

Port au Prince, HAITI (December 2014)

Sporadic political unrests are spreading across the city. Some had been violent confrontation between the police force and those demanding for the ouster of the country's president. Some deadly encounter happened between the government supporters and opposition parties. The opposition vows to keep taking the streets until they can successfully.

In our parish community, there seems to be cleansing of "suspected bandits" in the area. In just a week, five young people were murdered in the street leading to the church. Rumor says that police came with a list of those to be executed in the area. Some says it is the rival gangster doing the crimes. It created panicked in the parish community. Many feel so unsafe.



Amidst these insecurities, the poor people continue their struggle to survive. Their needs to live and to have a decent life are what matters most than the government inefficient answers to their problems. Women bravely take the streets everyday to find "something" so they can feed and send their children to school.

Young people who hope for a better future brave the streets everyday so they can go to school. Many expresses hope of leaving the country and find life elsewhere. It is a dream for almost every young Haitian to leave Haiti. There is a long line of young Haitians everyday in front of the embassies like the USA, Canada, Brazil, Chile, Argentina and Japan, hoping to get a visa. The ultimate dream is just to go but where.

Despite many changes in infrastructures, the plight of the poor people is becoming more and more desperate. Lack of jobs and almost everything is dependent on export. The cost of living is going up every day.

Everyday we are confronted with different stories of struggles and survival. Siblings of 6, ages from 21 to 7 years old, were left by their parents to tend for themselves. The father left them for another woman. The mother who seemed to lost hope for the family left them as well. The 17 years old girl said that every time she would ask help from people she trusted, men would only help in exchange for sex. It was also true for his 15 years old brother. The parish pays for the school and occasionally provides them food. The nuns of Mother Teresa promised to give them food ration on a regular basis. It is just one among the many challenging reality that confronts me in the parish every day.

The parish clinic continues to provide medical services to those who cannot afford health care. The recent 4 days medical missions proves this need when about 1000 people came to be seen by volunteer physicians. This was an average of 250 people a day who hoped to be seen by a doctor.



It is every parent's dream to give their children education. The parish has been supporting still about 100 children in elementary. Today, we focus our efforts to educate more high school students. The cost to educate a child in elementary is doable for a poor parent. But the cost of high school education is almost impossible for so many. I personally believe that young people reaching high school are more fragile. It is a period where they dream and aspire for a better future. By helping them get into a high school, we offer them some glimpses of hope. We may not be able to provide them everything, but we can help them hold on that dream and aspiration.

There is nothing more promising to see adult men and women eager to learn their alphabets. The parish has started an adult literacy program with about 120 participants. It is so exciting to see them proud to show they can write their names and able to count numbers. As we advance with this program, we hope to continue with our livelihood assistance program and mutual solidarity saving program. These two small economic programs had been proven to be effective among poor people especially with women in Haiti.

The plastic recycling project continues to progress. It is been almost three years in full operation. It greatly provides livelihood to many who are willing to collect plastic bottles in the streets. It helps to lessen the volume of garbage piled up in the streets of Port au Prince.



Advent is season to prepare for the birth of Jesus but for most Haitian it is a season of hope. Hope that the coming new year will bring them better opportunities. Hope that they will find solutions to their problems. Hope that the new year will offer them a life they can call their own. A mother's hope that she will no longer have to beg so she could feed her children. A young woman's hope that she will no longer have to use her body so she can finish her education. A young man's hope to find a job so he can help his mother and siblings.

This is the time to hope, to cling to that hope, to be encouraged to hope more. I just thank God for allowing me to hope with them. Let this be my Christmas greetings to you all because truly you are part of making some of these hopes come true!!

Father Andrew- Haïti