

A Visit to the New St. Vincent and St. Benedict's Day Nursery & Children's Home By Gerry Bird

Although the Mission has long supported St. Benedict's by way of an annual shipment of supplies, collected and sent by Loxi Street of Barrie, it had been a few years since we had paid them a visit. So in March, Jean, Lyle and I took an hour long van ride up the winding, windward coast road of St. Vincent to Georgetown, and a visit with Sister Nyra Anne Pajotte and the children of St. Benedict's Day Nursery & Children's Home.

We arrived to find that the old buildings (in particular, the former Children's Hospital and Day Nursery) had deteriorated since our last visit in 2006, but Sister Nyra explained that the long-anticipated construction of the new facility had begun a short distance away. After visiting with the half dozen or so children in her care (some of whom are severely developmentally challenged), we accompanied Sister Nyra a little ways down the road to the fenced-in construction site where the new St. Benedict's Day Nursery and Children's Home was taking shape. The outer shell and roof of the two-storey, concrete building that would serve as the children's main dormitory was already in place, although the windows and doors had yet to be installed. At the far end of the compound, Sr. Nyra pointed out the perimeter footings from which the new Bread of Life building would one day rise, serving as a home for our good friend Sister Zita, and the children in her care whose lives had been affected by HIV/AIDS.



St. Benedicts' kids

As for the St. Benedict's dormitory, we were surprised to find that the construction was as far along as it was. We were also shocked and saddened to learn of an unforeseen development which is threatening to stop the construction in its tracks - perhaps indefinitely.

The following urgent news bulletin, which we received from Sister Nyra soon after returning to Canada, explains the distressing situation in which she and the children find themselves:



Sr. Nyra and St. Benedict's' new Building

CONSTRUCTION AT RISK – URGENT HELP NEEDED!

By Sr. Nyra Anne Pajotte

The construction of our home for underprivileged children – St. Benedict's Day Nursery and Children's Home, was progressing smoothly with all payments up to date. Low and behold, we are unable to obtain our funds from the Financial Agency CLICO (CLICO is a Life Insurance Company with Investment Facilities). Our funds have been placed with this agency as we await the accumulation of additional funds and the commencement of construction. This agency has found itself in financial difficulty. They are not able to pay funds on maturity of deposits. We have been trying for months now to obtain our funds in order to continue construction and bring the first phase of the project to completion, but with little or no avail.

We are now in a crisis with no more funds to complete the home for the children. We do not wish the construction to stop at this critical stage where the project is significantly advanced. As you are aware, the children are residing in a makeshift house that leaks when rain falls and

with other poor elements for a long time now – anxiously awaiting the construction of their new home.

We are therefore earnestly appealing to you for any additional assistance that can be given to us at this time of need for the completion of the home for the children.

The approximate balance of funds needed for this part of the construction is:

US \$802,247.75 (EC \$1,339,753.75). Thanks in advance for the continued kindness and concern for these many under privileged children who depend on our love and care for survival.

The Mission's Response: The situation at St. Benedict's was discussed at the April 25 meeting of the Mission's Board of Directors. Sadly, everyone agreed that the magnitude of the financial help needed by Sr. Nyra and the children was well beyond the Mission's capability to meet. As our own funds are very tight, it was decided that the Bequia Mission would continue to provide an annual, modest donation (typically from \$300 - \$500 CAD) along with the large shipment of supplies (mainly items for their annual Spring Tea Party Fund-raiser) that Loxi assembles. In addition, an illustrated talk given by Gerry a few years ago to a Toronto area Rotary Club had resulted in a donation of \$20 000 CAD. These funds are currently being held by Rotary for the purpose of purchasing new furnishings and supplies for the Day Nursery & Children's Home once the construction is complete (as apparently Rotary funds cannot be used to finance new construction).

We would welcome any other help (either financial or possibly by way of legal assistance?) which any of our members may be able to offer. In the meantime, please keep Sr. Nyra and the children of St. Benedict's in your prayers.