difficulties

A few items were emphasized. They are listed as: 1) Malnutrition 2) Parents are unable to assist education without funds 3) lack of documentation 4) theft from each other (to survive) 5) Intense climate heat interrupts attention span in class 5) school supplies 6) school maintenance 7) lack of communication services.

The outcome of our process resulted in a provisional statement as follows:

“Central Region will carry on provisionally, dependent on community response, with the decision of 2010, given a formation of a WG as decided in 2013 and in collaboration with the Jesuits to 2020.”

In gratitude for this smooth transition, we celebrated the Eucharist together with Fr. J.P. Horrigan, our ecclesiastical Assistant. We eagerly look forward to a respectful positive outcome, blest by the Holy Trinity, whom we invite into our minds and our hearts every day of our lives.

Submitted by

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