

HAITI VISION UPDATE

Tom Vencuss returned from a quick 4-day visit to Haiti. He had the opportunity to spend a day Port-au-Prince, one day in Furcy, and the parts of two other days in and around Petionville. He spoke with several mission groups (Baptist and Methodist), an UMCOR-NGO Consultant, several Pastors and many of our friends. Here is an update.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The country itself is slowly getting back together, but it is a mess. There are many collapsed buildings, homes, and businesses that have not yet been touched, with, I imagine, many persons still unaccounted for.

As you know, the Palace, National Cathedral, Justice Building, and many other government buildings are gone. Trinity Episcopal Church (the church with the large beautiful murals in PAP), including the school and gift shop is gone. The large Methodist Church in PAP where Pastor Paul's ceremony took place experienced some cracks but is essentially okay. The large elementary school next to it is gone, and the large secondary school (College Bird) right next to it, is severely compromised. This, in particular, has been a significant source of income for the MCH.

Freres School is okay—they have reinforced a few overhangs and replaced some of the brick windows with metal but for all intents and purposes the school, church, and GH are stable (except for the surrounding walls adjacent to the GH which collapsed).

School has not officially started and the government seems to be shooting for a target date of early April. Some church related schools are holding classes outside, under tents, to avoid losing more students.

As you have seen on many news reports, there are tent cities all over the city and surrounding areas. The basketball court at the GH is filled with tents as is just about every open dirt space. It will be a nightmare when the rains pick up because there is no place for the water to go. Food and water are scarce and sanitation a real problem.

UN, US-AID, and other international organizations are present to provide emergency rations but food and water lines often stretch a quarter mile easily. Other supplies are readily available from international stores but prices have come up and are beyond the ability of most to afford.

The airport is still compromised but they have set up entry and departure terminals at either end—it just takes a lot longer to enter and exit.

I met a medical team from the states that has a “traveling clinic” and they, as you might expect, are not seeing earthquake related physical trauma but rather chronic routine issues such as our Clinic sees. They did have many patients with psychological trauma and grief. They had several pastors on hand who helped with this.

There is, as you would imagine, a deep sense of sadness and grief over the country and yet in the midst of it all, life has gone on. You see parents braiding the hair of children, men being shaved, people cooking, children playing, buying, selling, all amazing, all things considered.

FURCY

I traveled to Furcy with a small group of pastors and friends, some of whom have not been to Furcy in many years. It was a fun day.

The Clinic is fine—a few spider cracks but nothing significant. The Clinic was up and running—our nurse, Marie Marte, was there as was the doctor. There were about 30 people, mostly women and children waiting for care. And, many of our friends were present selling their food items.

The Church has a few dislodged blocks (mostly around door jambs, windows) and a few cracks but again, nothing terribly significant. The School is fine and the cookhouse at the school is the same, but requiring significant repair. The Principal's house, which wasn't solid to begin with, has been fully compromised and needs to be removed. He is living in the Clinic and has asked for wood to build a room in the village cook house for his lodging.

Though schools are not officially open, there was one class at the school with about 40 students and two teachers.

The Farmer's Association has the same number of participants (about 60) and they said they have seed and fertilizer for the next planting season.

The Clinic Administrator indicated a need for more meds. There had been an influx of people to the Clinic following the earthquake and the doctor does offer a "traveling Clinic" to those who cannot walk to the facility.

GUEST HOUSE

The GH is up and running. Again, food and water are available but more expensive and there are stores available. Everyone there is okay and asked to be remembered.

A number of people are living in the vans on the property. Some are drivers and interpreters who lost their homes and they just don't have any place to go. Some others are living in tents. I spoke with two of our interpreters, Jean Claude and Joseph, who were caught in a building collapse. They survived and are well, although Jean Claude continues to experience neck problems.

There were two teams there, a Baptist traveling medical team, and a Methodist group from Illinois who have a project near Carrefour. They were there to check in on their mission sit.

FUTURE TEAMS and PLANS

Travel: there is no problem getting in and out of the country, nor getting around, provided that vehicles are available. The GH has three main vehicles and a smaller Montero.

Food and Water: again, no problem except for increased costs.

Future Plans: There was an UMCOR/NGO Consultant present at the Guest House. His role is to serve as a liaison to the other NGOs, government agencies and help develop a plan for UMCOR and VIM for their future work. There are plans to hire several persons to oversee the coordination of relief/recovery efforts, work with teams, and generally organize the UM response.

Many people are asking, what can we do? Right now, we are doing what we can do. We have people on the ground putting things in place, making arrangements and generally organizing a plan for future VIM Teams. From my perspective, at this point there is little that the average VIM Team can do directly in regard to the disaster. We will need to wait until we hear some updated information and plans from Greg Forrester (our Jurisdictional VIM Coordinator) and UMCOR to fully define needed teams: i.e., medical, dental, educational, VBS-type, etc..

A difference I described between this situation and something like the Gulf Coast is the fact that many on the Gulf left before, during and after Katrina—and there was a great need for self-sustained volunteers to do the short and long-term recovery work. In Haiti, there are more than enough people there to do much of the removal work. However, safety, regarding the dismantling of buildings and homes, and the skills necessary to repair and rebuild are significant issues. In many cases these are beyond the skills of the average VIM team.

In the meantime we will continue to train and orient people through our ERT trainings and Haiti orientation sessions, and when the time comes begin to assemble teams. One of the things we must remember is that this situation will be with us for a long time. The early teams will be selected from those with particular skills, physical abilities, and prior Haiti/international mission experience.

It is our hope to continue our work in Furcy. Mountains of Hope for Haiti, our Conference mission program, is continuing to monitor the situation in Furcy and will work within the overall response plan to continue our commitment to the village and people of Furcy.

Our Conference Mission leadership, and representatives from Disaster Response, Volunteers in Mission and Mountains of Hope, will continue to work on and advise our response.

It goes without saying that we should all continue to pray for the people of Haiti, educate ourselves about the crisis and ways to help, and to support our UMCOR and Conference initiatives.

A PRAYER FOR THE PEOPLE OF HAITI

Out of the depths we cry to you, O God. We cry to you for our Haitian sisters and brothers. We thank you for upholding them in their suffering. Give them continuing strength and comfort. Give us love and courage to stand with them and work with them as they struggle for healing in the midst of tragedy. Keep us committed to the truth and empower us with your Spirit of love. We trust in your continuing mercy as we bring to you our own desire to be in solidarity with our Haitian brothers and sisters.

“O L’espri Sen, desann sou nou; nou gen yon misyon pou Ayiti.”

O Holy Spirit, descend on us; we have a mission for Haiti. Amen.

In faith,

Tom

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