

Hot News from Haiti Extra



Two days before SANDY



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Dear Friends

We want to thank you for your prayers and expressions of concern for us and the people of Haiti as the news broke about Tropical Storm Sandy. We have received so many emails and questions asking how we fared. Many of you were indignant at the coverage of news of the States and the lack of mention of the Caribbean that had already been lashed by the wind and rain. We felt therefore that we needed to send a supplementary newsletter devoted to the Storm and its outcome.

In Haiti there are many Charities and Non Government Organisations (NGO), staffed in the main by people from America. There are also work teams who devote a week or longer, to help with rebuilding or medical work, assisting in orphanages or offering training. We watched with heartfelt sympathy their horror as Sandy became a Super storm and headed towards their families. Frantic phone calls were made to tell their relatives that this is real and big and to move to higher ground and that nothing, not even work or commitments matter – just get out of New Jersey – and where to Mom? was often the reply.

Praying with and for them, sustaining with hugs and mopping up tears was all we could do and although a disproportionate amount of news was reported about the USA, who was equally ill prepared as we were, we saw the worry and distress of good people giving of their time and energy as we are, as they feared for their families back home. Here we live constantly without regular electricity and so when it is off for days as in the storm, though inconvenient, people carry on. In the USA life stops as it would in the UK.

Also one has to remember that up to date news is easily accessible with pictures and statistics from the States but quite a challenge in Haiti and the other Caribbean islands. Therefore as soon as we were back in Internet contact we were asked by Rev Tom Quenet at

Church House in London for a first hand report which was published on the World Church Blog <http://worldchurch.posterous.com> . The Church's response was immediate and grants in the way of gifts of money were made to the affected islands and we were glad to notify churches in Britain of this generous act.

We were all taken by surprise, for although it is the hurricane season, Sandy developed in an unusual place – off the coast of South America and not out East in the Atlantic. We look from time to time at the Hurricane Centre website, and so when on Monday teatime, one of the Americans in a medical work team that we were with, in Jeremie said, "I've just had a call from a friend in the Navy – apparently there is a Hurricane heading our way".



we got on to the website, scanned the map and there it was, not quite a Hurricane yet. Rain was already forecast on the mountains above the town but we woke to a dull day with spots of rain only. Clinic carried on as usual and I went to see the work and photographed the storm at sea on my way back.

At 11 am it was raining steadily. I was due to run the training session at church at 2pm but from 12 onwards phone calls came in from around the district – there was too much rain and rivers were rising. Transport was stopping and by 2pm the event was cancelled. Children returned from school soaked as did the team, in open back



pickups and motor bikes. Power stopped and we texted the UK saying that we were OK but not to phone. The rain continued all night, the next day and through to Thursday. School was cancelled and the children of the Manse and Guesthouse where we were staying were glad to look at magazines offloaded by the work team who were now worrying about the possibility of leaving on Thursday as planned and needing to be as light as



possible. Their MAF 'plane had been cancelled, unable to fly due to the low cloud and rain and they had missed the daily commercial flight.

We did have some some wind and the area of Furcy above Port au Prince had a lot of wind - enough to blow the roof off the school and the grainstore that had only recently been

repaired from Tropical Storm Isaac , as well as to damage churches and ruin the harvest of vegetables planted afresh in September. That leaves them again with no source of income. The team were making phone calls back home (one member had to go and buy another phone as his was out of battery and there was no power to recharge), explaining that they were not going to make it for birthdays, appointments, theatre lists and asking friends and relatives to rearrange flights for them for a few days time. All this was before any of us had any inkling of the ferocity of the storm to hit the USA. As the rain eased a little late Thursday morning some of the dedicated team and John decided to go back to clinic, sort equipment and clear up. Suddenly a message came - the commercial flight was coming in 45 minutes for a second run of the day– get to the airport and be on the runway, ticket or no ticket, just in case. I summoned Maxo to drive them along with Rev Chrisnel the Superintendent minister. The Head of the team – Phil started to make a speech and I said, "Go!" They got out to Port au Prince and out of the country making the States ahead of the Storm.

We remained in Jeremie unable to go as the mountain roads had mudslides and rockfalls, the Glace (Ice) River which we had crossed coming, was too full to ford and the bridges out of Jeremie were closed. Friday was dry and sunny but as Port au Prince was still suffering rain and flooding the President declared on the radio a national holiday. We tried twice on Saturday to leave but were turned back. Debris clinging to the high pillars of the bridge reached 16 feet above the water and the muddy water bringing the downwash from the



mountains was flowing out into the sea discolouring the ocean. We looked at the possibility of leaving the car, flying out, and retrieving it later. We went to the airline



office in town but there were no tickets – only standby with cash and no banks in town were open as there was no electricity and no internet. We did have sufficient cash in local gourdes as we had travelled with all our papers and money in case of any disaster and having to

leave the country suddenly. So we planned on going to the airport Sunday morning.

We had gone to Jeremie for 5 days but stayed 10. I was very glad that I had overpacked but even so was running out of clothes(despite washing some through!). However, we were wonderfully looked after by Rev Chrisnel and his wife, fed three times a day and joined in the family birthdays too.



We were woken just before dawn on Sunday by the Revd saying that the bridge was open but that we must leave now!



We dressed quickly and his wife pressed a packed breakfast into our hands. As we drove out of the town at first light we felt like refugees escaping.

Rev Chrisnel came to the bridge with us in his car, to see the situation. Some had said the police were guarding it and others that you could walk over but he had got wind of things - a pile of stones blocked the way, the debris that was on the bridge had been cleared and now men were charging people to cross and they would walk with them. Chrisnel said no, we will have none of that. Also people were afraid to cross so we were pretty much the first



across in a car with him walking peacefully through the crowds of men saying, Let them pass, they were working at the mobile clinic at the church along the road on Saturday... and he walked over the bridge, with our car and then spoke and moved among the people on the other side...a big man, well known, respected, doing the pastor's job of spreading peace, dispelling fear, setting justice in place and addressing the issues and the people.

It was very interesting to watch.

Once across the main bridge Maxo (our driver), was praising God fit to bust, laughing, hands in the air - *keep them on the wheel please*, thanking Jesus for getting us over. When we got into the mountains we went through three mudslides that had come down and then only had the swollen river to ford. We got across the river -it was fast flowing but Maxo kept going



and did ok - when through the river he was overjoyed! After four hours we were in Les Cayes and saw the destruction on the low lying flat land and how the town suffered.



Our statement read: Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe words, "Southern Haiti is under water" proved to be an accurate description of what we saw two days after Tropical Storm Sandy had deluged Haiti. Travelling from Jeremie over the mountains to Les Cayes and on



through Petit Goave we were taken aback as we passed one after another village with so much crop damage.



Fields of maize lay flattened by the torrential rain, plantations of sugar cane resembled rice paddies, and whole banana trees were submerged by swollen rivers that had burst their banks.



We witnessed the clear up after the storm as families spread their belongings out to dry on every available bush, swept the mud that had washed through their homes and stood and stared at their lost farming income.



As reported now by the media the death toll has risen to over 50 in Haiti and those missing can be assumed to have been swept away in the floods. Although the immediate damage to lives and property is both visible and saddening, the real effects of this storm will only be measured in the months to come. The extent of crop damage will create shortages of food and loss of income for communities who in turn will not be able to pay school fees, clinical treatment or their rent. Assessment of the damage in the circuits continues and meetings between pastors and their people have taken priority over the past few days. We are grateful for the swift response of the Methodist Church in Britain and its members for their generous donation towards Haiti's needs.



That day we came through so much mud which had washed down and spread into houses & schools - the place was a quagmire. People were out clearing up and assessing damage, staring at their lost crops, washing their clothes, sheets etc and spreading them on bushes to dry - everyone was washing it seemed. In Port au Prince the lower streets and homes were flooded. Although life is resuming normality there are signs of the longer term effects – there were no potatoes the next week I noticed, and prices for vegetables have risen sharply.

We, ourselves suffered no ill effects of the storm, but rather received the generosity and hospitality at a time of need from our Haitian hosts. We thank you for your prayers – our email to the UK on arrival home said “Your prayers have been answered over and above and we are home safely”.



John on the verandah at Jeremie



Sharon in the ministers study at Jeremie

May God bless you for your kindness and your thoughts of us. Please continue to remember the people of Southern Haiti whose crops were badly damaged and pray for strength and wisdom to be given to the ministers as they address this in their circuits.

With best wishes

Sharon and John Harbottle

harbottlejs@gmail.com

Eglise Methodiste D’Haiti, 8 Route de Jacquet, Delmas 95, Petionville, Port au Prince. Haiti. Caribbean