

# Religious Groups Fill Haiti Government Gaps

By CHARLES FORELLE

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti— Outside a red and gray Coleman tent, a boy sat mute in a wheelchair holding a dented metal bowl of yellow gruel. His arms were laced with pus-filled wounds, flies swarmed around his grotesquely swollen ankles, and his right foot was missing its littlest toe—but he was lucky. Not only had he escaped the school for the disabled, where many of his handicapped classmates were crushed to death, but he had found his way to what passes for an oasis in this city of death and ruin: a camp run by the Episcopal church.

In a country whose government has all but stopped functioning, in a city whose crowded shanties remain largely unreached by aid cargoes, it has fallen to communities on the ground to fill the gap as best they can.

Religious missions, with their deep community connections, are proving to be particularly critical conduits of help, both spiritual and material.

Catholic Relief Services has started turning a golf course in the neighborhood of Pétionville into one of the first formal camps for the homeless.

Some Haitian government officials say between one million to three million people may have been displaced by the quake. Thousands of tons of food and medical supplies have been shipped to Haiti, but much of it remains trapped in warehouses, or diverted to the neighboring Dominican Republic.

Despite serious damage to St. François de Sales Hospital, one of the oldest Catholic hospitals in Haiti, its workers trucked in supplies from the Dominican Republic and commandeered two medical teams from Europe. The first surgery there since the quake was performed Sunday.

The Episcopal camp was started the night of the quake with three tents scrounged up by Ogé Beauvoir, the dean of the Episcopal seminary. He and colleagues pitched the tents on the soccer field of a crushed parish school. A seminarian with medical training spent the night treating the injured. A team of young people dug through the school's rubble "with their hands, with iron bars," said Father Beauvoir. That night, they pulled out 12 survivors and four bodies. They got one more person out alive, but he died shortly after.

One week after the quake, the priests had given food, water, or a little medicine to 3,000 people, said the Episcopal bishop of Haiti, Msgr. Jean Zaché Duracin.

Looking uneclesiastical in a lavender polo shirt, khaki shorts, a baseball cap and slippers, Msgr. Duracin presided over a table of priests and lay leaders meeting in one of the school's undamaged buildings. They discussed how to rebuild the diocese, and how to serve the thousands living outside.

There is little chance the refugees will leave anytime soon, the priests said.

That's a problem, because most of the supplies were salvaged from the school's cafeteria.

"The stock is starting to deplete," said Msgr. Duracin, whose flock is now spread on the soccer field under tents and tarps. "We have only enough for perhaps another day or two."

Medicine is also a worry. The camp has no analgesics, no antibiotics and no diarrhea pills. Controlling disease will be a challenge, particularly if it rains.

Primitive though the conditions are, they exceed what is available in many other parts of the ravaged capital.

Daniel Pierre trekked across the city from perhaps the most crowded camp in all Port-au-Prince, one in the Delmas district. That camp is by the Lycée Daniel Figiolé, a high school that is now a scene of horror. A week after the quake, bodies are still visible. They are students, pinned and crushed between the floors, which have compressed into a pancake stack of concrete. Downwind, the stench brings tears.

"No aid has come here, nothing Not even water," said one Delmas camp resident. "It is inhumane."

So Mr. Pierre, an Episcopal church member, set out for the diocese's temporary headquarters looking for something, anything. He got a bowl of soaked and cooked wheat, flavored with salt. It fills the stomach, at least.

Another person who came to the Episcopal camp, Paulette Ernie, received a bucket from a Canadian aid group working with the church. Inside, she said, was "water, two spoons and a glass."

Jean-Baptiste Vanio, 18, sat in the camp in a plastic chair beneath a green tarp, propped up by stick and pipes, and lashed with rope and bits of electric cord. He had a festering shoulder wound; a power line fell on him as he sprinted out of the bookstore where he was working on Tuesday.

Too afraid to go back to his cracked house, he spent the first night on the Champs de Mars—a public space in the central city that is now a chaotic camp. Then he came to the Episcopalians. "It's better here, and I'm with family," Mr. Vanio said.

Haiti is mostly Catholic, with a mixture of other denominations brought by missionaries, all tintured by voodoo. Haiti has about 83,000 Episcopalians, according to 2008 figures from the Episcopal Church in the U.S.

Msgr. Duracin was outdoors when the quake hit. Friends and neighbors helped him dig out his wife, who was injured but survived. Then—miraculously, Msgr. Duracin says—his children appeared atop a pile of rubble. A tunnel had been left in the debris, and they had crawled out.

The Episcopal cathedral itself, several blocks from the camp, is ruined. The roof cratered, and the tower is now a pile of bricks entombing a car. The cathedral's frescos, icons of midcentury Haitian art naïf, are lost, just another stack of the rubble that is everywhere in this city. "It wasn't just a place of prayer," says Msgr. Duracin. "It was a place of culture."

On Sunday, Msgr. Duracin held services on the steps of a one-story building on the school ground—a structure that looks to be the most solid around. The altar was a dilapidated wooden folding table, draped with a white cloth. He said, "We must keep the faith, knowing that God is with us, in the good as well as in the bad days."

—Suzanne Sataline in New York contributed to this article.