

January 27, 2010

Haiti Earthquake Relief Update

The last few days have been encouraging for us as we are beginning to see more of a rhythm develop to our days and more distinct structure put in place for long term outreach. Now that we've found dependable sources of food & fuel we can open up Hosean's Camp de la Grace (Camp of Grace) to



increasing numbers. To the left, you see our volunteers putting up family sized tents donated from Caribbean Rotary Clubs (District 7020). Before I left today there were 10 up and ready besides our cement block buildings which normally accommodate 500 in a camp setting. Our volunteers from Fellowship Bible Church-Memphis taught camp staff how to get the tents pitched to withstand winds and rain.

Caleb, along with several other national Rotary leaders, hosted a meeting with our district leadership team to strategize how best to extend relief efforts.

We currently have 45 long term residents at the camp facility. Others have come and gone as they traveled through to get to their destinations. Caleb expects 19 more long term residents this evening. Each day they are provided with three meals, electricity to recharge cell phones for a few hours, and there is a river next door for bathing. Caleb is already anticipating needs for outdoor showers, more outhouses, etc. Perhaps these will be projects for future teams volunteering.

I spent some time today talking with some of the refugees, asking them if they minded sharing their stories with all of you. One young man I recognized immediately as he was one of our former sponsored students and was valedictorian of his class when he graduated last year. Junior Vanel Bernard is now 23 and had started university studies in Port au Prince this fall with engineering major. He had rented a house with six other students and had enjoyed his first semester. When the earthquake hit, he was outside of his school which was heavily damaged. He made his way home around roadblocks all around from crumbled buildings. He returned to his rental home to find it as the only building standing on the block, but was too afraid to enter due to aftershocks. He states, "I was shocked at the gravity of the situation. People lost everything!" His best



friend lived across the street from him, and Junior was told he had been in the house, now crumbled to the ground. He began to dig with his hands through the rubble to try and find him. Others joined in the



Gulderne Dessalines & Junior Bernard

search and they eventually found two bodies. Sadly, he never found his friend. Junior joined everyone else sleeping in the streets. After two days he found a local pastor, Levy, who had come to search for his nephew. He was able to get a ride back to his hometown (our community of Pignon) with him. Junior and two of his aunts and several cousins are now residents at Camp de la Grace.

The other young man I spoke with today is named Gulderne Dessalines. He was more reserved, and more withdrawn but eager to share with you what had happened to him. He is 24 years old and was getting ready to start this month to study Agriculture sciences/Agronomy at one of the Universities in Port au Prince. He lived near Junior and his home was demolished. He told me he had been in the process of taking a nap and had just finished bathing. When he felt the earthquake start, he quickly ran outside wearing only his boxers. "I didn't even have a sheet to cover myself," he shared with me. Over the next few days, he managed to find a pair of pants and a few bits of clothing. Neither of these two young men found anything to eat for several days. When I asked them what they thought were the greatest needs, they quickly told me, "People need a place to sleep, they need food, and we need to have school." I asked Gulderne if he didn't need some more clothes since he escaped with just his boxers, and he shyly smiled and said, "Yes, that would be good, too."

Rhythms of life are re-forming. We are working to begin to put some semblance of order and hopefully healing for those around us. Caleb met with his teaching staff yesterday to begin to plan how we could re-open our ministry school. Normally we have 900 students attending classes until 1 P.M. With our current facilities and support now in for relief, we are hoping to re-open with afternoon classes as well, effectively doubling our student body. We want to offer all those students affected by the earthquake who have re-located to our area, the opportunity to have this small sense of normalcy. The teachers and staff here are ready to take on the challenge, hopefully within the next month.

Our volunteers here this week have been having some activities for the children now at the camp. As odd as it may seem, this has been a huge encouragement not only for the kids, but their caregivers and families as well. Simple use of left-over teaching supplies, have been used to bring some much



needed smiles. The mothers here at the camp told me they were really grateful to have some activities to engage their children. Today they were making crowns and learning how they are all children of the King. Please continue to pray for those around us, pray that Hosean's facilities can become a place of refuge and healing for those affected by the earthquake. I also spoke with two mothers who shared their experiences with me. (but that story will have to wait for tomorrow!-what a tease, right?)

Please encourage those around you that care is being provided, and very slowly but surely, healing has begun.

Debbie for all

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