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AMERICA/HAITI - "On April 6, the major seminary reopens and we must find accommodations for the surviving 243 seminarians," Apostolic Nuncio tells Fides; Papal Holy Thursday Mass Collection to be sent to Seminary in Port-au-Prince

Port-au-Prince (Agenzia Fides) – "After hesitation and doubt, the Bishops have decided to call the seminarians back together and re-open the academic year on April 6. With the destruction of the entire Major Seminary, then we must find accommodations for the 243 surviving major seminarians," says a note sent to Fides by Archbishop Bernard Auza, Apostolic Nuncio to Haiti, expressing his joy for this further gesture of closeness from the Holy Father to the local Church, which has suffered greatly following the earthquake of January 12. The donations collected during the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper, presided by the Pope at the Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano, will in fact be used for the reconstruction of the Seminary of Port-au-Prince.
"There is only one major seminary in Haiti, the National Major Seminary 'Notre Dame d'Haiti' in Port-au-Prince," the Nuncio tells Fides. "However, there are two sections, two structures separated from each other, that of Theology, in the Turgeau district (close to the city's downtown), and that of Philosophy, in the Cazeau district (near the International Airport Toussaint Louverture). There is only one rector for both sections. The structures of both sections were destroyed by the earthquake. Four of the five buildings of the Theological School collapsed. In particular, the building that held the dining hall (ground floor), the chapel (first floor), and library (second floor) was leveled. The chapel has fallen in, so that the dining hall and library are now linked to one another. It gives me chills to think that if the whole community had been in the chapel at the time of the earthquake, it indeed would have been a loss of enormous proportions."
Before the earthquake, the Major Seminary housed 159 theology seminarians and 98 philosophy seminarians. 6 seminarians from theology and a professor died, along with 8 from philosophy. "Those who were trapped under the rubble were able to come out, most of them on their own," says the Archbishop. "The Rector was in his office on the ground floor of one of the buildings. The office is now underground, but the Rector emerged unharmed without being able to explain how and where he got out. He says he was guided by Our Lady."
On April 6, the bishops decided to reopen the academic year. Both sections of the seminary will be hosted on the large grounds of the headquarters of the Haitian Bishops' Conference (CEH). Students of philosophy will be housed in the Seminary of the Scalabrini Fathers, adjoining the office of the episcopate, and those of theology, in the Our Lady of Guadalupe Home, on the grounds of the CEH.
"Nine large tents (20 x 32 feet) will be used for classrooms and 21 will be used as dormitories. All this should cost about U.S. $ 400,000. The tents are waterproof and can withstand winds of 240 kilometers per hour. The teachers will be accommodated in rooms available at the Scalabrinian Seminary and Our Lady of Guadalupe Home. For the chapel, philosophy seminarians will use that of the Scalabrinians and the theology seminarians will use that of the CEH. All major seminarians should therefore be able to finish the academic year and face the next with serenity."
Regarding the reconstruction of the seminary, the Bishops have not yet made a decision on the future site and are considering several proposals, considering the costs of acquiring the land and the most suitable location. As for how to finance the construction of two seminaries, philosophy and theology, Archbishop Auza said: "There are no criteria established at this time, but I believe that this national project is of enormous importance for the Church and will be financed with the contribution of all." (CE/SL) (Agenzia Fides 30/03/2010)

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