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## PEOPLE

### The shape of Haiti — A glimpse from inside

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Since my trip to Haiti in June many people ask, "So how is Haiti?" The answer is, "It depends on where you look."

In Port-au-Prince with 1.5 million poor people living in tents wherever there is a vacant space, only a glimmer of hope exists in this dire situation. Jerry, my poor friend, lives in a tent with his family and eight other people. He says food and water are expensive and that they could not live if it were not for contributions I send, along with gifts from my friends.

One person working with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) told of their St. Francis de Sales Hospital in Port-au-Prince, completely destroyed, but now a new facility is under construction. A volunteer from Mother Teresa's orphanage told of the complete devastation and of their efforts to rebuild. She says that more and more people are abandoning their children at the orphanage — just wanting them to have a better life.



Sisters Marie and Ann pose in the lab at Hopital Sacre Coeur in Milot, Haiti, this summer. A number of Haitians have been treated at the hospital since a Jan. 12 earthquake struck Haiti.

On June 3, the Feast of Corpus Christi, a Haitian holy day and holiday, and a very hot one, we were in a procession in Port-au-Prince with about 100 people following the priest in full cope and humeral veil. He was carrying the monstrance under a large canopy carried by four men. Little girls dressed in white dresses and veils, wearing red sashes and red ribbons in their hair, strewed flowers ahead of the procession where home shrines were visited. The crowd sang hymns accompanied by blaring speakers on a truck. We ended at St. Louis de Gonzaga Church, one of a couple of churches left standing and now surrounded by a tent city.

On June 12 at dawn at the Hopital Sacre Coeur (HSC) tent section in Milot, we bade joyful farewell to 38 orthopedic patients dismissed to family or friends living in Port-au-Prince. Townspeople, caretakers, volunteers, onlookers, relatives and friends of patients (mostly amputees) assembled on the street with their myriad crutches, wheel chairs, commodes, canes, boxes, bags and parcels, waiting for two large air-conditioned buses with rest rooms. These patients were hospitalized for five months, having arrived by helicopter as trauma patients, and now recovered to return home. But to what? Where? We all wondered! But they were cheerful and tearful because they had been healed and bonded together and now were to be separated, maybe for good. Five little girls — all amputees — ran around on crutches. How sad that one had to stay behind. Relatives came from Port-au-Prince to accompany those in wheelchairs. HSC gave every patient a 100-pound bag of rice, a tent, clothes, shoes and a \$100 cash gift from the Dominican Republic Jesuits. They also had lots of bottled water and snacks for the seven-hour bus trip.

Later we listened to the med techs' stories of many acts of heroism; of their day and night hours spent tirelessly drawing blood from donors, cross-matching blood for transfusions, searching tents for patients

for whom tests were ordered and prioritizing tests as doctors stood waiting for results. But through all of this excessive stress and trauma, this little lab hired only one extra tech because everyone pitched in and worked exceedingly long, hard hours. They felt it was easier than trying to take time to teach others how to do all the procedures. We are truly proud of this team and how they responded to this momentous occasion.

Every night we listened to many volunteers' stories, to the evening planning sessions when everyone reconnoitered for the anticipated duties of the next day. It has been an awesome team effort which will live in the memory and change the lives of all who participated.

My good and bad stories could fill many pages. The proof of success of Hopital Sacre Coeur is that many people have recovered and returned home; but the bad part is that home is in terrible shape and will be for the foreseeable future. God bless Haiti and its people! For the most part they have more faith in God than we do — that's all many of them have left. They depend on God and us as God's helping hands. Thanks to the many people who contributed to this ministry throughout this crisis. It would have been impossible without you.

*(Sr. Vittetoe has been a volunteer laboratory consultant to labs in Haiti since 1985, but for the last 10 years at Hopital Sacre Coeur.)*

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