

Fr. Butler Shares His Experience in HAITI

On **TUESDAY**, January 12th, the weather was sunny, about 75 degrees, when Fr. Butler and 7 others (including his brother and 2 cousins) flew into Port-au-Prince. From there, they headed out by van to St. Boniface Hospital in Fond des Blancs, but something felt strange as they rode in the van. The driver stopped and got out to see if there was something wrong with the engine. Then they saw people coming out of their houses and the driver asked what was happening. They were told there had been an earthquake.....

This is a personal account of Fr. Butler's experience in Haiti as he read from his "journal" notes and relayed his thoughts to those in the Rectory upon his return.

"When we arrived at our destination, we found out that we had been fortunate enough to have left Port-au-Prince only a short time before the devastating earthquake hit. The St. Boniface Hospital had a computer so we had electronic availability to hear what had happened. Urgent emails from everywhere, including the U.S., were constantly being sent to the Hospital trying to find out if we were safe. We were also trying to get as many details as possible from anyone in Port-au-Prince. Unfortunately, we learned that the Cathedral where the Archbishop was having a conference with 100 priests and seminarians was destroyed. They all perished.

We felt ongoing tremors, and a discussion ensued in terms of whether we would sleep outside that evening or remain inside for fear of a building collapse. We decided to remain inside.

WEDNESDAY: *Six boys from Fond des Blancs (sponsored by St. Boniface to attend Xavier House, a school in Port-au-Prince) made their long way to the hospital and told us that they just happened to be outside when the earthquake hit. All the other students and teachers inside the school perished. The boys were told by the Staff/friends at the hospital that they wouldn't be able to return to the school. Because the boys couldn't speak English, we just remained present, listening and learning as the staff relayed to us what the boys were saying. Then, the group gathered together and talked about what would make sense in our approach to the boys. It was suggested that it was important to help them focus on one thing...WAIT...Wait and see what makes sense to do. The immediate action was to give them food and food supplies to take to their families and told them to return the following day which the boys did.*

THURSDAY: *We all had to register on the Internet at a website with our passport numbers to let people know that we were alive. The question remained in our minds regarding the fact that we're due to leave on Saturday...what process will we now have to go through to exit the country? We had to keep reminding ourselves not to panic, that it was best to wait and see what was going on, to stay calm, and to stay where we were as we looked at all our options. Everything in the streets was now so unpredictable. So many people were walking in silence, others were carrying cell phones awaiting word as to whether loved ones had survived. We heard that many of the roads and bridges out of the city were destroyed or impassable.*

To maintain focus on our mission to Fond des Blancs, despite the horror going on around us, we continued to help with the meals at the hospital and we showed our friendship to the 6 young men. We went to the library in town and helped pick up books that had toppled over from the tremors and did the same in other buildings.

As the day continued, we received news that our flight back on Delta had been cancelled and the only way out would be on a helicopter that would pick us up and take us to Port-au-Prince and then onto the Dominican Republic. Only one vehicle was being used to transport people around

the area as many of the roads were destroyed and other vehicles were being used to bring people to safety.

FRIDAY/SATURDAY: *Early on Friday, our group was told to pack our bags and remain ready to board a bus that would take us to a field where we would be picked up by helicopter. We went, but upon arriving at our destination, we were told there was no helicopter. We were getting hungry so we walked back about 1/2 mile to the town to get something to eat. As we began eating they got word that the helicopter was on it's way and to get to the field immediately! We stopped eating and ran back.*

Crowds were forming on the field as we caught site of the helicopter. It was extremely difficult to make our way through the crowds to the helicopter, but we continued to push through. We arrived and were ready to all board, only to discover that the helicopter could only take 4 passengers. Four would have to remain. My brother and I and 2 others got on, but 4 others had to stay. The bus carrying our luggage also couldn't get through the crowds, so we had to leave without our luggage.

It was quite an experience. The helicopter pilot was supposed to take us to an airport in another town, but he was uncertain as to what direction to fly or where it was located, telling my brother that he would have to be the co-pilot. None of us passengers had ever been on a helicopter before. From the helicopter, we could see the devastation and remnants of buildings destroyed. We landed safely in Port-au-Prince rather than the intended airport. Once landing, we had to get a taxi to take us to Santo Domingo. It was a grueling 5 hour drive....our minds constantly recalling what we'd seen and wondering what we could possibly do to help.

SUNDAY: *From Santo Domingo we flew to Miami and from Miami home. When I arrived at the Rectory, I was met with a loud halleluia, hugs and handshakes....*

Those of us who were at the Rectory when Fr. Butler returned, were thrilled to have him back safely, but we also knew that despite not carrying any luggage, he was carrying with him an overwhelming experience, a sense of shock, but also a sense of relief to be home....so many mixed feelings that would take time to decipher.

Over the following days, we found that Fr. Butler continues to ask himself, "*What is this all about? Where do I go from here? How can we, here, help those in Haiti?*"

He also told us, "*Remain aware of what has happened in Haiti, be open to all the possibilities that may exist in discovering ways to be helpful now and always diligent in promoting possibilities for the future to those who have survived.*"

Amen, Fr. Butler, Amen. As Fr. Casey said in his Bulletin Note, we need to remember the importance of Faith, Hope, and Love.....

If you wish to send in a donation:

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