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Haitian orphanage that local volunteers engineered, built survives

Haiti's massive earthquake

By JESSICA CRAWFORD

- Daily Leader



When Liberal awoke to news of the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti Wednesday morning, many felt for the country and the devastation the poorest nation in the western hemisphere faced. But the fact that the event took place in what seemed a world away, many only gave the tragedy a passing thought.

Little did the majority of the community know that one Liberal congregation was on their knees, praying for the safety of those that inhabit the school and orphanage that they have spent many hours building in 2009.

For the past year, Pastor Jack Jacob and members of First Southern Baptist Church in Liberal have made four trips to Haiti. They have been constructing an orphanage with their own hands and have been nothing short of blessed through the work they have been doing.

When Jacob learned of the earthquake Wednesday morning, he feared for the lives of the orphans and Sherrie Faussey, the woman who has been lovingly caring for the Haitian orphans. Faussey was instrumental in helping the the FSBC form a plan to build an orphanage for 27 orphans left in her care after a series of hurricanes destroyed the previous orphanage they had lived in.

“We have not heard from the lady that is working down there, but the news reports we have seen do not look good,” Jacob said Wednesday morning. “The epicenter appears to be about five miles from her school. We have not heard from her, any of the teachers or the children. Her sending agency has not heard from her either. They have heard from all of their other missionaries in Port-Au-Prince, but not her. We are gathering at noon to pray for them.”

More than 24 hours had passed and Jacob still had no news of Faussey or the children.

“No, we have not heard anything yet,” Jacob said Thursday afternoon. “We tried to get someone on the ground to go over there, but they could not get through. They said almost all of the buildings are down in that area. We have a group from Jacksonville, Fla., going in tonight, and they will hike to her compound to see what is going on. We should hear back from them about noon (Friday).”

Not even two hours later, Jacob was thrilled to announce Faussey had been found unharmed. However, he was sad to inform his congregation that one of the orphans, Peterson, had lost his life as a result of the earthquake.

“Our missionary friend has been found and is alright,” Jacob said Thursday evening. “She did lose one of the orphans, a little boy named Peterson. The building that we have been working on stayed up and is providing their shelter as the school fell down.”

When Jacob and his local missionary team from FSBC poured themselves into the project of building the orphanage and school, they had no idea the particular building would become a refuge for Faussey and the children they had spent so much of 2009 helping and keeping in prayer.

“We had a little service last night to get all of our folks together to have a time of praise,” Jacob said this morning. “There are 27 just in her orphanage, and then there are 270 school children. The 270 school children were not in school, so we don’t really know – they are with their families.”

Although Jacob and his congregation are excited God was able to work through them to provide for Faussey and the orphans in her care, they are still saddened by the loss of Peterson. However, they know the outcome could have been much, much worse.

“I called Gary Steiger, he is one of our members and teaches construction down at the college,” Jacob said. “I called him before I called anyone else. I said, ‘Gary, I just want to let you know, you teaching us how to build provided a building that didn’t come down that they ran to for security.’ He just burst into tears. He was just praising God that God had used him that way.”

“So, on one hand we have that sense of feeling like God used us to provide a haven for them,” Jacob added, “But then, of course, we are sad for Peterson, the little boy that died. It is kind of that mixture of relief and being grateful, but also knowing that there is so much to be done.”

Members of FSBC Liberal are eager to return to Haiti to aid the children and Faussey, who they have all come to love. Unfortunately, they will have to wait.

“The general consensus of most of the guys last night was, ‘OK, when are we going?’” Jacob said. “The problem is right now there is really nothing to go to. You wouldn’t be able to even get in, they aren’t allowing anyone in unless you have medical training. They are having problems staging supplies. There is a terminal there, but it is not like what we expect here. So, a lot of it will just have to sit on the tarmac. Trucks can’t even get around so getting a truck there to load it and get it somewhere is impossible.”

Anyone wishing to help with FSBC's relief efforts for the Haitian orphans and Faussey are invited to contact Jacob at 624-0186.

"We have several people ask if we are taking up any special kind of offering to help them, and we are," Jacob said. "Anyone that would want to contribute, whether they are part of our church or not, is welcome to. I know a lot of times, you are not sure who to give to. You want to help, but you don't just want to throw dollars into a pot of millions that may or may not ever see anybody. Most would rather give to something that actually has connections."

Jacob is absolutely amazed such a miraculous outcome could arise from such tragedy. He said he felt his faith waiver as he feared the worst for Faussey and the 27 orphans.

"To be honest, when I got the phone call yesterday that she had been found, about 20 minutes before that, I was just kind of praying," Jacob said. "I was saying, 'OK, God, if they are gone, I am still going to praise you.' But I am going to go, 'I don't get it.'"

Jacob is praising God today. Not only is he thankful that he and those from FSBC were able to provide a harbor among so much devastation, he is thankful that God is still on His throne and very much in control.

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