

Notes from a Recent Conversation with Sister Emmanuelle

All over Haiti, the school year has been extended to mid-August in order to make up the weeks missed after the earthquake. In the “Village” near Port-au-Prince, they have been holding class under tarps because everyone is too frightened to go into the buildings. They plan to use the time between the end of the current school year and the beginning of the next in late September to build some wooden classrooms. In the Pandiassou area, the children of the displaced families living there have been incorporated successfully into the schools in the area.

Also in Pandiassou, the families living in tents near the technical school are being encouraged to take hold of their lives and be more independent in the following ways:

- 1) At first, the community was not only supplying food but also cooking for the families who had no cooking equipment, etc. At this point, they have supplied cooking gear to the families, who by and large are now cooking for themselves.
- 2) They have found small jobs for people through the internationally-funded Cash for Work program so that the displaced persons can begin to be more independent and have their dignity restored.
- 3) The Little Brothers and Little Sisters have spearheaded many recreational activities for the displaced persons—games, films, etc.
- 4) There are plans and materials available to begin to construct small houses for the displaced persons now living in tents. Those who have family anywhere in the Plateau have been encouraged to take their tents and go live with their families either long-term or at least for the short-term while some houses are being built. People receiving these houses will be asked to pay a small amount monthly in return, spread over some years, so that they really feel ownership of the houses, have their dignity restored, and do not become dependent on hand-outs.
- 5) The displaced persons have been given seeds and tools so that they can begin to garden.
- 6) Compared to many in the country, those in Pandiassou can consider themselves lucky despite the displacement and difficulty of reconstructing a life.

Despite these hopeful signs of progress, Emmanuelle says that, on the whole, the country is in very bad shape and that the uncertainties and slowness of aid to materialize in Port-au-Prince are having serious effects on morale and on the lifestyle of many young people.

She assures us all that the friendships of many individuals and groups around the world are a great consolation to her and to the Little Sisters and Little Brothers. She stated that just being alive was a miracle and that those who are living **MUST** have a mission, that she feels that she

MUST devote her whole soul to doing what she is called to do despite the fact that the work at hand is so very difficult—so difficult that she is at a loss for words to explain it. She said that every day it seems as if she hears of another person whom she knew who has died. Or she thinks about going to thus and such a store for supplies and realizes that the store doesn't exist any more. Perhaps she said it best when she said that it is "like co-habiting with Death."

Despite all of this, Emmanuelle says that they must all try to be optimistic and to continue to do the best they can.