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Caritas officer blogs experiences in Haiti

by Joeun Lee by Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY -- Amid the chaos and rubble, survivors of the Haiti earthquake sing and pray together, showing unity in times of devastation, said Michelle Hough, a communications officer for Caritas Internationalis.

Hough, who works in the Vatican-based headquarters of the umbrella organization for national Catholic charities, was sent to Haiti as a member of the international rescue staff to help with operations in the area. Hough has been recounting her experiences through daily blog updates from Haiti.

Driving through the city on Day 3, Hough reported seeing one flattened house after another, and a collapsed school with bodies still in the courtyard. In Haiti, schools have both a morning and an afternoon shift; the earthquake happened in the afternoon when half the children were in their classrooms, she said.

The numerous streets lined with fallen homes and schools have a smell that reminds others there are people still lying under the rubble, "most likely dead, but who knows if there are also people who are alive," Hough said. People are camping out in front of collapsed homes where loved ones remain buried in the rubble.

On the blog -- <http://blog.caritas.org/> -- Hough also provided updates on the desperate needs for food and aid for the survivors. Traveling to Petit Goave, a small town less than 40 miles from Port-au-Prince takes more than two hours with the massive holes and cracks in the road. "It's tough going in a jeep, I can't imagine how aid trucks will manage," she said.

According to Hough, Father Boniface Sena who runs the Caritas in Petit Goave said that "he has been sleeping outside like everyone else." People have been so hungry that Father Sena has given them all the bananas from the trees next to the presbytery. And they have been drinking unclean water because of low supplies.

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Apart from gunshots heard on the second night, Hough said she had not seen or heard signs of violence. Father Antonio Sandoval, the regional coordinator of Caritas Latin America and Caribbean, said, "The longer the delays in getting food and water to people, the more people will become desperate and the more likely it is that there will be unrest."

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Despite the tragic circumstances, people continue to sing and pray every night, spreading hope to all survivors in Haiti, Hough wrote.

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