

The following contains graphic material.

As most of you know, today started with a major aftershock. Early this morning, as Dr. Jim Toth and I were standing near the portico of the building we are working out of, I heard and felt what I thought was a huge truck lumbering down the street that runs in front of the place. Suddenly Jim Toth yanked me by the arm and I quickly realized what was happening. I looked up to see the building shaking and kicking up dust and saw that a big chunk of concrete above where we had been standing had cracked and looked ready to fall. We have been sleeping outside on the ground because the building is compromised and unsafe. The newly damaged part is very close to where I have been sleeping, so I think I'll be moving my little mattress a little further away tonight. We had a morning meeting and the team decided to split up and send half of the team at a time out into neighborhoods that have not received enough help. Amber, a very resourceful member of our team, identified community leaders who could help us locate injured people. I was part of the first group to go out. We were led past numerous collapsed buildings - a school here, a church there, most of which, we were told, contained numerous bodies. We eventually arrived at tent city that had sprung up in an open area. Word got out and we were soon surrounded by injured people, many of whom had received some kind of first aid, but were in dire need of wound care and fresh dressings. Unfortunately, after a few dozen patients had been treated, a heated argument between two men broke out into a machete fight just a few yards from us. We all jumped up and backed away from the melee as quickly as possible. It was time to go. Some of the team were very shaken by the experience as we made our way back home. While we were gone, a young woman was brought in with numerous serious injuries including a shattered pelvis, multiple fractured limbs, numerous lacerations and internal injuries. Be warned - THIS IS VERY DISTURBING - She was trapped under rubble for several days and explained to team members that she only survived by (using extreme measures.) She was simply too technically challenging for our limited facility in the soccer field. They transported her to the Israeli team who rejected her because they did not expect her to survive. By the time our smaller group returned, she was back at Mathew 25 and the team was struggling to keep her going while searching for a more advanced facility to send her. Eventually a team from Doctors Without Borders agreed to take her. The odds against her are long, but we are praying for her. Jim and I were both deeply affected by that woman's plight. We have seen way, way too much suffering here. While a second smaller team was out in the community, they saw a human leg laying in the street. After dinner, I went out into the soccer field and sang to a rapidly growing group of kids. An idea came to me - bann a pye (band on foot), a great Haitian Mardi Gras tradition of marching through the streets in large groups with home made instruments dancing and singing loudly in unison. The kids loved the idea and soon there was a loud, crazy parade going on around and around the compound. More and more people came out of their tents and joined in. Team members heard the racket and were soon cheering the hundred or so kids as they went by. On the last lap, the kids requested the "blan" (foreigners) join in and they did. It was so nice to see the kids so joyful after all the horror and misery they have witnessed. Team members later commented it was just what they needed too.

Mark Coughlin