

## **What is the Future of the Haitian Pastoral of the United States?**

Editorial Posted on Bishop Sansaricq's Facebook Page - October 2019

This week we are very delighted to write an article on the Haitian pastoral approach in the United States. According to our research, the Haitian pastoral ministry in the United States was born at the time of the massive arrival of Haitians in Florida in the late 1960s. In 1965, only one Haitian priest ministered in New York. Father Guy Sansaricq, today bishop, began his ministry in Brooklyn in 1971. He is among the pioneers of this pastoral ministry with Fathers Antoine Adrien, William Smarth, Rollin Darbouze, Leandre and Smith Jeannot, his late brother Carl Sansaricq, and a few others who did not persevere. In Miami, Father Thomas Wenski, now archbishop of that archdiocese, started a very vigorous pastoral work for the Haitian Boat People. Archbishop Wenski of Miami learned Creole very quickly and spoke it fluently. Today in all the dioceses and archdioceses of the United States Creoles Masses are said as soon as the officials of the dioceses and archdioceses take note of a Haitian presence. It is a big step but it is not enough to speak about the existence of a Haitian Pastoral Program. The American Episcopal Conference asked Father Guy Sansaricq to open the National Center of the Haitian Apostolate at the beginning of the 1980s.

Today we have more than 100 Haitian priests ministering in the United States, many of them have been ordained in the United States and are beginning to occupy prestigious positions in their respective dioceses and archdioceses.

It is important to mention the great spiritual celebrations of the Haitian Catholic Community, such as, among others, the annual pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, the Annual Congress of the Council of the Charismatic Renewal of the Haitian Catholics Overseas, regional congresses of the Renewal Charismatic, Jericho and La Mer Rouge (The Red Sea) evening "sensational" worship services that bring together several thousand participants from the Haitian community.

Many observers in the Haitian Catholic community continue to wonder how our spiritual leaders are taking advantage of these opportunities to advance the Haitian ministry in the United States. in the right direction. How many times do Haitian lay members, deacons and priests meet each year in their diocese or at the National level with the National Center of the Haitian Apostolate to reflect together on the problems, challenges and priorities of the Haitian Pastoral in the United States? Do Haitian deacons and priests only have the boundaries of their parish as their only horizon? What contributions do they make to the advancement of the Haitian National and Diocesan Pastoral Outreach?

We should be able to discern the basic qualities necessary for the leaders of this pastoral care, to define the priorities and the objectives to be pursued. It is on the basis of fraternal exchanges and discussions between priests, deacons, nuns and lay leaders that our vision and our objectives will be clarified.

It is difficult to speak of a Haitian pastoral if Haitian priests, deacons, religious and laity do not meet to discuss the problems, the challenges, the priorities and the stakes of the Haitian pastoral in their diocese and in the nation. Definitely the Haitian Priests must be the leaders of the Haitian Pastoral. Even as we talk about the concept of Church-Communion a laywoman, or a layman cannot play the role of the priests when it comes to implanting official policies or cannot replace the priest for certain ministries within the Church.

In the world where we live we talk a lot about networking or social networks. So the Haitian Ministry must use these modern means of communication for the advancement of its pastoral goals. Several Haitian priests hold master's degrees in different fields, others have PhDs, others are studying or are candidates for a doctorate. Many Haitian Catholic Lay Leaders have masters and even PhDs.

In spite of all these resources, how many newspaper articles refer to our pastoral objectives or the Haitian pastoral programs? How many books have been written about the Haitian ministry? I continue to insist in this article on the fact that a mass in Creole for the celebration of the Independence Day of Haiti on January 1st, the celebration of Flag Day and even that of the feast of Our Lady of Perpetual Help are not enough to show the strength of a Haitian pastoral Program.

**Is it not true that the Haitian ministry must unfold at three levels: first at the level of the parish, then at the diocesan level and finally at the national level?**

**It is important to mention that there is a big difference between the celebration of Parish masses in Creole and a consultation at the diocesan and national levels to better discern the fundamental challenges of this immigrant population. The Church needs to formulate the basic qualities that are required of the leaders of this population, who are often in distress. It is very difficult to speak of a Haitian pastoral Ministry if the priests, deacons, nuns and committed lay members of the Haitian community do not meet in their dioceses or archdioceses to discuss the challenges, priorities and issues of the Haitian pastoral in their diocese or archdiocese.**

**In this weekly newsletter of the National Center of The Haitian Apostolate we believe that the presence of Haitian priests in a diocese or archdiocese and the celebration of Creole liturgies are not enough for us to speak of the existence of a Haitian ministry. Is there consultation, exchanges, meetings and constant calls between priests, nuns, deacons and committed laity who want to contribute to our pastoral care? As a nation of priests, prophets and kings we are obliged to ask questions and tell the truth.**

What is the future of Haitian ministry in the United States? In 20 years and 40 years in a society where many young people tend to turn their backs on Christianity. What contribution did Haitian deacons and priests make to Haitian ministry? Is Youth Ministry a priority for our spiritual leaders? Of course young people represent the future of our society. Sometimes our youth cannot participate in a youth gathering day for transportation problems quite solvable by generous leaders.

The National Center of the Haitian Apostolate each year organizes a national convention. How many Haitian Pastoral leaders participate in this convention or encourage their members to participate in this convention? People who participate think that these conventions are always a time of training and exchange for the participants. The National Center through the radio *Télé Solidarité* organizes 2 youth rally a year and a youth contest to elect a Haitian youth of the year. In average how many young people participate in these gatherings? For the contest of the Haitian youth of the year of the Haitian community we sometimes have participating young people from 12 countries. The National Center of The Haitian Apostolate also has a weekly bulletin and a Radio and *Télé* station on the Net. What is the involvement and contribution of Haitian Spiritual leaders in these two communication media that are planned for them? Of course the National Center of the Haitian Apostolate has a lot to do and Bishop Guy Sansaricq is very aware of the challenges and problems of our pastoral care. He always urges pastoral

leaders to work together and understand that unity and solidarity at all costs within this pastoral care is crucial to long term success.

Finally, to answer the question of the future of Haitian Pastoral Ministry, let me state that if all the leaders involved in this Haitian pastoral work understood the importance of sitting and reflecting together on the challenges, the problems, the priorities and the future of this pastoral care, we would have taken decisive steps in the right direction. After research, reflections and observations, let me add that in 20 to 40 years, it will be difficult to talk about the existence of a Haitian pastorate in the United States if we flee [miss] the opportunity to exchange ideas and visions. The answer cannot come from one person. Sometimes it takes someone to sound the alarm and say the truth as it is. Allow me to end with the famous sentence Jean-Louis Auguste Commerson wrote in French in his 1860 *La Petite Encyclopédie (The small Encyclopedia)*: " If the truth is shown naked, it is, since lying stole his clothes."

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#### **Comments:**

Bilingual post (English-French) received October 31st, 2019 from the Facebook page of the first Haitian-American Catholic bishop who served 4 years as auxiliary bishop of the Brooklyn diocese. The late Bishop Sansaricq (October 6, 1934-August 21, 2021) is among the co-founders of National Haitian Apostolate founded in 1984 by a group of exiled priests who started ministering in Brooklyn New York around 1968. Some of the priests have left Brooklyn to start Haitian Catholic ministries in cities where Haitians were settling around the country in the 1970s and the 1980s. Among them, the late Father Léandre Jeannot (March 11, 1929 – July 8 2001) started the Haitian Catholic ministry in 1972 @ St. Leo, located in the Dorchester section of Boston. He opened a second ministry in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1973. The writer was among the first parishioners as a teenage immigrant. Started in the late 1980s, early 1990s to the early 2000s, a number of Haitian ministries "branched out" to other cities in the North and South of Metro Boston as well as the Worcester/Springfield area. The ministry in Worcester closed in 2019.

Things are more challenging in the hundreds of independently owned Haitian Protestant Evangelical churches. As a veteran educator with a Jesuit theological formation, I want to say the Haitian church community needs lots of help/intervention in the areas of Education, youth, and civic participation.

**Addendum:** The late Reverend Father Gérard Jean-Juste, born in Cavailon on February 7, 1946, died on May 27, 2009 at 63 years old in Miami, the co-founder of the Haitian Refugee Center in Miami was very active in being a voice for refugees detained in Chrome and for the Haitian community of Florida. The first Haitian priest ordained in the United States deserves mention in this editorial. After studying civil engineering and engineering technology at Northeastern University in Boston, he moved to Miami around 1977 and ran the Haitian Refugee Center in Florida until 1990. Father Jean Juste returned to Haiti in 1991. The author knew Father Jean Juste as an advisor in Cambridge based youth group Jeunesse en Marche and stayed in touch until his passing in 2009. Jean Yves Urfié (August 4, 1937 – February 9, 2021), a French Spiritain priest who dedicated his life to Haitians in Haiti and in Brooklyn, New York during his exiled years deserves to be mentioned as well. The writer knew him as well and spoke with Father Urfié two weeks before succumbing to COVID-19.

**Comments and Addendum by Nekita Lamour**, North of Boston based educator – Taught ELL- English Language Learners/Multilingual/Cross Cultural students for 27 years in Cambridge, Massachusetts – She holds a MTS (Masters in Theological Studies) from the Weston Jesuits School of Theology that merged with Boston College in 2008. She is a candidate for a CAGS degree in School Administration in Cambridge College and for a Master's in Theology at the IBCS (Institute of Black Catholic Studies) @ Xavier University, New Orleans. Ms. Lamour holds a Master's in Education with a concentration on Bilingual Education from U/Mass Boston. She had also pursued post graduate studies in Special Education & Teaching ESL- English as a Second Language./ELL (English Language Learners) at Lesley University, formerly Lesley College - **Revised March 2022**