

May 20, 2015

Message about School Sisters of Notre Dame from Nepal

We felt the major tremor of May 12 in Bandipur as a few seconds of shaking. It was lunchtime at school for our Nursery through Class 10 students and teachers. (Classes 11 and 12 are still at home preparing for Board Tests which are scheduled to begin June 3.) The students were great. There was excited talk but no one panicked. Mothers and some fathers and other relatives arrived at the playground almost immediately. Sister Miriam gathered the nursery and kindergarten children into lines in their play area. Sister Andre checked classrooms after dismissing students who were reading in the library. All students were directed to the playground where most of the children had already gathered. Sister Evangela collected information and talked to parents. I helped organize the rest of the students into assembly rows by homerooms. Teachers quickly returned to the compound from their lunch break, and older students helped manage younger students. Older students also made sure that no one returned to the buildings. After verifying that everyone was alright and accounted for, all students were sent home with guardians or to hostels, leaving their backpacks and books in the rooms.

After we inspected the buildings and got word from a Bandipur Municipality engineer that buildings were still sound, we held classes the rest of the week. We have discovered a few new cracks in one building that will need repair, but the cracks do not compromise the building's support structure. On Friday, May 15, about 7:15 in the morning, we experienced a slight tremor. Later that morning a few parents expressed concern about their children's fears and asked Sister Evangela to close the school. Sister Evangela told the parents that they were free to keep children home but that the children who wanted to come should have that chance. Numerous articles have been published asserting that children need to be gathered into groups to experience diversions and activities even if they cannot actually participate in classes. It seems intuitive that children need routine and regular events to overcome stress from fearful experiences. We are fortunate to be able to hold regular classes. Most parents are happy about that. However, attendance has been down from typical patterns and fluctuates with the tremors.

More buildings in Bandipur and across the country have been damaged since the second quake. People all over Nepal are coping with the pain of immeasurable loss. Some have lost everything, including their families, homes, and villages. Many cannot even complete funeral rituals because bodies remain under tons of debris. Already the bodies are causing health hazards and dreadful odors. Kathmandu continues to experience five or six daily tremors. Hundreds of thousands have left the Kathmandu Valley, and those who remain are having trouble finding safe housing.

I'm sure that people are aware of the continuing difficulties in Nepal: inability to reach remote mountain villages, the imminent monsoon, landslides, and slow relief distribution. These problems are being reported regularly. A crisis that was not reported earlier is the fact that

trafficking of children, always a problem in Nepal, has reached a new level of risk. Predators are offering to pay \$750 for each child delivered to them. These children will then be sold in India. With 950,000 children living outside their homes in camps and tent cities and with no schools to attend, they are extremely vulnerable. It seems there is no escape from those who choose profit over every human value.

Our Bishop, Paul Simick, wrote a report for the Catholic Press about his personal experience: **Time is running out for victims of earthquake.** His report reflects his personal contact with victims in poor areas. <http://www.todayscatholicnews.org/2015/04/bishop-in-nepal-time-is-running-out-for-victims-of-earthquake/>

It was recently acknowledged by the government that Nepal lacks the skill and equipment to demolish multi-story buildings. Kathmandu is filled with such structures that must be removed before other work can begin. People in Bandipur have been more fortunate even though many have returned to sleeping outside at night since the second major quake. People are working to clear rubble and prepare shelters stronger than tents. We are working with villagers in the preparation of temporary shelters and in planning for the building of stronger homes after the monsoon. People are more interested in building brick and mortar structures than they were in the past. We keep doing what we can for the children and their families. We are grateful every day for the safety we continue to experience in Bandipur and the part we are able to play in assisting people in Nepal.

Thanks for the support you send. We count on your prayers.

Best regards,

Barb Soete, SSND
(for Bandipur Community)