

# BROTHERS OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION

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**Brother Yannick HOUSSAY**

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## ***Letter to the Mennaisian Family***

Rome, 26th March 2010

Dear Brothers,  
Dear Friends,

Pressed by the urgent desire to support the Brothers, the Laity and the youth of our educational institutions in Haiti, I went to the site from the 10th to the 18th March, accompanied by Brother Louis Balanant, Treasurer General. In eight days, we have been able to access the gravity of the situation, but also of the trust that gives to the Haitians the stamina not to despair but to forge ahead with the work of reconstruction. The earthquake of 12th January 2010, of magnitude of 7.3, lasted 35 seconds. The buildings insufficiently robust were not able to resist, but the others also were shaken by the furious attack of the earthquake.

Our Brothers, the young men in our houses of formation and other persons we met, notably at Saint-Louis de Delmas, related to us what they saw and went through : the earth which was moving like waves of a rough sea; the buildings shaken by the violent movement and which collapsed with a terrible noise; the numerous people wounded that could not be helped for lack of means and who were laid at the doors of packed hospitals; the dead also, very many dead people, children, youths and so many others; and the feeling of powerlessness in view of the extent of the disaster.

It was also the time of solidarity, of mutual help, in spite of the danger. A Brother narrated to us how the youth and the Brothers tried to rescue Brother Joseph Bergot trapped by heavy concrete beams in the rubble of La Mennais House, thus exposing themselves to the dangerous after-shocks that were still killing people. A magnificent devotion to duty in terribly difficult circumstances.

Today again, when we are going through the streets of Port-au-Prince or taking the route in the direction of Léogane – a town 90% destroyed of which the old school of the Brothers was completely razed to the ground – we were astonished at the quantity of devastated buildings. In this town, as at Port-au-Prince, everything has to be rebuilt.

And, tents everywhere! The Haitians do not want to sleep any more under roofs with concrete. They are too frightened ! Each family tries to find a place where it can construct a precarious shelter or put up a tent. The Brothers are doing the same. Many sleep under tents or in the classrooms which resisted, waiting to be able to reconstruct a solid house in which they

hope to find a safe shelter in the future. The families that found refuge in the camps organised at Saint-Louis or at the Juniorate are privileged in relation to many others. It will be difficult for them to leave this place. Yet, they will have to in order to if education has to recover its rights there! We are pressing hard to propose to them a more appropriate site.

But, above all, it is the persons that need rebuilding. It is to this task also that the Brothers and the Laity of our schools actually consecrate themselves. There, where it is possible, according to the instructions of the Government (Jacmel, La Vallée), the school reopened under the big tents set up with the help of the NGO. At St-Joseph School of Pétionville, since conditions permit it, the children are received every day. There, they can relate what they have gone through, sing and play, and also rebuild themselves. In the country, our schools have received as many pupils as possible from Port-au-Prince. All hope that at the beginning of April schools will re-open everywhere. For that, it is envisaged that several schools will use the same provisional physical facilities, some, in the morning, the others, in the afternoon.

Such a trial shakes up all the certitudes. In 35 seconds, many institutionnl landmarks collapsed. « We have lost many cadres », said a Haitian student; many of these, at the time the earthquake struck were still in their offices. Many Government buildings were destroyed or badly damaged. A big number of churches collapsed. Many schools were destroyed. That provoked an enormous traumatism. It will take a powerful interior strength and a strong faith to remove the mountains and give life back to this devastated country !

For that, our Brothers of Haiti count on our prayers and on our aid. With them, we shall rebuild Haiti. There, I met the people engaged in the reconstruction, and among them, some Old Boys of Saint-Louis de Gonzague. There is in them such trust, and such hope that, on listening to them, we cannot doubt that Haiti will rise again from its ruins.

I told the Brothers and the Laity that they were not alone, that we were with them for, thanks to God, giving life again to our education works. At one time, some felt their strength failing and their hope fading in their heart. But actually, thanks to the team spirit which animates them and to the many testimonies of aid they are receiving, thanks also to the convictions animated by faith in God Alone, the Brothers know that they will be able to start all over again. With the other religious men and women engaged in teaching, in the Church, they feel their strength is being invigorated and they know that Haiti will rise again.

« Thus says the Lord, who made a way through the sea, a path in the raging waters,... The Lord says : No need to remember past events, no need to think about. Look, I am doing something new : now it emerges ; can you not see it ? » (Is 43: 16, 18). We read this as a call to hope, this 5th Sunday of Lent, on the 21<sup>st</sup> March. Haiti will only be able to rebuild itself on the basis of searching for truth and justice for all. That is why it is not possible to rebuild without making it « start from Christ ». It is necessary to go to the place to realise that it is the only way that will permit to give a chance to all the plans that will be made to save Haiti from a new disaster.

But we must hurry up. Living inside a tent which is too fragile, when the rainy season is approaching, is a real challenge. It is tantamount to exposing the sick to additional ravages. Can we remain doing nothing when so many human beings are in danger ?

The Brothers were touched by the important boost of solidarity which, in the entire Congregation, has already produced a substantial financial aid. Thanks to all those men and women who have already given donations, they feel supported, sustained, encouraged and even pushed to go forward on this immense path which is unfolding now. You have given them great hope. They know that with your aid they can actually begin the work.

We ought then to go on with our actions of solidarity, and also think that we could help other schools to recover.

In concrete terms, here are, in a few lines, the reconstruction projects and the rehabilitation of our schools, as well as their funding as provided for in the Provincial Council meeting which was held on Sunday, 14th March in the presence of Brother Louis Balanant, Treasurer General and me.

- Rehabilitation of the buildings of the Postulate, of the Mennaisian Centre and of the Noviciate. The work has started.
- Restoration, in progress, of the Sisters' residence, at Delmas, which will become that of the Brothers.
- Reconstruction of Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague Primary School, not at Rue du Centre where it was, but on the site of the Secondary School of the same name at Delmas.
- Rehabilitation of Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague Secondary School at Delmas, and the reconstruction of some buildings which must have been demolished.
- Reconstruction of Jean-Marie Guilloux School of which we could keep two storeys of the old building.
- Reconstruction of a building of 6 classes at the school of St-Joseph de Pétionville.
- Rehabilitation and reconstruction of some school premises of Jacmel and of La Vallée.
- Adjustment of a new Provincial House. A project still under study.

For some of these projects, notably at the school Jean-Marie Guilloux of Port-au-Prince, Jacmel and of La Vallée, a funding is already envisaged, independently of the aid that we can give. With regard to the other projects, the Brothers of Haiti will utilise their meagre resources and count for a very big part on our aid and that of the Old Boys of Saint-Louis de Gonzague.

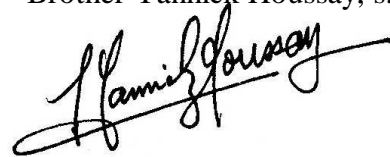
Brother Louis Balanant has already sent a detailed letter concerning these projects to the Major Superiors of Provinces and Vice-Provinces, and to the NGO's of the Congregation, with the proposals made by him, by the Provincial Council and by me in view of their financing. It

remains to them now to let him know what they envisage to do. I thank them in advance for their reactivity and generosity.

I would not like to conclude this letter without thanking with all my heart all those men and women who will put their expertise and their availability at the service of the reconstruction of Haitian schools. Each gesture of solidarity they will make will be a participation in this common effort in favour of the Haitian children and youth.

May Our Lady of Perpetual Help sustain the efforts of each one, and give hope again to the people of Haiti.

Brother Yannick Houssay, s.g.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yannick Houssay', written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.