

## Hope for Haiti

### The Claretian Mission in Haiti amid the quake's devastation

Just one day after the earthquake struck Haiti, a Claretian convoy assembled to head into the destruction and stand in solidarity with the Haitian Claretians and their communities. The group, from Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, was led by Fr. Hector Cuadrado, C.M.F., Major Superior of the Claretian Antilles Province, which includes Haiti.



The convoy's first stop was the Claretian mission house in Jimani, the border town between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which is now a makeshift medical clinic for the thousands of injured being brought from Haiti. Here the Claretians witnessed the heartbreaking scene of a Haitian boy, eleven years old, wailing not only from his injuries but because his mother was gone and he had no idea where she was. They also visited the Claretians' St. Anthony Mary Claret Multipurpose Center in Jimani, where the injured were being treated.

Anxious to witness the magnitude of the catastrophe in Haiti with their own eyes, the convoy then traveled to Port-Au-Prince to visit Fr. Anistus Chima Onuoha, C.M.F., pastor of St. Antoine Marie Claret Church in the Nazon district, where he has ministered to the people there for several years. The Nazon district is one of the poorest areas of the city.

Here they saw for themselves the devastation the news had reported.



"The vast majority of concrete structures had collapsed completely," explains Fr. Cuadrado. "We finally got to the house. I knocked on the large green iron door. Within moments, a little Haitian girl with drooping eyes opened the door. Greeting her as best I could, I went in and saw Fr. Anistus. Hearing us, he got up, absolutely overjoyed, and then began crying, letting everyone see his mixed feelings of sorrow, frustration, confusion, happiness—and seeing us, gratitude."

After a warm embrace, the Claretians toured the Claretian mission house. Huge cracks which would hardly stand another aftershock marred the house structure. In fear of the house's instability, people were sleeping outside on the patio, along with a few acquaintances and neighbors who had lost everything.

"It is unbelievable what we experienced and that we are still living. Please pray for us. We are in deep trouble, many deaths, bodies scattered everywhere, houses crumbled with people still inside," explains a weary Fr. Anistus.

"Every time I go out and see the city I ask myself: Am I dreaming or is what I see true? Is this the Port-au-Prince that I have known?" asks Fr. Anistus. "But it is not a dream; it is a reality."



The Claretians toured the Nazon district to see what remained of the buildings of the St. Antoine Mary Claret Parish. The ten-year-old church and the public elementary school that the Claretians helped to build were destroyed. The four Claretians who served the parish survived and are out on the streets along with everyone else.



After assisting in the relief efforts with their brother Claretians in Haiti, the Claretian convoy traveled back to Santo Domingo where ten Haitian Claretian seminarians still had not heard any news about their families. The Claretians decided to send the young men in search of their loved ones. Although their level of fear and anxiety was considerable, the mutual support of the Claretian community has helped them to maintain their faith and fortitude in these moments.

“Among the ideas that I shared with them were these: that we are men of faith and hope, because we bring Jesus Christ in our heart,” says Fr. Cuadrado. “I cannot describe my feelings in sending our sons to confront face to face what they have only seen on television.”

A few days later, the seminarians located their families. They were pained and saddened at the death of the mother of one of the seminarians, several small cousins, nephews, and a godmother.

“The Haitian people have always been in the heart of our Mother Congregation,” explains Fr. Cuadrado. “Many ask themselves why God permitted all this. However, we want to ask them, are they not seeing Him acting in the love and solidarity of so many?”



The long-term challenge now facing Haiti is the rebuilding of the infrastructure and government institutions. While millions of dollars have been raised to support the island nation, Fr. Rosendo Urrabazo, C.M.F., former Claretian General Vicar in Rome who visited Haiti, is concerned about potential for decreasing support for Haiti as time passes. “The outpouring of the international community has been remarkable,” says Fr. Urrabazo. “It shows the people of Haiti and the rest of the world that humanity is alive. But rebuilding will be a long term process.”

“The challenge is not just to restore the lives of the Haitian people, but to rebuild their institutions,” says Fr. Urrabazo. “It’s going to take generations, and the vision of the church is certainly long term.”

“There were many social and political problems that needed to be sorted out even before this tragedy,” he explains. “But the only institution that seems to work in Haiti is the Catholic Church. After all the aid organizations are gone, the church will still remain, and the people’s faith is what is going to get them through this.”