

PERE OCTAVE LAFONTANT

1924-2009

By Marjorie Raphael, SSM

P

ère (Father) Octave Lafontant's father had been in the Army and stationed for a time in Jacmel, on the southern coast of Haiti, but the family had been brought up in Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. Father Lafontant considered himself a city person until he applied to enter the theological seminary and was sent, as a preliminary exercise, as a lay-reader to rural Grand Colline. This was the beginning of his



lifelong love of the rural people of Haiti and of his priestly dedication to the development, spiritual, moral, intellectual, and material, of the various parishes and missions that he served over the years in the vast mountainous area of Leogane. Even after his "retirement" at 65 he asked and obtained permission to volunteer to establish a church and school at Trou de Nippes.

He did it with great success. Each of the three major parishes in the Leogane area has a series of 7, 8, or 9 missions. Each supervised by a lay-reader and answerable to the priest in charge of

the parish. The parish priest visits each of these missions for Eucharist perhaps once a month, usually accessible only by horseback.

The projects he was involved in for the benefit of the area around his succession of parishes included **primary schools, a Trade School, medical clinics, the raising of pigs, the development of strains of goats, the planting of fruit trees**, but above all, **the preaching of the Gospel and the advancement on all levels of the people of his country.**

Octave communicated not only with his Haitian compatriots but also with foreigners. He became a friend to a chaplain of the American Marines then stationed in Port-au-Prince. Another young American studying theology at Harvard University could not envision himself as a parish priest in New England, but casting his lot with Pere Octave, first for two weeks and later for two years, he knew for certainty that he was indeed called to the priesthood, but to the missionary priesthood in the pattern of Pere Octave.

Pere Octave Lafontant, tall and thin, lived to the age of 85, surviving his wife and chief collaborator, Lisette, and four of his five children, three of them victims of sickle-cell anemia. The surviving son, Jack Guy Lafontant, is an outstanding doctor in Haiti with specialty in Hepatico-Gastro-Enterology, having studied not only in Haiti but in Paris and at the Mass. General Hospital in Boston as well.

Father Lafontant was a lifelong friend and Associate of the Sisters of St. Margaret. After his retirement from Petit Trou de Nippes until his stroke he celebrated the Eucharist weekly for the aged residents of Foyer Notre Dame, a work run by the Sisters.

A great missionary priest has completed his earthly mission. Like all the saints, he leaves behind countless disciples and has joined the company of those who continue to serve in the life beyond the grave. He died on Easter Tuesday, 2009, with the funeral at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Port-au-Prince.