



## *Reverend Jean Ridly Julien, Mth; BCC* *La Vie Continue*

I was born in Chambellan, Haiti in 1956; I come from a large family. My childhood was filled with love, laughter, and support. As a child, I always had the desire to help others and less fortunate. My dream was always to become a social worker or a Catholic priest.

While in my early teens, I started to think about priesthood and going to church frequently. After completing my secondary education, I applied to enter the Seminary to become a priest for my diocese of origin, Jérémie in Haiti. I was accepted and entered the Major Seminary Notre Dame in Port-au-Prince. During my time in the seminary, I studied hard, worked diligently, and prayed fervently. My studies in the priesthood soon took me from Haiti to Canada where I completed my studies in Theology with a Master. I was a teacher at the Bourget College in Rigaud, Quebec for two years. Soon after, I had moved from Canada to the United States and was ordained a Deacon on June 8, 1996 in the Fairfield County by the diocese of Bridgeport.



“My Mother has a great influence in my life. Certainly, other people influenced me but, her impact in my life is without comparison. At 65, she built a Small Community Center with the help of some neighbors in our vicinity. This Community Center was a place where adults could come after work to learn how to read and write.



She was one of the students”.



I was raised in a strong Catholic faith and actively participated in several movements of Catholic actions. I was 14 years old when I started to put my faith into action. Subsequently, I became an officer of the legionary of Marie, a chief boy scout, a choir member and later in 1976 a co-founder of a missionary youth group: Les Apôtres de Jésus Christ (the Apostles of Jesus Christ), which has provided more than 20 priests and 10 nuns to the diocese of Jérémie where I originally come from. As an altar boy, I was always amazed by the priest of my parish when I was a child. His name is Fr. Albert Saindoux who did great work of mercy and his spirit of

developing and providing social services for his parishioners. I have learned how to celebrate the funeral service from serving as an altar boy. His influence inspired me at a young age to have a strong desire to become a social worker, a community-organizer or a priest.

In 1983, I was accepted as a seminarian for the Diocese of Jérémie, Haiti. I had the privilege to meet Sister Rita Lemire through Sr Marguerite du Divin Coeur and Fr. Benoit Deblois two Canadian missionaries who worked in Haiti at that time. Once again, I felt moved by their spirit of sharing and compassion for the needy. That was another push to encourage me to do the same. From the time that I was in the seminary, I started to help and support some individuals and communities from the help that I received from my four brothers living in the US and The Gagnon's family, Sr. Rita friends and Fr. Benoit. \$50 or \$100 every three months was lot money for me at this time. It seems like I wanted to launch myself in serving others even before I was ordained as a priest. I felt called to help others because I have been helped and supported emotionally, spiritually and financially. While in the seminary, I provided some small financial supports with the little that I had to put a roof up for an elementary school, Ecole Le Bon Samaritain, (Good Samaritan School) in Grand-Fonds Baillard, Chambellan, Haiti. To this day, this school is still serving the less fortunate children of the area.

I was ordained to the sacred order of priesthood in 1996 for the diocese of Bridgeport in Connecticut. Two years after my ordination, I had the privilege to be founder of the Haitian American Catholic Center in Stamford to serve the Haitian Community of Greater Stamford and the Fairfield County.

I asked my Bishop, Edward Cardinal Egan, former Bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport, authorization to create the Haitian American Community Center of Stamford in order to better serve the Catholic Haitians who live in His diocese. The



request was granted and I moved to the rectory to do the necessary repairs before the Grand Opening. As Cardinal Egan moved to the Archdiocese of New York, on June 9, 2000, Bishop William E. Lori inaugurated officially the prior Our Lady of Montserrat as The Haitian American Community Center of Greater Stamford. This center becomes a great asset for the Haitian Communities, and it is still providing spiritual and social assistance to the people in the

area. During my ministry as the spiritual leader in the Greater Stamford Area, a food pantry was established with the support of Food Bank to fill the need and help people who did not have enough to take care of their families. Also, I created a special program that I called "the Helping Fund" which helps for the elderly, the sick and especially those who had difficulties to do food shopping. This program also helps to support them with their prescription or their rent. The center was not only

a helping hand to Haitians or to Catholics but also to those in need in the area regardless their religion. I also founded a youth group in Stamford, The Stars of Tomorrow, to answer to the spiritual, emotional, social and cultural needs of the less fortunate Haitian-American young children in our region.

In August 2002, while on vacations in Chambellan, my hometown, to start rebuilding my mother's old house as a way to remember her. One morning, Mr. Labonte Renel (Executive counselor), the Principal of the only high school of Chambellan (a public school) came to my house to say hello, he is a long-time friend. As we were discussing the school situation in Chambellan, I told him my great desire to contribute in the education of some young people. My plan was to pay for or sponsor ten teens in memory of my mother. His first reaction was laughing loudly, and he told me: "Father it is a great idea but a little bit crazy" I asked him why? He said "you know Father: "Five among them will go to school for about two years and then quit, maybe only three will really take advantage and stay in school. From my experience as a teacher and Principal, I suggested that you pay instead for a teacher for many abandoned and orphans children in the neighborhood that have never been to school." So, I welcomed his idea, I started to meet with people in the community and opened "The Anne Clémande Julien Foundation for the orphans and the less fortunate children. The idea of helping the less fortunate was vividly invaded my mind and I know that I had to do something to bring to life my mother's dream. Up to this year, the school has a staff of more than 20 employees and welcomes more than 330 students many of them are orphans.

God calls each one of us for a purpose and for a specific mission. The Haitian-American Community Center of Greater Stamford, the Anne Clémande Julien Foundation, a school for the orphans and the less fortunate children in Chambellan, Haiti are tangible and direct results of my experiences with my mother, Fr. Albert Saindoux, Sr. Rita, and Fr. Benoit Deblois. The Haitian American Catholic Center and the Anne Clémande school for less fortunate children are wonderful ways that I can express God's love for others and especially the needy, the sick, the poor, the orphans in my homeland and in the United States my adopted country.

Years after my mother's death, I continue her work of mercy by expanding the school that she was founded, helping young adults and the community. My plan is to build an orphanage to house orphans and poor children of the area. Please help me to get there with your support and prayers.

Please join Father Ridly for a good Cause.