

A Night to Remember

I personally give much kudos to Pastor Franco Valdemar, executive director and President of Hope for Haitian American Youth and Elderly. Saturday, February 23, 2008 was certainly a night to remember at the church of the President, located at 1900 West Greenleaf, in Chicago, IL. Many people showed up to this fundraising event and were definitely not disappointed. With a night filled with fellowship, laughs, entertainment, and empowerment, this event was a reflection of hope, giving, and of great things to come. Hope for Haitian American Youth and Elderly seeks to empower youth to follow their dreams and reach for their highest potential, provoking our young people to pursue a higher education or trade. The organization also sparks fire in and encourages older Haitian adults to pursue a higher destiny and to not settle for less than the best. Ultimately, the organization recognizes that our spiritual connection to Christ is the center by which we can do all things. This event, which centered on the theme of love and healthy relationships, allowed people to come together in loving fellowship and feel empowered in supporting this vision. Everyone who attended this event gave a donation to help in the monetary collection of funds for children in Haiti whose educations are being solely supported through Hope for Haitian American Youth and Elderly.

The evening began with spectacular entertainment, showcasing the remarkable talent of a few people in the community. Patricia Desir sang so angelically and had the crowd on its feet. She sang French songs filled with the theme of love. People were amazed as she sang several numbers with such professionalism, class, and star quality. She looked amazing and seemed very excited to contribute to such a great cause. Magalie Dieujuste, the Youth Coordinator for Hope for Haitian American Youth and Elderly, led her talented youth choir in a couple of musical selections, including a song in Creole that spoke to the love we have for Jesus Christ and the love He has for us. The ages of the choir members ranged from 4 years old to 17 years old. They sang beautifully and seemed to be very excited about having their voices heard. The children continued to showcase their talent, represented through a praise dance. Led by Magalie Oscar, General Coordinator for Hope for Haitian American Youth and Elderly; Makayla, Najabelle, and Symone presented an inspiring dance interpretation of the song, "Imagine Me". This song speaks to having God inspired vision and self belief of living your best life and being your best self. The lyrics include, "Imagine me, being free trusting You totally. Finally, I can imagine me. I admit it was hard to see, You being in love with someone like me. Finally, I can imagine me..." The theme of self-love, love for others, and love for Haiti and the community continued through a poetic interpretation done by Marie Mica Dori, South Side assistant secretary for Hope for Haitian American Youth and Elderly. Accompanied by her very talented peer, Eroid Saint Louis, their voices rang through the room, as they presented in French, Creole, and English. Their talent was a reflection of the talent that exists among the youth in the Haitian community.

There was also a psycho-educational component to this evening. Chaired by Dr. Maryse Nazon, the committee for the Empowerment of Haitian American Youth and Families has a vision of empowering the community through increased awareness and education. This committee, whose members include Dr. Maryse Nazon (Chair), Daniel Jean, MA (Assistant Chair), Dr. Karen Thames (Secretary), and Magalie Oscar, MSW (General Coordinator), continued this task through workshops on building loving, positive relationships during this Valentine's event. The participants were broken up into four different groups: children (ages 7-12), adolescents (ages 12-17), young adults (ages 18-25), and adults (ages 26 and older). Each group engaged in discussions about love that targeted age appropriate issues. For instance, Mr. Jean taught the adults about the five love languages and how to express and receive love from your mate. The children talked about love from their families and learned love songs. The adolescents engaged in discussion about self-esteem and inward love and how this relates to loving other people in their lives. The young adults talked about making decisions about life partners and making the distinction between love and obsession. These workshops were developed to teach, promote awareness, and empower its participants. Pastor Franco's vision of educating the community continued, as Mr. Steve and Mr. Willy Pompilus gave a presentation on the importance of having life insurance. They stressed the value of thinking about one's future and the future of his or her loved ones in the event of sudden or expected death. They gave a very enlightening presentation and gave out business cards for contact should anyone have questions in the future.

The evening continued to get better, as all the attendees were fortunate to be served with a spectacular dinner, the spaghetti dinner. Continuing the laughter, fellowship, and fun, everyone sat together and ate a scrumptious dinner of spaghetti and meatballs, home-made tea and juice, and baked breads. Headed by Sister Immacula Dieudonne, the hospitality committee created a wonderful meal combined with excellent service and dedication. Breaking bread together at these beautifully decorated tables in the beautifully decorated room was symbolic of the fellowship, community, pride, and togetherness of the Haitian community.

In addition, the prizes for the raffle were distributed. Many people participated in the raffle by buying raffle tickets, all for the cause of raising money for the organization. This raffle was headed by the South Side of Chicago Branch, with the director, Reverend Ernest Laine and fundraising coordinator, Mrs. Antonine Laine. This fundraiser produced hundreds of dollars, all being contributed to the cause of funding a private school in Duverger in Haiti. Many children in that community will have the opportunity to have daily meals, school clothes, and an invaluable education.

Finally, honor and recognition were given to two significant persons in the organization. A beautiful presentation of a flower bouquet was first given to Dr. Maryse Nazon, Chair of the Committee for the Empowerment of Haitian

American Youth and Elderly. Presented by Dr. Karen on behalf of the organization, Dr. Nazon was given the flower bouquet as a sign of appreciation for her personal and professional contribution to the organization. Honor and recognition were also given to Prima Lubin, the founder of the Institution Prima Achile in Haiti. Her vision is the foundation and has made significant contributions to the overall vision of the organization. Pastor Franco presented Prima Lubin with her beautiful bouquet of flowers.

What else is there to say, but that this was definitely a night to remember! Thank you to Pastor Franco for your continuing commitment, dedication, and Godly love!

~Dr. N. Karen Thames, Licensed Clinical Psychologist