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The Scholasticate of Haiti on the move due to insecurity

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - The growing insecurity which affects all sectors of the country and causes massive population displacements also has a great impact on the proper functioning of the scholasticate of the Montfort Missionaries in Haiti. Many areas in Port-au-Prince are declared lawless zones or lost territories where thousands of men, women, and children forcibly left their homes to escape violence and looting. The *cul-de-sac* plain in particular “Bon repos” where the scholasticate is located is one of them. It became an area which is difficult to access and depopulated due to clashes between armed groups. This situation led to internal migration where people fled their neighborhoods to places that are more peaceful and secure. The Montfortian Scholasticate was not spared.

Since October 1, 2023, in order to escape the violence of armed gangs and at the request of the Provincial, Fr. Jean-Jacques SAINT LOUIS, SMM, the seventeen (17) scholastics and their Rector, Fr. Lanès PHANOR, SMM, abandoned the house of the Scholasticate and are currently staying in a house belonging to the Sisters of Sainte Union in the Parish of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort. They arrived by fleeing heavy fire and taking shortcuts. They were welcomed by Fr. Roland VILFORT, SMM and, for some months already, they have been staying in this new house with good and bad sides, advantages and disadvantages, ups and downs. The important thing is that they have a certain peace of mind to pray, study and carry out the apostolate of charity.

How does the scholasticate function in this new reality? For how long will the scholasticate be housed in this house? What will be the future of the scholasticate?

Such questions concern and challenge them in this context of generalized insecurity in the country, and plunge into deep community reflection.

As for the functioning of the scholasticate in this new reality, it must be said that since their arrival in this new house, they have tried to adapt as best as they could, even if all the conditions are not met. Besides, the host house was not built to accommodate all these people. There are not enough rooms and amenities. They are obliged to put two scholastics per room. There are also not enough showers and toilets. There is no library. The room used as a chapel is at the same time the living room, the study room, the community meeting room and the recreation room. The refectory is also very small compared to the number of scholastics.

Also, there is a lot of coming and going in the yard of this house. There are at least four other people who are not scholastics who share this courtyard with them. This creates a lack of privacy and affects the proper functioning of the scholasticate. On top of this are the noises of merchants, cars and nightclubs in the area which disturb them during their prayer times. However, despite these inconveniences and difficulties, they recognize that their presence in this house is the work of God's providence, and they are grateful to Him for His goodness shown in these times of trial.

Despite the difficulties, they must also recognize the advantages that this house brings. Being in this house, the scholastics arrive earlier for class unlike when they were at the "Plaine". There are less traffic jam and less fatigue. In addition, they have more time to rest and study. However, if they have to stay in this house for a long time, there must be some changes, notably: 1) getting the people out of the courtyard to give the scholastics more privacy; 2) consider more rooms, showers and toilets to accommodate the number of scholastics which is growing more and more each year. There are 17 scholastics this year. There will probably be 21 next year. If nothing is done in time, it will be more difficult or even impossible to house them all here. This is why it is important to start thinking now to anticipate the future, take the necessary measures and have a plan B for next year.

As for the question relating to the duration of the scholasticate in this new house, it is uncertain because the situation is getting worse every day. Armed gangs reign supreme and terrorize the population. Peace has not completely returned to the plain area. Apparently, there is calm at the moment but there are still shooting incidents, and insecurity is in full swing. There are still a lot of uncertainties and worries about their upcoming return to the scholasticate in the "Plaine". Hence, there is a dire need for those responsible to think about the future of the scholasticate in the plains. Should they always keep it in the same place or not, or consider another place?

Regarding the future of the scholasticate at the "Plaine", the reality should be looked at more closely. With the growing insecurity in the area, keeping the scholasticate at the "Plaine" requires good discernment and a capacity for observation for better planning for the future. Certainly, the house was built with more or less a structure for formation but, taking into account the current situation with armed gangs which are expanding their territory every day, if there is no change in the future, things must be seen differently. Reality therefore invites everyone to read the signs of the times, to see, judge and act.

Vigilance and prudence in faith

It is true that they trust the Lord and always pray to Him for help, but it is also He who tells them to watch and be careful. They do not know the day or the hour when the thieves will come to break into and

pillage their house because, not far from this house, these thieves are already invading others, pillaging them and transforming them into their own base. This is why everyone is vigilant and careful.

Since the scholastics left, they have had a caretaker on site who takes care of the yard and the house. Father Lanès, accompanied by a few scholastics, goes down on Sundays, when there are people passing through, to celebrate Mass with the people of God gathered in “Notre Dame du Rosaire” church. It is their way of daring to take risks for God and for humanity as the General Chapter of May 2023 asked them. It is a testimony of faith, courage and hope which says that all is not over despite the many challenges. Indeed, times are difficult, and the situation is serious. Living in Haiti today exposes everyone to many risks but it is in this context of risk that they are invited to bear witness to Christ and train future pastors for the Church in Haiti.

May God, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, continue to watch over and protect this country so that peace and security become a reality in this beloved Haiti.

*Fr. Lanès PHANOR, SMM
Rector of the Scholasticate*