

December 12, 2010

A Project Status Report from Haiti UVMIM Team in Haiti from 12/3

Hi Susan,

Tom said that you'd like a quick report from the VIM teams currently stranded here in Haiti. Here's a quick one from me:

Our mission to Haiti was planned for December 3-11. Our project location was Mellier, a community near Leogane. We arrived in Mellier on Saturday, December 4th, met some of the community, school and church leaders and began our assistance by moving concrete block from the front of the compound to the rear where a new latrine was being dug. On Sunday we enjoyed worship at the local Methodist church with 193 in attendance. It was heartwarming to share our love for our Lord with our Haitian brothers and sisters in Christ. Pastor Jim Lillibridge led the congregation in Mellier with a familiar response done at Indian Run United Methodist Church (but in Haitian Creole): "Bondye bon ... Tout tan! Tout tan ... Bondye se bon!"

Foundation plans for the new church in Mellier were delayed on Monday, so we spent the morning moving full and partial concrete block from the school demolition to the rear of the compound and dismantling rebar wire cages. In the early afternoon we sorted donated vitamins for later distribution. Once the Haitian workers were ready for the latrine's foundation footing concrete pour, we had an exhausting, but incredibly fun time in a bucket brigade with our fellow Haitian workers.

The plans arrived on Tuesday, so work began by laying out the foundation lines and then digging the footings for the foundation with pick axes, sledge hammers and shovels. It is still very hot during the day in December (low nineties), but the cooler nights (upper sixties to low seventies) made it very comfortable and allowed us to recharge our batteries.

On Monday and Tuesday we spent time with the local school children, sharing crafts and distributing vitamins. On Wednesday not only did we learn that the local Methodist District Superintendent wanted to change the plans for the church, but we also learned that demonstrations have become more severe, due to the announced election results for the new Haiti president. Our project work was halted, and the school was closed. I should note that despite what we heard about what was going on elsewhere in Haiti, we never once worried about our safety in Mellier. This gave us an opportunity to take a long tour of the Mellier community, meeting local residents and learning of their plight from the earthquake. Many people are still living in tents, but some have now been replaced with more substantial temporary housing supplied by USAID. We heard many stories from local Haitians regarding how the earthquake has increased their faith in God, because they were delivered from the devastation and have hope for the future.

We learned Wednesday that travel in Haiti had become difficult, and the airport had been closed. It rained on Thursday, limiting our ability to do very much. Word came from the

Methodist Guest House staff in Petionville that they could not even leave their compound most of the day due to barricades that were set up by protesters. That night we learned that our American Airlines return flight for Saturday was cancelled, and we made new reservations for a Monday/Tuesday return to the States.

On Friday the staff at the Methodist Guest House did an incredible job of keeping us updated on the demonstrations and situation in Petionville and the roads from there to Mellier. They were to have picked us up in Mellier on Friday but that was no longer possible. We got word that the "boss" for the project needed us to move the rubble from the school demolition to the side of the property behind the temporary church. We worked on that all day, and it kept our minds on the task versus our plight.

On Friday evening we learned that our Monday/Tuesday flight schedule was cancelled, and we were delayed to a Wednesday/Thursday flight schedule. American Airlines had not flown since Wednesday, and they planned no flights until Tuesday. On the positive side, the staff at the Methodist Guest House had arranged for a police escort and was optimistic that they would be able to pick us up and return us to the guest house in Petionville.

On Saturday morning we got a call from Tom Vencuss at the Methodist Guest House that they had received word that the roadblocks had been cleared and that they were sending a vehicle for us immediately. A police escort was not necessary. Once we arrived back in Petionville, we learned that all of the VIM teams in Haiti were either back at the Guest House or on their way back. Everyone arrived back without incident. The one team with flights on Delta Airlines flew out that day.

The VIM staff at the Guest House was wonderful in all respects in caring for our needs. They are not accustomed to handling so many people at one time, but they worked hard to make sure we are comfortable and are ready to return to the States as soon as American Airlines resumes flights. It has been frustrating awaiting American Airlines' decision to resume flying, but we pray that the demonstrations will not resume on Monday so that flights may begin soon.

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