

Bonjour,

It is with a heavy heart that I begin to write this trip report; not because we didn't have a successful trip, but because of the massive devastation and suffering caused by the 7.0 earth quake in Port au Prince.

If you would like to read Janet's immediate reflections on the trip and the earth quake, you can go to <URL>, and if you want to see photos from the trip, click here (still under construction).

Our trip to visit Fr. Noe and his family in Cap Haitien probably began while Janet was exploring her call to St. Paul's in The Dalles, in 2008. While discussing her interest in Haiti and mission, she piqued the interest of at least one person on the search committee. By the time she was onboard as rector, she already had people asking 'When will we go?' And, very early on in 2009, we began to have meetings to explore the possibility of a trip in January 2010. We soon decided that this would be an exploratory trip to find out what kind of relationship could be developed with Fr. Noe and his schools and churches. Janet and I would be the team leaders, since we'd been to Haiti on short-term mission trips many times before.

As we continued to meet with team members and potential team members, we talked about what life was like in Haiti, what the trip could do for the people around Fr. Noe, and how we could finance the trip.

At one time, the team consisted of 16 people, which in hind sight, would have been way to many – we would have overwhelmed the Bernier's, especially in the aftermath of the earth quake. Eventually, we ended up with 11 – Janet and me, Don (DW/Dub) Dickinson and his 13-year old 'little brother' Bubba (Brandon), and Don's son-in-law Jeff Rask, P.K. (Dr. Phil) Schwartz, Sharon Stewart and Dianne Walworth were all from St. Paul's. Fabian Baker, from Bonanza, OR, joined us – she and I met on a work trip to New Orleans. And lastly (not leastly), we were joined by Yvonne and Andy Slifka, from Lakewood, CO – we first met Yvonne as she headed up another search committee in Colorado.

Throughout 2009 the St. Paul's folks raised money through a number of projects, including selling organic garden seedlings, several car washes, a couple of yard cleaning days, and a Haiti dinner at the church – in all, we raised a total of \$16,667, which also included donations from friends and trip fees. I mention the financials because we were able to provide Fr. Noe with much-needed support as the events of the week unfolded.

So, on January 10<sup>th</sup>, the team of eleven found our various ways to Ft. Lauderdale, where we would spend the night. The next morning, we headed to FLL where we

checked in with Lynx Air and I got to reunite with the LWI team that would be flying with us to Cap Haitien. Jim was leading that trip and we also met up with a friend of our brother-in-law, Mark – small world. After refueling in Exuma, Bahamas, we flew into a fierce rain storm which was pounding Cap Haitien, and on our way in we were surprised to see many houses standing deep in water. Debbie, who met the LWI team, said that it had been raining for 20 days – just about since I left after my previous LWI trip. Saying good bye to LWI, we packed ourselves like sardines into Fr. Noe's trucks and bumped our way over to his compound, which includes his house, an under-repair school, and a trade school. The Bernier dogs, Brutus and Magli, greeted us warmly, as did Shirley and their 3 children, Noeli (age 7) and the 5 year-old twins, Alexander (Lex) and Alexandra (Lexi).

It is easy to forget the impact that a place like Haiti can have on someone who hasn't been before – just the trip over from the airport was an eye-opener. Cap Haitien was at one time a beautiful French city, and its history, beauty and potential are still there. But then, there is the extreme poverty, the incredible mass of humanity, the mounds of trash and rutted streets – Paradise colliding with something far less. Anyway, we got ourselves situated into 3 bedrooms and enjoyed our first Haitien dinner. That night many of us hit the sack, soon after Compline, to the ongoing sound of pounding rain. One of the highlights of the trip was Morning Prayer and either Evening Prayer or Compline – most of the team willingly led the services with gentle guidance, as needed, from Janet.

Tuesday morning, January 12<sup>th</sup>, we ate and took a tour of the trade school. Due to the continual rain, many of the classes were not in session, but we explored the wood shop, computer room, and other functional and in-repair classrooms, and began to see that a lot of cleaning up, repairing and painting were in order. From there, we went over to visit the elementary school, where Fr. Noe's church, Church of the Holy Spirit, is located. Classes start with Kindergarten (ages 3-5) and run on up in age. Thirteen year-old Bubba was a huge hit – if you don't know Bubba, he is incredibly mature for his age, is working on a size-16 shoe, stands over 6' tall and weighs in over 200 pounds of muscle – quite an impression on many of the Haitian kids.

Some members of the group are educators and were interested in the Haiti school system, and what we might be able to do to lend support. A huge barrier, though, was language, and the class sizes, by necessity, were way beyond U.S. standards. I'm pretty sure that the average Haitian teacher hasn't been to college, too. Back at Pere Noe's compound, he had showed us an old school building, in need of a lot of repair, where he would be starting up a teacher's academy – now that was something that greatly interested our educators.

After a late lunch, we were relaxing, getting to know each other better, when it hit. The house began to sway, a rumbling was heard, and we all quickly left the house and stood in the court yard. We had no idea how big the quake was, where the epicenter was, and what was the risk of tsunami – right across the street was the bay. DW and Jeff had international cell phones and quickly text'd their wives in the States to see if there was any news. Almost immediately, Monte and Tori sent back that a big quake had hit near Port au Prince, with considerable damage. We assured them that we were ok; then all phone communication to the outside world was lost.

Watching CNN on Fr. Noe's TV, we learned over the course of the evening that something horrible was happening – Janet and I have spend a fair amount of time in Port au Prince, and we were learning that many of the buildings that we knew were gone – Hotel Montana, Episcopal (and Catholic) Cathedral, a hospital, the Presidential Palace, to name a few. But buildings can be replaced – not the lives of those who were in them. Fr. Noe has a medical student brother in Port au Prince and Shirley has a brother in Leogane – in addition, there were lots of extended family members to worry about, and no news would come through about any of them for several days. It is probably safe to say that every Haitian, living outside of the Port au Prince area, has loved ones in the P-au-P area. Eventually, we would learn that the 2 brothers were OK, but not so all of the extended family.

On the 13<sup>th</sup>, we sat and worried. Should we stay and provide moral support, or were we too much of a burden on the family? As we were sitting there, Jeff suddenly leapt from the sofa – his pocket was vibrating and for a brief period of time we were able to communicate with our loved ones back in the States – and then no more. At this time, I really need to thank DW and Jeff for bringing along those phones, and Monte and Tori who would become our communication angels back home. Many of you who are reading this may have first heard that we were safe via this fragile communication link.

By the 14<sup>th</sup>, Thursday, we began to realize that going home early was neither an option nor a good plan, and that we needed to find something useful to do. All schools (and banks) in Haiti were closed for a long, indefinite period. In the trade school, Janet had talked with Fr. Noe about a large room that was overflowing with boxes, obsolete computers, old sewing machines, books and old filing cabinets. Fr. Noe's plans were to fix up the room and begin a women's center, and he was talking to a very interested party. We approached Noe with both a suggested plan, and money to help implement it. By afternoon, we were up to our elbows in dust as we stored some things in a nearby room, hauled lots to the downstairs dump, swept walls and ceilings and got ready to paint. A few of us went with Fr. Noe to the hardware store where we purchased 25 gallons of white paint, brushes and rollers, some lumber (for a yet-to-be revealed project) and a soccer ball for Lex (and Bubba).

Oh yeah, there was also the saga of the toilet – changing out the wax ring in the U.S. can be tedious, but isn't too hard a job. In Haiti, where supplies are short and toilet installation is unfamiliar to us, it took 4-5 of us a fair number of hours to get the job done, but in the end we succeeded.

Each day, we were treated to wonderful Haitian meals – lots and lots of variety. Janet had brought along a bottle of Melinda's Hot Sauce which was a huge hit with several members of the team, and especially with Shirley. The morning and evening prayer services were keeping us grounded, and evening card games were helping us maintain our sense of humor.

Friday morning, we attacked the room – it is truly amazing what a coat of paint can do. Fr. Noe then showed us another equally large room where the lumber was already being used to build walls that would turn this one room into 2 class rooms and a teachers' office. There was a bathroom, with sink brackets, plumbing for toilets, and showers – but no hardware. This too would change. Again, a good coat of white paint was applied and the transformation had begun.

Saturday morning, more of the same – a second coat on the 2 rooms, some working on the walls, and painting yet a third room which would be used for computer classes. I don't know about you, but painting isn't one of my strong points, and we were all tired by the end of the day. On Sunday, we had 2 services to attend, a celebration dinner to consume, and then we needed to get the Slifka's to the airport.

Sunday: Janet co-celebrated at the 6:30 am service, with Fabian and me in the congregation, and then Fr. Noe drove us back to round up the rest of the team for the 2<sup>nd</sup> service. We all walked over, guarded and escorted by loyal Magli. What a service! 2 ½ hours flew by with joyful singing, familiar liturgy, Fr. Noe preaching on the earth quake devastation (in Creole), Eucharist and Janet blessing/anointing first the children, and then everyone else in the church. Lastly, Janet introduced the team, called us to the front, and we sang 3 verses of Amazing Grace – Shirley, and many others, were in tears – oh my. Peterson, Fr. Noe's all around handy man (plumber, carpenter) was also the organist at the church and quickly added needed accompaniment to our voices.

Home for an incredible meal, and then off to the airport. All 11 of us plus Noe in one truck, expecting to say our good byes and then the remaining 9 of us would be treated to a tour of the country side – in the midst of sudden fuel shortages, Fr. Noe was a saint. At the airport, we met the LWI team and learned that there would be no flight that day, which also meant that our departure the next day was in doubt. I enjoyed visiting with Rick who had come back from a scary battle with malaria. I also got to visit with my other LWI friends and we learned that they and our 2 teammates should be on a morning flight – be there at 6:00 am. So, back in the truck, and off on the tour.

We drove out to Milot, where I've worked on wells, to see the ruins of King Henri Christophe's 'castle'. It was really something to see – partially destroyed by a massive earth quake in the early 1800's, it looked like a ruin from England or Scotland. The same king also built the Citadel a little further down the road.

Then we back-tracked and went to see a couple of Episcopal churches/schools out beyond Rick and Debbie's place, and I pointed out wells along the way. I was glad that Janet, and the others, got to see some of the territory where I've done LWI work. With sore rear-ends (riding on the back of the pick-up) we got back home for an evening meal, Compline and some more cards.

Next morning, Monday, Fr. Noe, Yvonne and Andy, and I headed to the airport where we waited until 10:00 am – the plane was coming, but when? I got to talk with Debbie and hear how things went with LWI – 6 wells repaired, over near the Dominican Republic border. Shortly after 10:00, I learned that our flight had been moved to the next day, but that we were on it. Yvonne, Andy and the LWI team did eventually take off, but they lost an engine on the way home and had to land in Exuma. Compared to the earth quake, this was a minor difficulty, but a major worry for those who endured it. Yvonne relayed a message to us through Tori and Monte – get a charter and get out, which we sort of did.

Tuesday, we were all at the airport by 9:00 am, and waited until our plane departed at 4:20 pm. Lynx had run low on pilots and airplanes, so they chartered a flight from Locair for the 9 of us and 6 Haitians. We stopped off at Exuma for fuel on the way back, passed through customs and checked in to our hotel on the beach by 9:00-ish. Then, off we went to find a restaurant, which turned out to be quite a decent ending to our day.

Wednesday, we went our different ways and eventually joined up with extremely grateful and welcoming family and loved-ones, including our 2 four-footed G's.

So, what else is there to say? Haiti has once again been hit with an epic disaster and it will take years to climb out of this new hole. So many lives lost, so many lives destroyed, so much anguish and despair. Fr. Noe headed out on Thursday with food, water and some boy scouts from the church to see what they could do. Rick and the LWI nationals headed there on Wednesday with enough supplies to repair 30 wells. I've heard from other friends who are also waiting for a more opportune time to take teams to help with the recovery. As for us, Fr. Noe assures us that our presence was a true comfort to him, his family and the church. We were able to begin the development of new relationships and we will continue to keep our new friends in prayer. We were also able to give Fr. Noe and our Haitian friends some financial support – well over \$6000.00 – it's not a lot, but Haiti needs our financial support at this time, and our prayers, and our sweat in the future.

God bless,

Ron

P.S. Heard that by Saturday Rick and his team had reached P-au-P and had already repaired 11 wells.