

August 11, 2010 - Haiti – A visit of encouragement and planning



(ANS – Port-au-Prince) – Fr. Vaclav Klement, general councilor for Salesian missions, was in the vice-province of Haiti from August 1 to 4, meeting the provincial council and members of the Rinaldi Foundation and visiting all the Salesian works in the capital. (He was accompanied by Fr. Mark Hyde from the Salesian Missions Office in New Rochelle.)

Fr. Klement went to Pétion-Ville, Thorland, Gressier, Fleriot, ENAM, Lakay, Cité Soleil, the Little Schools of Fr. Bohnen (OPEPB), and Drouillard. He met the Salesians in each place to hear about and check the state of progress in the reconstruction work after the January 12 earthquake.

During the meeting with the Rinaldi Foundation, Fr. Klement was able to establish that, motivated by the Rector Major's letter at the beginning of the year, the various agencies are getting organized to intensify the work, clarify priorities and responsibilities, and solve problems together rather than working in isolation. A list of projects had been drawn up, and they are in constant contact with the Rector Major. At present the Rinaldi Foundation team are still working in tents, but they will soon be able to move to new offices.

In the next few days a report will be sent to Rome detailing the funding required, based on the degree of need. There is also a need for an expert in communications based on the spot, able to highlight positive situations, responses to difficulties, and the solid work that has been done for the needy, counteracting bad press and exclusively negative news.

Relations with Salesian NGOs are very good and fruitful. Those working in the front line are fully aware of the need to be careful in administering the funds received and to maintain the trust and responsibility required in such situations. That said, some works have not yet found agencies to help them rebuild, whereas others are beginning to see the results of their work.

At the meeting with the provincial council on August 3, attended by members of the new and the old councils, everyone found many areas to work on in common. Fr. Sylvain Ducange expressed his thanks, recalled the need for continued courage and enthusiasm to make progress in facing challenges, and introduced the new council members. He added that the mayor of Thorland had made it possible for the guests at Thorland to begin their retreat and had thanked the Salesians for their support over the past six months.

In his address, the councilor for the missions insisted that in all the work going on the key word was "communication," in every sense of the word: as commitment, as the way forward, as responsibility. "This entire project needs the primacy of God, the nourishment of his word, and a faithful understanding of the Constitutions," he said.

Fr. Klement then pointed out that the Salesians in Haiti have been at the center of the Congregation during 2010, experiencing a time of worldwide solidarity, the presence of the Rector Major, of general councilors, of new missionaries, of the Salesian world present in every expression of fraternity. All this was in turn an opportunity to build up the charism and re-empower the Salesian presence. In October, furthermore, there would be visits to Haiti from Fr. Filiberto Gonzalez, general councilor for communications, and Fr. Fabio Attard, general councilor for youth ministry.

Various tasks remain, such as the drawing up of a Province Plan (POI) to ease the way ahead for the province, the production of positive and encouraging news items, to be made known widely, and the continuation of the work of reconstruction and developing links with the Salesian NGOs, to reinforce the numerous projects.