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St. Benedict, Bolingbrook

Good morning and thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my experiences in Haiti with you this morning. I wanted to talk to you all about my time in Haiti not only during and after the quake but also my time in Haiti before the quake. I think you should know that when I was assigned to go to Haiti by the Episcopal Young Adult Service Corps I didn't want to go. I had wanted to go back to Africa and even as my mom was driving me to the airport last September I was crying and begging her to turn the car around. I say this so that when I tell you how much I truly loved Haiti you might have a bit of understanding of where I'm coming from and how Haiti transformed me and my opinions.

Anyway, in September I arrived in Port au Prince, Haiti. The place that was going to be my home for the next year. Most of my work was done with the Episcopal Seminary for the Diocese of Haiti. I was the Professor of English and the Seminary's "Director of Development" Which basically meant I had to find a lot of money. I was trying to stabilize the operating budget, find a reliable source of income for the seminary. We wanted to construct a new building that could house the growing number of students and would also have the seminary's first classroom. Classes were currently being held at the primary/secondary school which was in the same sort of complex as my apartment and the seminary. The school was called College St. Pierre.

If you talk to my friends they might tell you that I'm the last person that should be teaching English to anybody because my grammar is awful but somehow the classes which I taught with another women went well enough. My favorite part of the class was each week all 17 of my seminarians were required to spend at least 15 minutes practicing English with me. We would talk about different things or I would help with their writing, but it was in these conversations that I really got to know my students, most of whom were in their mid to late 20s. They also helped me to understand their country and took great pride in teaching me different things about their culture and their language, Creole. I really valued the work I did in Haiti and the time I spent with my students who quickly became my friends.

I was also lucky enough to see a lot of Haiti in time before the quake. I was able to see how beautiful the country is. I met amazing people from women who had been trained as nurses and working at a birthing center in Les Cayes, to a priest who had energized his community to build an incredible school without any outside funding, to students graduating from a trade school about to find jobs or create their own businesses. Even in the place which had been titled the largest slum in the western hemisphere, Cite Soleil, where one women was providing shoes for children in the schools and trying to build a feeding center that would also show movies for families on Friday nights. Haiti seemed to me like a place that was doing something. A place where things were getting better after a very troubled past. There was growth and there was hope for the future. All over the Episcopal Diocese of Haiti there was talk about growth, ways to help people get jobs, education, health care, clean water. It was exciting for me to be there and witness all that seemed to be happening.

But on Tuesday January 12th life changed in Haiti. When the quake started I was sitting at my desk in my apartment in Port au Prince which was near the national palace. I had been planning my English class for the next day. The shaking started and I had no clue what was going on. At first I thought a car hit the building, then that maybe a bomb went off and eventually, remembering something from an episode of *Saved by the Bell*, I went under my desk, which to be honest probably would not have helped me very much if my building had collapsed. People have told me that the quake lasted for 30 seconds but at the time it felt like 10 minutes.

Luckily my building somehow didn't collapse and when the shaking stopped I went outside to find my friends not fully understanding the enormity of what had happened. I immediately noticed the dust which filled the air and saw people who looked like ghosts covered in white dust from buildings which had fallen. I saw the Episcopal primary and secondary school, College St. Pierre, it had collapsed. My students, the seminarians, had been having a class there at the time but had managed to escape.

We all began to gather at the soccer field which was between my apartment, the seminary and College St. Pierre, the place that would become my home over the next couple days, and is now, still the home to about 3,000 people who are being cared for by the Episcopal Church of Haiti. While those first hours after the quake were filled with fear and anxiety, it was also a time of great calm and faith. I remember sitting with some girls only a few minutes after the quake as they prayed. Praying that their families would be ok, praying for understanding, but also that they knew that God was with them. As the night progressed news trickled in, a little about people's families but also the damage that had been done in the rest of the country. The National Palace was gone. The Cathedral was gone. The Hotel Montana was gone. All the things which had been symbols of power, strength or stability, were gone.

The rest of the night was filled with tending to wounded, and attempting to sleep on the cold earth as the ground continued its shaking with various aftershocks throughout the night. All I could think about was that I wished morning would come.

I can't go into here all the details of my experience over the next couple days but there are a couple of things I'd like to make sure you hear. One is the strength of the church in Haiti. The morning after the quake, Bishop Duracin, was at the camp with his wife who had been severely injured. At a time when all of us could have crawled into a corner and only looked out for ourselves, the bishop called some of us together and formed a committee. This committee was to begin organizing the camp, where people would go to the bathroom, where they would get medical treatment etc... None of us knew when help would come and at that time the Bishop knew it was up to him and the church to care for the growing number of people at the soccer field. Bishop Duracin said that it was important to feed the people at least one meal that day with whatever food we could find, the people there were God's people and we needed to do what we could to care for them. Bishop Duracin said "We are the church and that doesn't stop with an Earthquake"

So how does Haiti's earthquake affect us here in the US? For me, I always think about the body of Christ, I believe that to be apart of the body of Christ means that we are all connected to each other through good times and bad. That others joy is our joy and their pain is our pain. I think we are all called to be there with Haiti, yes because there was a massive earthquake, but also because we are all connected in the body of Christ.

Its now been over 2months since the earthquake and media coverage has mostly disappeared and there are those who I have heard complaining of Haiti Fatigue, yet at the same time in Haiti 1.2million people remain homeless. Haitians now face the rainy season, flooding and eventually hurricane season. It is vital that we continue to pay attention and continue to do what we can to help. My students, their families and millions of others have been affected by the quake, and it is going to take years for them to recover and rebuild their lives. All I can ask is that you pray for Haiti, continue to think of different ways which you can contribute and remember that we are all connected through the body of Christ.

Thank you.