

*Dear Readers, This message is sent from Sister Martha Barlai-Kovich, Albany Province, of the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake.*

Dear Sisters,

Last week, at the request of the pastor from Petit Goave, three Sisters, including Sister Joanna Danson (Province of Great Britain), were sent to visit the area to see if we could help in any way. The journey took them through the town of Leogane on their way to Petit Goave. They found it impossible to describe the devastation caused by approximately 30 seconds of the earth moving. From the time they left the Provincial House and especially upon leaving Port au Prince, the scenes became worse and worse. Whole towns were reduced to rubble and there had obviously been a small tsunami as many shoreline houses were not only destroyed, but standing in the sea.

They stayed in the area for 4 days, visiting different parts of the parish and the surrounding area. They held mobile clinics in an old people's establishment and in outlying villages, one of which was at the top of a mountain. Even the houses and chapels at the top of the mountains had collapsed during the earthquake.

Around the town of Petit Goave, there is not one house that has not been either completely destroyed or structurally damaged and now hanging at a precarious angle. Everyone, including the Sisters, slept on the streets sharing their space with cats, dogs, chickens, and lots of mosquitoes. They found that the greatest difference between this area and Port au Prince is that the people have accepted and are at peace with the situation. Each morning they can be seen going to their "homes" and salvaging their belongings and clearing rubble, they have all received good tents and tarpaulins and are making the best of their situation. Sadly, in Port au Prince the people are still sitting and waiting for other people to help them.

On Friday, Sister Joanna and I went to talk to the Medishare/Univ. of Miami folks who are running a tent hospital at the airport. A Marionite Sister had called Maureen who in turn called us and asked if we were still interested in developing a post-discharge patient reception center for patients who were ready to be discharged, but who did not have homes to go to as they were being discharged to the streets. With Sister Marie Teresa's permission we went, we met the Sister, she introduced us to their CEO who is also a physician who tried to get the Medishare administrator out to talk to us. After waiting around for more than an hour and getting repeated messages that he was too busy to talk to us, we left.

Sadly, this is often how things are here. Each organization wants to do their own thing and are not very interested in collaboration.

On Friday afternoon, Father Maloney stopped by with Fr. Joe Foley (an American Vincentian). They were in Port au Prince for a board meeting of the microfinance project. They are going ahead with the project, though I don't know the specifics.

Yesterday morning we attended a memorial mass for all the religious who had died as a result of the earthquake. It was a very simple moving liturgy, for each religious who died during the earthquake a member of their community received a candle, symbolizing their Baptism and eternal life, the candle was then placed next to a small cross bearing their name. The Filles de la Marie lost 15 sisters which was over half of their community, other communities lost several members as well. In many ways, we were fortunate in having only one sister die as there were several who had made miraculous escapes.

Later, we had mass for the Province of Haiti and the installation of a new Councillor, it was a happy and joyous occasion for the sisters and hopefully there will be more occasions to celebrate in the future.