

Update from Fr Rick in Haiti July 21, 2010

Dear Friends,

Six months have gone by since the earthquake, and easily our work is three times larger than it was before. We have so many new programs to meet the pressing needs. Today for the first time, we fired up our crematorium. Although I was joking that I would like to use it to make Sister Judy's birthday cake (for her 65th today), the sad truth is that poverty still humiliates the poor even after their death (a simple trip to the general morgue would show that to be true in a second). Our first attempt at a more dignified burial through cremation was predictably for a child, for five year old Lori Demosthene. We said the usual prayers for the dead, and commended Lori to God, to ash, and to the earth. This is our reality. The circle of life, coming around all too soon, completed already in childhood. Our crematorium is dedicated to Our Mother of Sorrows. We have the sorrow of burying more than 50 children and 30 adults every week.

Our new campground for displaced children is nearly ready. We have been working there all week. Instead of circling the wagons, we squared off empty containers in a huge rectangle covering 4,000 square meters. We will expand it in time. The containers themselves will soon be dormitories for the children, and the area for meals, schooling and activities will be in the shadow of the containers with the help of large awnings. There are about 350 children waiting to come in. There will be an area for small children dedicated to St Ann, the grandmother of Jesus, and a section for older children dedicated to St Louis. We hope to open July 27, on the feast of St Ann. In the meantime, the program for kids in tent cities, called Fr Wasson's angels of light, is going strong and fast becoming an informal school system and nutrition center for 3000 children.

We have started another eight street schools over these six months. One of them is for blind and deaf children. The school they used to attend, St Vincent's in Port au Prince, was destroyed by the earthquake, so we made a simple school for them until St Vincent is rebuilt. Our first ten children are already in this simple school. We named the school for the late beloved founder of St Vincent's, Sister Joan Margaret. Our other 23 schools are all in session, some in tents and some in undamaged buildings, and all of them will be rebuilt slowly. We have a campaign in progress for this.

The program for prosthetic s and rehabilitation called St Germaine is well underway, and many people leave our gates with crutches, wheelchairs and artificial limbs just a little bit stronger and a little bit more able after every therapy visit. The mothers are so beautiful and patient with their children, but sadly sometimes the mothers also are disabled or missing a limb from the earthquake. Hope springs eternal.

Our St Luke field hospital for adults and children has saved a few lives already. It looks like something from Gilligan's Island but it works for now. We are making a prefab surgery room at the moment, and doing our best to make it a family environment. We have a portable CT Scan already, and a portable Digital XRAY in the planning, most important since we receive terrible trauma injuries. Our ability will be greatly increased by this equipment which will be used in an air conditioned container! Just today, we received the donation of an ambulance for the field hospital, from the government of Spain.

On July 23, our original orphanage (as of 23 years) we will receive 40 children from the earthquake. It will bring the population there at St Helene to 400 children.

We are still very busy with distributions of food, clothing, water, tents, and thousands of shoes donated in memory of Molly Hightower, one of our deeply mourned volunteers killed when our headquarters at Petionville collapsed. The distributions are difficult but important, since Port au Prince hardly at all much improved from the original catastrophe six months ago. I think many of you saw the pictures of the memorial we made for our deceased children, staff, volunteers and colleagues from the earthquake. It is at St Damien Hospital. It is our new cornerstone.

At St Damien hospital, our cancer program is improving, the surgery center is very active, the new maternity and neonatology programs and struggling but doing well, and we now can do digital electroencephalograms and have them interpreted abroad. This is to monitor the seizure activity of our patients. It is a huge advance in our treatment of seizures. Also, just today, little Anabel returned to Italy to have part of her skull replaced, finally, after losing it in the nightmare of January 12, 2010.

I will find a way to get pictures of many of these activities on the website of Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos (NPH.com) and Compassionweavers.com as soon as I can.

Many thanks to all of you for your prayers, donations, encouragement!

Fr Rick Frechette
July 20, 2010

