

### *Special points of interest:*

- ✦ 25 teachers and 337 students enrolled for 2010 from Preschool to 8th grade.
- ✦ 20 students from the inaugural first grade (2002) graduated 8th grade with high honors.
- ✦ 3 students participated in the Spelling Bee at the province level.
- ✦ 2 students won the Province competition in Mathematics enabling them to proceed to finals in the capitol.
- ✦ 1 sixth grader placed first in the district reading competition.
- ✦ 10 eighth graders passed the entrance exam for Loyola Polytechnic High School, (a prestigious education center in the Dominican Republic) and took up residence on July 28, 2010. These 10 young people prepared for their new school with a 2-week intensive English camp.
- ✦ 2 students have begun their senior year at Loyola Polytechnic high school and will be the first graduates from the villages.

### *During Summer 2010*

- ✦ 100 students participated in a 2-week English summer camp ran by 12 missionaries from the Orlando Diocese.
- ✦ Adult Missioners along with youth from St. Maximilian Kolbe conducted a VBS style camp in La Cueva.
- ✦ UCF Campus Ministry conducted a VBS Camp in Los Guayuyos.

## Turning Points in Education by Sr. Bernadette Mackay, O.S.U.

### LA CUCARITA, Dominican Republic -

"What's that?" asked 10-year-old Dany Mari, as she stood facing the magnificence of the Caribbean Sea. "That is the sea," I said. "Does the sea end at that line out there," she inquired further. "No it does not end there; it just stretches on and on, meeting other seas and oceans, linking us to all the other boys and girls on our wonderful planet Earth." What a privilege to stand there with this child whose home is in the mountains where our mission team serves. She is one of the little ones in our Catholic School. Her book-learning about the sea had suddenly taken on a new meaning: How blessed a moment to share with her.

Three weeks later, 11 eighth graders from the same mountain village stood in the same spot and again gazed in amazement at the expanse of this body of water. They could name the sea which they had never seen but had learned about in their geography class. "But what is that line out there," they asked curiously. How many times before today had they heard the word horizon; how easily and quickly they could spell the same word but its meaning and reality was hidden from them until this moment. What a privilege to stand with them and share the excitement of their discovery. What a privilege, to stand with them, listen to their questions and see their eyes glow as they put meaning to so many words and concepts. How blessed a moment it was indeed.

Two days later, these same 11 eighth-graders are "standing



proud and tall" in a line that stretches ever so long. They are 11 among 1,400 teenage students assembled to take the entrance exam to one of the most prestigious Jesuit high schools in their country, the Dominican Republic. Their mountain home is now far away. The crowd of young adolescents surrounding them is probably three times the entire population of their village. It is indeed a daunting moment, but they are innocent and unaware of its real significance. They have studied and worked hard to arrive at this moment. Their thoughts are set only on their goal to qualify for admission into this school. The fulfillment of a dream is in the balance.

What a privilege to stand at a distance and watch them take their first step forward into uncharted waters as their numbers and grades are called. Is it a threshold moment, I wonder? My mind races back to that other threshold moment seven years ago when these same children stepped into our very first preschool in the mountain. Going to school at

the age of 4 was as unimaginable as was learning to read by age 5. Seven years later, they stand proudly alongside city children, confident and excited to be once again pioneers of a new possibility for their mountain village. How blessed are we as a diocese to have enabled this journey for these children! We are privileged and blessed at the same time. These children thank us all for believing in them and for providing them with a new threshold moment.



*Ursuline Sister Bernadette Mackay is director of the Mission Office*

# Bishops Convene

*Bishop Thomas Wenski and Bishop Jose Grullon Estrella of the Orlando Diocese's sister diocese, San Juan de la Maguana of the Dominican Republic met in February to celebrate the special relationship between the two dioceses. This is an excerpt from a Florida Catholic article by Karen Osborne.*

Bishop Grullon met and thanked more than 100 missionaries from the diocese who have taken trips to his diocese in the Dominican Republic to help with construction projects, medical missions, teacher training, creating sources of potable water and more. "In going to the mission country, you receive more than you give," said Bishop Wenski. "There is no one who is so rich that he cannot receive something and no one so poor that he does not have something to give. In going on a mission, we are ministered to ourselves."

Some of the major triumphs of the mission program, under the direction of Sr. Bernadette Mackay, O.S.U., include the education program, which turned underperforming mountain schools, - where teachers only held classes two days a week and dropping out early was a common phenomenon - into places where classes are held five days a week and students have won regional and national competitions in reading and math. Bishop Grullon said, "The children of the countryside thought that they couldn't learn anything and now they are excellent students who can compete with students from the best schools in the country."



Bishop Grullon also thanked the Orlando Diocese missionaries for their help in developing and distributing water filters that make non-potable water drinkable, by eliminating common waterborne diseases... "Truly, you have become Jesus for our people," he said. Looking forward into the next 10 years, the bishop hoped that the diocese could expand its educational program, training more teachers and moving into more towns. In addition, Bishop Grullon spoke of the need for aqueducts to carry fresh water to far-flung habitations, as well as reconstruction on difficult, badly-paved and dirt roads in the areas around La Cucarita that would make travel to school, work and the cities below less dangerous. "Thank you for this beautiful relationship of sister churches," said Bishop Grullon. "The Lord extended an invitation and you responded. Thanks for that availability; that is what it means to be a Christian."

During the reception, Bishop Grullon cited an example from Luke's Gospel - "that Jesus went to the other side of the shore, because on the other side there were problems. You have crossed the water and made those problems your own, and because of your work you have set many people free."

## Pastoral Updates

✧ Fr. Hilario Rivera joined our mission team and is responsible for catechesis and celebrates Eucharist in 3 villages surrounding our 5 mission communities.



✧ Fr. Fred Ruse continues to work with the 5 communities in promoting spiritual and moral formation and offers sacramental preparation for children and adults. Additionally, he implemented the "Identity Program", enabling several hundred adults and children to obtain birth certificates.



✧ Orlando seminarian, Hernan Ramirez spent 6 weeks working closely with Fr. Fred on various projects for the villages.



✧ A mission group travelled from Orlando to La Cueva to make much needed repairs to the chapel.

## Project Updates

✧ Work continues on the building of a new elementary school in Los Frios.

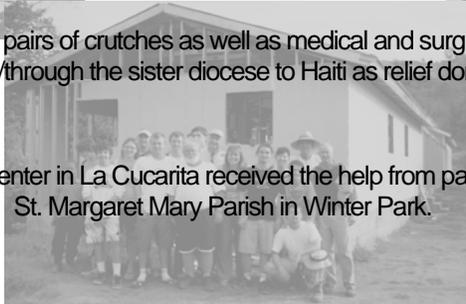


✧ 2 dental missions and a surgical mission provided much needed care to several hundred adults and children.



✧ 800 water filters, 20 pairs of crutches as well as medical and surgical supplies were sent from/through the sister diocese to Haiti as relief donations.

✧ A new community center in La Cucarita received the help from parents and youth of St. Margaret Mary Parish in Winter Park.



St. Maximilian Kolbe Mission Trip