

February 16, 2010 - Haiti – Final stage on a journey inspired by hope



(ANS – Pétion-Ville) – The final day of the Rector Major's visit to the vice province of Haiti was entirely dedicated to the Salesians. His meeting with the council of the vice province, celebrating Mass, and giving some special tasks were the highlights.

This final day began with a short visit to the Salesian primary school next to the Pétion-Ville house. In the courtyards of this center, where only the outer staircase was damaged by the earthquake, there are 200 families in tents.

This was followed by a meeting with the council. The Rector Major gave the Haitian provincial, Fr. Sylvain Ducange, the task of putting into action the priority mentioned the previous days in the meeting with the Salesian Family: education. After the situation of the centers affected by the earthquake had been ascertained, a plan was drawn up that would take account of the work to be done and the relocation necessary.

Afterwards a short but significant meeting was held with the person responsible for the Italian Civil Defense group in Haiti, Luigi D'Angelo. The time required and the methods to be used in making the ENAM operational were considered so that the phases of reorganization and reconstruction can be started

Drawing on the readings of the liturgy of the day, the Rector Major told the Salesians in Haiti gathered together at Pétion-Ville, in the course of simple and well-attended Mass, not to follow the example of the Pharisees, who asked Jesus for a sign of the presence of God. "There are already signs of His presence!" Suffering and death become clearer in the sign of the cross. "I can already see signs of something new! The signs of solidarity that have been seen in the Congregation and around it are the expression of something which is alive, which suffers and shares totally! You are not alone!" As evidence of this, Fr. Chavez mentioned the small contributions and the results of collections that have been made for Haiti in some of the poorest houses in the Congregation.

He asked the Salesians of Haiti to be the antennae of history capable of picking up the needs and the problems of people and of society; the heralds of the dawn who know how to wait for and assist in the birth of a new era for the country; and God's prophets proclaiming His Word.

During the Mass special prayers were said for the Salesians, youngsters, and all those who died under the rubble.

Later in the morning the Rector Major phoned his vicar, Fr. Adriano Bregolin, who was holding a meeting with a group of businessmen in the city of Pavia who were ready to become involved in some projects being proposed. During the short link-up the Rector Major described what he had seen during his visit and the urgent humanitarian needs of the people of Haiti.

Before leaving Pétion-Ville, the Rector Major informed the Salesians of the practical decisions that, in agreement with the council of the vice province, had been made that morning. Special thanks were offered to those centers which had welcomed the displaced people. Thought needed to be given about relocating some of them, but education remained the priority. ENAM was to be restructured and needed to have a youth center so that it might be "a social lung at the service of the whole area of Cité Soleil and offer a broader sort of education."

Fr. Chavez repeated that the real difficulty lay not in rebuilding collapsed walls "but in changing the mentality of the Haitian people. Salesians are educators. It is up to you to cooperate in this change." The Rector Major concluded, "It is time to roll up our sleeves!"

The thanks of Fr. Ducange were heartfelt and moving: "Thank you for your presence, for your words, for your encouragement," thanks which were offered also to all the members of the general council and to all the Salesians of the Congregation.