

FROM THE EPISCOPAL NEWS SERVICE:

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Haiti organizes relief efforts following Jeanne

By Nan Cobbey

[ENS] The Rev. Max Accimé, priest in the Haitian city of Gonaives, hardest hit by Hurricane Jeanne, was able to stay during the storm only by climbing onto the roof of his house. Many in Gonaives, a coastal city several hours north of the capital, had to do the same. An estimated 200,000 are now homeless in that city. Accimé has turned the parish church, l'Eglise St. Bazile, and its school into shelters. The church, flooded earlier, is now free of water and Accimé is attempting to obtain drinking water and food, according to Sister Marjorie Raphael, SSM, of Port-au-Prince. She describes horrible scenes, but says the diocese is busy organizing its relief efforts and has created a committee to collect "everything and anything" and transport it to the Northeast.

Last week, Accimé met with diocesan officials and the new committee to plan how to get relief to Gonaives. Forty-two parishioners are currently living in the church's school building, according to Burton Joseph, program director for the diocese. "They are nourished and taken care of by Father Accimé. There are another 100 who stay there just at night." Delivering aid to Gonaives and the people trapped there is going to be impossible for the present though, says Joseph. "Right now we won't be able to get to Gonaives with whatsoever. We would definitely be held up and everything taken away ... It's still chaos, total chaos," he said.

"We heard there are additional troops coming [to provide security], but we do not know exactly when ... so Father Accimé and Farther Macdonald Jean say we will have to wait and see how things develop before we venture ourselves. It is very, very, very risky ... Joseph said the new committee formed to respond to the crisis decided Thursday to collect funds and goods - rice, beans, cooking oil, sugar, milk, soap etc. -- "for at least 1,000 people over a period of at least two weeks ... We will also take the opportunity to call on all the different faiths to come together and to put up a national rescue plan for the country along with the government starting with reforestation efforts."

Travel dangerous: One family from the Holy Trinity Cathedral congregation nearly lost their lives during the storm when they attempted to travel north. Seven of them were on their way by rented bus to Gros Morne for a funeral, according to

Sister Marjorie, when they were trapped by the waters in Gonaives. "They climbed to the top of the bus, then to the roof over the Monument of Independence in the heart of Gonaives (near our church). They thought this was the end, but the waters abated," said Sister Marjorie. She explained that Marc Leon had told that story at the 9 a.m. Eucharist at the Cathedral on Sunday. The horror stories about the number of dead are indescribable, says Sister Marjorie, "...like the mass graves to bury the over 1,200 bodies found to date. Now the new bodies discovered are 10 days old and the smell and possible disease add to the horror."

"We had three days of national mourning, and it really is national mourning, for the whole country aches for the sufferers and survivors," she said. "In one sense, this was a natural disaster, but it is also the fruit of hundreds of years of negligence toward a people and abuse of trees and soil."

Many agencies and countries are trying to help but, according to Sister Marjorie, "the logistics of getting truckloads and containers safely there for distribution has proved a formidable task." Mudslides have prevented relief shipments reaching victims. Gen. Augusto Heleno Ribeiro Pereira, the Brazilian army commander in charge of the U.N. peacekeeping force in Haiti, says the situation remains critical. He told the Associated Press this week, "The government infrastructure was already weak and, after this tragedy, is virtually nonexistent." Flooding has damaged 9,900 acres crops near Gonaives and another 3,700 acres in the Trois Riviere Valley, according to a Miami Herald interview with government workers.

CARE officials have not been able to reach isolated villages with any aid. CARE president Peter Bell told the Herald, "What's absolutely crucial is thinking long-term about food security, increasing production, so Haiti can begin to support itself." His words echo those of the Episcopal priests who called on the larger church for help with sustainable agriculture, schools and decentralized manufacturing earlier this year after the political turmoil disrupted the nation.

--Nan Cobbey is associate editor of Episcopal Life

Dear friends;

Our Sisters in Haiti are doing their best to cope with the incredible devastation that has occurred in their country in the past few months. They struggle daily to respond to the needs of the people who have been left homeless, orphaned, unemployed and without adequate water, food, or clothing due to the recent floods. They have asked for your help. They desperately need the following items:

Clothing for children and adults (suitable for their tropical climate)

Vitamins for children and adults

First aid supplies of all kinds

And of course, monetary donations are always needed to purchase what is possible to purchase in Haiti itself and to pay the high costs of postage.

Checks should be made out to the Society of St. Margaret and sent to the address below.

Supplies should be sent to the same address. It costs \$1.00 per pound for Agape Flights to deliver items to Haiti, so including a check for the postage would be most welcome.

Their mailing address is:

St. Margaret's Convent

c/o Agape Flights P au P

7990 15th Street East

Sarasota FL 34243

The Sisters of St. Margaret