



Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mùa Thường Niên Năm C
Chúa Nhật Tuần XV
July 14, 2019 | Ngày 14 tháng 7 năm 2019

Pastor's Column

Rev. Michael Ratajczak
760-758-4100 x100
michaels@stmoside.org

The Diocese of Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies

When we think of Jamaica, the thoughts of Ocho Rios, beautiful beaches and wonderful scenery come to mind—all of which is part of the island. A year before becoming a priest of the Diocese of Mandeville, I spent 5 days with our founding bishop touring the diocese—and, I saw a very different side of Jamaica!

Bishop Paul Boyle said to me: “We have dire poverty. It’s something the tourists don’t see, nor do the television ads feature. Our people are poor. Jamaica is one of the poorest nations in the hemisphere after Haiti, and our diocese is the poorest part of Jamaica.”

In the Diocese of Mandeville, there are about six hundred thousand people. Sixty eight percent have no running water; only, outside latrines. Families are using “primitive methods” of disposing human waste – they go into the bushes. People need basic necessities of life: food, clothing, shoes to wear, mattresses – many need a home. The average annual income in Jamaica is US\$1,500. – a little less than \$29 per week. Many workers don’t receive even this wage. Among people aged 15 to 19, 25% are “functionally illiterate.” Many of those who are functionally literate have severe reading problems. Seventy-five percent of students who take standardized testing cannot pass even one subject. There is an alarming number of destitute elderly and abandoned/neglected/abuse children and adolescents. People are dying every day from diseases, which no longer exist in the United States because we have adequate medical care. **BOTTOM LINE:** the Diocese of Mandeville is very, very poor!

Bishop Boyle shared with me SOME of his needs so he can serve his beloved people:

1. **Housing for the Poor**—since some people are completely homeless and many live in shacks of zinc with dirt floors, the bishop tries to build houses for the poor. The houses are 14X20 feet, without electricity or running water; but each home is a “castle” to a family used to sleeping on the ground. The cost of each house is \$3,000.
2. **Care for the Elderly and Abandoned**—many elderly are destitute and abandoned. The Diocese of

Mandeville has a home for 75 elderly who are cared for by Mother Teresa’s Sisters. More homes are needed. The diocese cares for 100 dependent, neglected and abuse youth in our orphanage. More homes are needed for the kids also.

3. **Education**—Sixteen basic schools have been established, most for young children; there are also 2 high schools – one of which opened 2 years ago! The church has always believed in the power of education to break the cycle of poverty. A small Catholic college, The College of Mandeville provides a college education.
4. **Food**—Many families are hungry, or even starving. The parishes provide as much food as possible for the hungry.
5. **Parish Ministries**—In most cases, monthly parish collections represent less than 10% of the monthly parish operating expense. One priest I met slept on the floor in the sacristy! Some parishes don’t have a phone. People walk for miles to go to church. We beg for 90% of the operating costs of parishes and parish ministries to evangelize and catechize our people.
6. **Clinics**—We are blessed to be able to provide clinics in areas of the diocese where people can’t get medical attention—something developed nations take for granted.

All too often, the tropical weather and storms in the Caribbean wreak havoc in the lives of our poor and to our ministries. The cost is enormous to recover from these storms and replace roofs, restore classrooms, clean up from water damage in our buildings, and, replace vestments and liturgical books that were ruined. Also we work to help families rebuild hundreds of humble homes lost in the storms. Obviously, we need enormous support for our local church. Please help us as we bring the Gospel, in our Catholic tradition, to our beloved people and help them to experience dignity as children of God. Thank you for welcoming the Diocese of Mandeville for your annual mission appeal.

—Fr. Gary Wiesmann, Diocese of Mandeville