

The following is a Letter written by Todd Pihl, of New England Chapel, who was in Haiti serving on a Short Term Mission Trip when the earthquake hit on January 12. *Posted with permission.*

Sunday, January 17th

Dear Family and Friends,

I want to begin by thanking you all for your prayers and support over the last week. Our team of 40 people saw many miracles and felt the power of prayer from people like you. There are three reasons why I am writing this letter to you:

1. To provide you information on how I believe is best that you can help the Haitian people that have been devastated by this tragedy. Without your help more people will lose their life.
2. Give an account of miracles I witnessed throughout the week.
3. To give as accurate account as possible as to what the team experienced after surviving a disaster that goes beyond the description of words. Telling my story this way is also a form of therapy and because I don't know how many times I can tell of the tragedies witnessed. So please feel free to not read it. I realize it is long but wanted to give you the opportunity to have a firsthand account of my perceptions of the events I witnessed if you are interested.

How You Can Help

First I want to say that there are wonderful people who I have come to know in Haiti and I want to see aid reach them. Secondly the best way to get aid efficiently to the Haitian people is through grass roots organizations. Yesterday, I personally witnessed aid coming into the airport that was good intentioned. However, the group bringing in the aid had no contacts or solid plans to distribute the aid. They did not even have their transportation arranged. I can only be concerned as they went out into the streets with someone they did not know...

I believe we should be supporting Mission E4 because they have:

- Been working in Haiti for years
- Network is in place to get aid where it is needed now
- Work through local churches
- Support approximately 400 school children (before the earth quake) who need this aid now
- Grass roots organization employing local people and stimulate the local economy
- Aid will get out to outlying areas hit worse than Port- au-Prince but not receiving aid
- Understand language, culture, and have relationships with local Haitian community
- Have already hired 3 Haitian work crews, a security team, and one nurse in faith that ongoing support will come in!

I want to encourage you to support MissionE4. I have seen their work and worked with this organization for the last year. They have a heart that is breaking for the Haitian people and have lost many friends and school program children. They will be on the ground again in a few weeks to provide needed support. Now is the time to give so they can arrange the aid that is desperately needed. You can make a donation to them either by:

- 1) Visiting there Website at <http://www.missione4.com/>
- 2) Send a check to:
Mission E4 - Disaster Relief
39 Burnshirt Rd., Suite N, Hubbardston, MA 01452 | Phone: 978-820-1190

Every dollar will help by providing aid to the Haitian people. If you have the means perhaps you will contact them to set-up monthly support, or support a child in their efforts to help some of the poor of the poor?

In addition if you know of any Architects, engineers, Orthopedic Surgeons, Doctors, Nurses, Masons, Carpenters, or Construction Workers, Scott is forming teams to return to Haiti and help. Talk to these specialists and see if they would mind having Scott Long (President of Mission E4) contact them. You can contact Scott at 978-820-1190

Miracles Witnessed

- Neither of the two buses our team was traveling on had walls collapse on them, walls around them did collapse into the road
- The building Scott and I were in did not collapse, the others in the compound did
- The two Haitian women held Scott and I in our spot, probably saving us serious injury or death
- Our phone call to Donna got through right after the quake, We could not make any other calls out of country on Scott's phone for another day
- All three Pastors Mission E4 works with survived unhurt
- Orphanage, although damaged badly, did not collapse on the girls
- Pastor friend of Scott we met on the streets of Laogane was in a prayer meeting and God told them to get out of the house before the earthquake, they obeyed, the quake hit, the house collapsed, no one was in the house
- We were able to get all 40 team members out of the country on Saturday when no commercial airlines were flying

Detailed Account

During the week visit to Haiti our team was to be broken into two work groups of 20 people so we could maximize our efforts and effectiveness during our week in Haiti. On Tuesday, January 12th, our team awoke excited for the day that lay before us. The plan was to run the children's programs in two of the three schools that Mission E4 supports and in the afternoon continue work on the medical clinic and construction on a new school building.

One of the things I enjoy the most is being with children and making them smile and acting like a big kid myself. We had such a wonderful time in the morning with the children performing our skits and spending time together playing games. The dramas are always fun as you get to really ham it up and the kids love it! It was a blessing to be able to spend lunch eating with Shelda, our sponsored child, and another boy I had decided to sponsor that morning.

After lunch Scott Long, the President of Mission E4 asked if I would like to go into Port Au Prince to the general hospital to visit with one of the school students who was critically ill. I jumped at the opportunity. It was my first experience riding in a tap tap (a Haitian cab). On the journey downtown Scott and I talked much about the plight of the Haitian people, biblical principles of Christianity, and our responsibility to the widows and orphans of the world. We talked of some of the following scriptures:

- "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves, do what it says". (James 1:22)
- "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)
- "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless as this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27). The many conversations I have had with Scott since I have gotten to know him always challenge my thinking and the choices I make in my daily life.

We arrived at Port-au-Prince general hospital at approximately 4 pm. We made our way through the sprawling complex to the pediatric building. My heart started to break as we made our way through the halls to see the young boy. There were row upon row of sick babies and young children lined up in every available space including hallways. Parents were standing at the end of each child sized metal gurney-- IV lines everywhere providing hydration for infants and small children who were being ravaged by sickness and disease. As we looked about there were no doctors or nurses caring for these children.

Parents have to buy their own supplies to provide treatment for their child. As we made our way to the boy we met with his mother. Scott reviewed the medical records and his treatment and was conversing in Creole with his mother and the station nurse. The boy was so weak that he had received two blood transfusions and was still too weak to have a needed x-ray to determine a diagnosis on his ailment. As I looked around I started to cry as the magnitude of the situation in Haiti struck home in new ways. To my left there was an infant that lay dying with a bible open to the Psalms lying next to the child's head. The magnitude of the situation was overwhelming. After Scott and Pastor Bazile talked with the nurses and prayed over the boy we started making our way out of the hospital.

As we walked down the hall we heard what sounded like a bomb exploding. The floor started to move beneath our feet and the walls started swaying side to side. We ran for about 20-30 feet and stopped as we came to the end of the hallway. Everything was shaking violently, the noise was deafening. It was hard even to keep your footing as the earth moved beneath you like water. I believed that we were going to die. Across the room I saw a structural support and yelled to Scott, "let's get to that support." At just that moment two Haitian women ran to Scott who was crying out to Jesus. They also started calling out to Jesus at the top of their lungs. They held on to us and we stayed where we were as the building continued to shake violently. A wall collapsed near the structural support that I had suggested we move to. Glass partitions shattered onto babies in the gurneys that they were lying in. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity the building stopped shaking. We quickly made our way out to a court yard. Everyone was screaming and wailing. There was confusion, chaos and mayhem around us. Mothers' started running out of the building holding their sick children. One mother handed her infant to me as she ran back in to the building to grab all of her belongings. Scott went back in to the building as I stood there with the baby and started helping the mother's trying to get their babies out. The earth started to rock again. Looking at the structure we realized it was near collapsed. We handed the baby back to the mother as she emerged from the building and then we started climbing over debris of fallen walls to make it to the street.

When we got to the street the enormity of the situation started to sink in. There was complete chaos. There were buildings that had fallen in to the streets, dust clouds, and people running and screaming in all directions. As we made our way through the crowd we came upon the tap-tap that had taken us into the city and we climbed into the bed of the pickup. Words cannot describe the scene that we were witnessing around us and I truly believed the world was coming to an end. We were able to get a call through to Donna and gave her a list of contacts to call and to get the word out to get everyone associated with the group praying. Scott's wife and three children were with the rest of the team and we feared for their lives as well.

The streets were grid locked and after a short discussion we decided to start the 10 mile trek back to the compound where we were staying. Phone service was unavailable, but we continued to try to contact the team. The entire population of Port au Prince was on the streets wailing and crying out to "Jezi". As we started our journey through the city our hearts were racing. We needed to focus on moving as fast as we could in our efforts to exit the destruction. Everywhere around us buildings were down. Walls had fallen on to people in the street and there were many dead bodies crushed by the crumbling concrete. Night fell upon the scene of destruction. We came to a gas station that was on fire along with a bus in the street that was on fire. The night glowed from the flames. It is impossible to describe in words all of the things that we saw and experienced during those few hours.

Scott finally got a call through to the other team who reported that they were all safe. This came as a great relief. It took us approximately an hour and a half to travel the ten miles. It became evident as we continued on our journey that the destruction was not limited to the city. The entire journey was riddled with fallen buildings, casualties and chaos. Just prior to reaching the compound Scott and I stopped to gather our composure and our thoughts. As we walked to the villa we saw that the front wall had fallen into the street. As we made our way inside we were thankful to see all of the buildings were still intact and the team greeted us in the courtyard with much thanksgiving that somehow we were all safe.

We pulled mattresses out of the buildings and set up a sleeping area in the courtyard. The men in the group settled on two hour shifts to watch over everyone as they slept. Around us we could hear the Haitian people wailing and calling out to God. People were gathering in churches and worshipping. Amazingly they continued in loud praise throughout the night without ceasing. The nation of Haiti was crying out to God as one—crying out for mercy. There was little sleep during the night as massive tremors continued to shake the ground. With each tremor came more screaming and wailing. It was a terrifying night for all of us. As the sun rose we were all thankful we had made it through the night alive.

Tuesday morning the team gathered, we all believed that God had put us here in Haiti for a very specific reason-- which was to serve the Haitian people in whatever way we could. We broke up into two teams. One group to bring medical help and another team to make their way to the orphanage at Leogane assuming that the transportation could make it out there. Everyone started ripping sheets into strips as we thought this would be needed and we had two suitcases filled with antibiotics, gauze, aspirin, tweezers, tape and a few tubes of burn cream. As the medical team walked down towards the main road in the bodies were already being lined up along the street. We went in to a field where there were many injured and wounded. As soon as we entered the field the crowds started crushing in on us. I was fearful that the situation was going to quickly get out of control. We did our best to set up a perimeter for our team to work and administer first aid. There were hundreds of severely wounded individuals—many of whom were close to death. All of the wounds were horrific in nature. The construction in Haiti is all concrete cinderblock. As the blocks fell on people it tore the skin and muscles away from the bones.

Some of the first wounds that we saw were scalps that were split open exposing the skull. There was a boy with a wound down his back that exposed his shoulder blade. Hands that were crushed, flesh pulled from the bone, deep lacerations, feet that were mangled to the point so that the flesh was hanging on by threads. So, the team started working on people who were lying on the ground doing their best to clean and wrap the wounds hoping that needed medical treatment would get to the people quickly. We wrapped and bandaged wounds for two hours before our supplies started running out. As we were packing what little supplies we had remaining people would continue to frantically push their way to the front with their loved ones. Their eyes filled with desperation.

One man squeezed his way to the front where I was trying to hold the crowd back and laid his toddler son on my feet. I asked for him to please step back but as I took a step back he moved forward and took his young son and laid him on my feet once again. It was clear that this child was going to die from his wounds. As we made our way from the crowd I was amazed to see the crowd did not turn violent as I had feared but simply turned away to continue their search for someone else that could help them. Unfortunately there was no one else, were the only help they would get. As we made our way into a secure building I broke down as I put myself in the position of the father who had desperately sought help from me. I made the mistake of losing my focus on the situation at hand.

All morning it was my role was to keep a perimeter and give the team room to work, constantly urging people to give us the space we needed to work. I had to turn people away from the only hope of help they had, help that could save them or their child's life. I struggled with my emotions as I thought of how Jesus welcomed the crowds. What a contradiction to what the rest of the team was doing, focusing on saving lives and showing compassion.

As we regrouped in the building some other team members brought more supplies that they had gathered at the villa as they waited for the bus. Scott found a Haitian coast guard building that would be better suited to provide medical services. It had stairs leading to a front porch which would help in keeping the crowd back. It also had tables and a secure area to work in. As we made our way through the crowd to this building people once again started following us with their wounded. We set up work tables and our supplies. We found an interpreter who worked with the UN troops and made contact with a Sri Lankan UN physician. As we continued to work a couple of Haitian nurses also joined us and brought with them much needed latex gloves so the UN doctor could work (we ran out of gloves and the UN troops did not have any, yes it is that bad). We worked for another couple of hours splinting broken bones with sticks and tape, cleaning out wounds, packing them with antibiotic cream and wrapping them with gauze and/or bed sheets. We also prayed with those we served, it seemed that brought the most comfort of all.

There was one girl in particular whose image I cannot erase from my mind. She was a few years younger than my own daughter. She came to us unclothed, alone and with a horrific gash on her arm that went from the top of her wrist to her elbow which exposed the bone and was packed with concrete debris. She stood in front of me for what seemed to be hours, patiently waiting for some help. I finally got her to an open table where the doctor scrubbed out her wound as she wailed in agony. We finished wrapping her arm and she thanked us as she made her way into the crowd, she was all alone, no family was with her. I wondered if they had all perished. By 2:00 in the afternoon all of our supplies were exhausted and we made our way back through the wounded and dead to our villa.

That night we gathered to reflect as a team on the day. The other team had made it to the orphanage. We were relieved to find out that the sixteen girls at the orphanage had all survived. It also became evident that the destruction in Leogane was even worse than in Port au Prince. Upon reflection of the day one team member summed it up best for me and quoted the verse in Phillipians (4:13) "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." She shared how she felt Christ's love flowing through her hands as she administered aid to the wounded and dying. We all reflected on how each one of the people we served was so grateful for helping them as best we were able. We had brought comfort to many that day as inadequate as we had felt about what we had done.

It was another sleepless night filled with tremors, screaming and crying out to God by the Haitian people. We were also blessed that Kris, a missionary doctor, joined us at the villa that evening as she heard there were other missionaries staying there. We planned going to the orphanage with her in Leogane and treating the wounded there. We had more medical supplies there donated by individuals from prior trips. On guard duty that night a teammate and I shared how we hoped tomorrow would be better, but realized how unlikely that would be. The Haitian church services continued again through the night with praise and worship echoing throughout the night.

Thursday morning we were grateful for a new day after another night of little sleep due to continuing tremors. The team packed up and headed for the orphanage at Leogane. We stopped in Leogane to tour some of the city and examine some of the damage. It was overwhelming. We met up with a young mother who was wailing and she pointed to her collapsed house and said her two children were inside. There was nothing we could do for her other than give her a hug. A little further down the road we came across a group of men trying to rescue children from a collapsed school. We could not confirm how many children were in the after-school program when the three story school building collapsed on them. We know it was a significant number. The only tool they had in their efforts to remove the children was a single sledge hammer. They urged us to let people know, in the States, to send help as soon as possible. They shared with us that disease would soon set in and take many more lives. They do not even have the means to free bodies from the rubble. As of this writing we are hearing that the outlying areas are receiving no aid. All efforts are focused on Port au Prince

When we reached the orphanage we quickly set up the medical clinic with four tables and one sitting area where we could administer aid. The situation was more controlled than the previous day as we could let people in through a gate

one at a time. As word spread the crowds grew and we were concerned that we would be turning people away once again. My job this day was to escort people to and from medical personnel. We saw many of the same horrific injuries. I was thankful that I was able to comfort people even though we were performing procedures such as amputations of fingers and toes and setting compounds fractures without anesthesia or pain medication. The strength and courage of the Haitian people amazed me. Some went through these procedures in complete silence. The team worked remarkably well together on this day and we were able to take everyone who showed up outside the gates. We provided aid to approximately forty people. On the way back to the villa the odor of death was starting to fill the air and we saw mass graves being dug and the collection of bodies from the streets.

That evening we were thankful for Scott's network within the country and his ability to secure fresh water for the team. At dinner while we were eating another severe aftershock hit which sent the entire team into a panic as we raced for the outdoors. The realization of what we were experiencing was plain for us all to see. We gathered for another night of prayer and sharing followed by another sleepless night filled with after-shocks and security details.

On Friday our team focused its efforts on starting the work to create a sustainable living situation at the orphanage which is now a refugee camp. We started work on a temporary fence surrounding the orphanage. Throughout the week Scott had been working hard to assure people would be receiving aid:

- Hire three Haitian work crews construction workers for a month
- Hired two security guards to work at the orphanage for the coming month
- Construction the first of two latrines that will be built on the property to help deal with sanitation issues since losing their toilets in the earthquake
- Secured food for the coming month to keep the school program going even if for now it is providing life giving nutrition
- Provided funds to get the medical clinic supplied and a full time Haitian nurse

Pastor and Madame Bazile tearfully thanked our team for the work we had done and for helping many of her relatives and going into her house and helping to save their few possessions. She did not know how she would have made it through the first few days without our presence and support. I promised Pastor Bazile I would do all I could to continue to support his ministry to the orphans and his local congregation.

With Friday night came the news that there was a possibility that we might be transported out of Haiti by Mission Aviation Fellowship. We tried not to let our hopes rise as we knew American Airlines would not be able to fly us out for at least another week. This is another testimony to Scott and MissionE4's ability to make it happen. We arose at 4 am and started the journey in to the Port au Prince airport. We waited anxiously for word as to whether we would get out. At noon we were relieved to lift off from Haiti headed home to see our families and start working on getting the needed aid to the people we have come to know and love in Haiti.