

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

There was no expectation that a hurricane would strike Gonaives again as Hurricane Jane did four years ago. In fact, Hurricane Gustav only brought some rain, and we were all happy that it didn't hit us hard. While rejoicing for not being hit by Gustav and its predecessor, we were surprised to hear that a new hurricane named of Anna was on its way to Haiti, and brunt of its force would hit Artibonite County. My hometown, Gonaives is the largest city in Artibonite County.

We first heard about Anna last Sunday; there wasn't much time to prepare. Heavy rains started late Sunday night. Monday morning there was a lull, to the extent that I spoke with one of the LCH supporter from Canada, Howard Bogusat and told him things did not look that bad. Three hours later things got serious with very heavy rains and winds that took off over 60% of the corrugated metal roofs from the houses in Gonaives. Goats, cows, donkeys all floated by in the water. Not long thereafter, the water was up to the roofs of many of the houses. My house has the only concrete roof in the area, so many people in the area climbed onto my roof to keep from being washed away like many of their neighbors. I had my family and myself to take care of and we all climbed to the safety of our roof. The water destroyed everything we had! We were all on the roof for over 14 hours, from 4:00 P.M. Tuesday 6:00 A.M. the following morning. There wasn't any food available and I was in trouble because I am diabetic and must have food or my blood sugar can drop to dangerous levels. What helped were two small watermelons I bought the day before and saved them; they helped me get through the night. My doctor from Tucson, AZ, Joy Lynn Logan, told me I must eat four times a day. Being on the roof with five kids and about 50 hungry neighbors while it was raining was not fun.

This morning I went into town to see the damage done by the hurricane. The scenes I have seen were awful. Dead bodies of people and animals are all over the streets. The flooding was even worse than four years ago and extended to over 10 other towns in Artibonite county. Over 75% of house walls and roofs were destroyed and about 70% of the trees are gone. People are using small boats to get through the city. Even the UN trucks and tanks cannot get through the water because it is so deep. Thus far we have heard nothing from the government about what they are planning to do to help the people. Food and drinking water are not available because most of the food storage is filled with water. All towns wells are contaminated. We are all starving in the city of Gonaives as well as the other towns. So far I have not been able to find food to buy for my family. My small four year old daughter Janet is crying because she is hungry.

So far 500 people have been reported dead as that is the number of bodies they have found. In the LCH we have not yet been able to assess loss of life, but we do know that lots of our LCH ministries have been damaged or destroyed.

The walls over our orphanage have been destroyed; our medical clinic walls are gone along with all the medical equipment and supplies inside of it. The orphans in the orphanage no longer have cloths and shoes. The water even took the kitchen utensils.

High-tech Computer's windows were all destroyed by the wind and lots of water got into the computers. Our bakery equipment is lost and most of the bakery walls were destroyed. At least two LCH vehicles were damaged. We have now over 300 people in the 4 story church building. They all came yesterday morning to find shelter in three upper stories because the sanctuary on the first floor is filled with water. Rev. Gaston Hyppolite, a lay pastor assistant, had his house completely destroyed.

The quarry manager, Pierreny St. Fleur went to the quarry this morning. There is both good and bad news. Our new Kobelco excavator is in excellent shape because it is located at the top of the mountain where it's exploiting the sand to load the trucks; that's the Good News. The bad news is that both our Bulldozer D8 K and the 950 B loaders have been damaged by the water. They were located at the bottom of the mountain near the rock crusher and the flood moved them and damaged their engines. The rock crusher and its engine are okay because they are on concrete bases and were not moved by the flood waters.

Tears come to my eyes as I write this report. It's like everything we have worked for has been destroyed. When we'll get through this situation I don't know; only God knows. What is more frustrating is that the government has not yet said a word on how they plan to assist the people. All we have seen are some UN helicopters. We have no food or running water and we all feel cut off from the rest of the world.

Please assist us. The first need as I see it is food, medicine and water. The second is cloths and shoes. The third is to help reconstruct all the things in the mission that have been destroyed. Will you please help? You can send your support and financial assistance for the Lutheran Church of Haiti to Mr. Paul Klenner, Haiti Lutheran Ministry, P. O. Box 14275, Santa Rosa, CA 95402. He is the Treasurer of the HLMCC and will see to it that we receive the funds.

Please pray for all of us in the City of Gonaives and the County of Artibonite.

God's peace be with you all.

Rev. Revenel Benoit
President, the Lutheran Church of Haiti