



Good news to the poor

By Fr. Gary McDonald, S.F.M.

"Yo no se nada."

"Yo no soy nadie."

These are two expressions which can be heard so very frequently among poor people in the Dominican Republic. They signify, unfortunately:

"I don't know anything."

"I am a nobody."

Such a lack of self-worth can be traced to the reality in which they live. So many structures tell them that they are unimportant. Lack of medicine and proper medical facilities speak loud and clear that the poor aren't worth what it takes to provide these necessities. The absence of schools and dedicated teachers proclaim that the children of the poor are not worthy to receive a life-giving education. The poor are ridiculed by the attitudes of many politicians except around election time. The list goes on and on, of institutions that reinforce the sense of nothingness already held by so many poor people.

I believe that one of the principal tasks of the Church is to help people to discover a sense of self-worth. Part of the mission of Christ and our mission, that of bringing Good News to the poor, is precisely in telling people that they are important.

By stating, re-stating, and demonstrating our belief that the poor are important—that they are indeed recipients of the love of God—gradually they come to



Classes at a new school built by a local development organization, ADESJO, in San José de Ocoa, the parish of Scarboro missionary Fr. Lou Quinn in the Dominican Republic. Working with overseas partners, ADESJO and the people of San José de Ocoa have completed projects in areas such as health care, education, infrastructure, agriculture, and the environment.

an awareness. They discover that saying "I know nothing" or "I am a nobody" is blasphemy. It is in effect telling the Lord that what God has created is not worth very much.

Another important discovery people make is that they are important to one another. Without this notion of shared importance, nothing will ever change.

As missionaries, we have a role to play in helping the people among whom we live to see themselves as they really are, to discover in themselves the tremendous talents and gifts that the Lord has given them.

For those of us who have the privilege of working with peoples outside our own country, we can and must affirm others, particularly the poor, especially when we receive graciously what they give us so generously; especially when they help us to discover that we, too, are important because we are important to them.∞

Fr. Gary McDonald lost his battle with lymphatic cancer in 1997. All his missionary service had been among the people of the Dominican Republic.