We are back from Nassau Bahamas where Dr. Pierre-Paul Cadet and I had travelled yesterday for an in-situ assessment of the destruction resulting from the Hurricane Dorian. We left the Fort Lauderdale International Airport at 7:00 AM on Wednesday. Just 45 minutes later, from takeoff to touch down, we landed safely in Nassau Bahamas where we were able to observe that life pattern that has maintained its course without much interruption. We were welcomed at the Lynden Piddling international Airport by father Junior Calixte, a young and dynamic Priest from the Archdiocese of the Bahamas who had already scheduled for us a full day of work in the different places where Haitians affected by the hurricane have been relocated.

By 900 AM, after a short detour to fill up the Gaz tank and to grab a Subway sandwich at the next-door Mini Plaza, we were ready for what was going to be a very exciting and informational day of probing and assessment into the sad and ever tragic situation imposed on the Bahamian Haitian diaspora by the passage of Hurricane Dorian. They were living for the most part in the ABACO Island, a place where Dorian pounded non-stop for over 24 hours, leaving behind a trail of dead and wounded bodies in a cataclysmic proportion almost never observed before.

We first visited the Kendall Isaac stadium, a make-shift shelter, where 181 Haitians have been relocated for two weeks after they were brought from ABACO in the days following the hurricane. There, we were greeted by Mrs. Andrea Newbold who gave us ample details of the shelter structure. People can come and leave the place up to 10:00 pm, which is the curfew time when everybody should be inside, and the shelter doors are closed. There is a nursery and a couple of social service employees waiting there to attend to the residents' urgent needs. Air mattresses were spread all over the floor, some 200 and counting, that serve as bed and furniture at the same time for the residents. Many complained that the food came late and is not what they're accustomed to eating at home. Others had a request for telephone or calling card in order to call home and inform their relatives of their fate.

School will open officially on Monday. Under the new law in the Bahamas that mandates "Education for all children", these children will be able to go to school very soon regardless of their legal status or their citizenship. We are not sure from the JUS SOLIS or the JUS SANGUINI, which one applies or is practiced in the BAHAMAS. Mrs. Andrea appeared to be well informed of the Haitian culture and quite sensitive to the trauma the residents are dealing with.
at this time. She seems also well equipped psychologically to help the victims cope with the ordeal and the anguish they are being consumed by at this time in their lives. Some people also voiced their frustration toward the Haitian Consulate in the Bahamas whose one of the representatives has come and requested a lumpsum of $200.00 in order to help them get their paper regularized. We were unable to verify the veracity of the statement. But it is obvious that the Haitian authorities will have to step up to the plate and help the victims regain their passports and other documents that they lost.

After one hour at the Kendall Isaac Gymnasium, talking to the residents, informing ourselves of the fate of the hurricane victims, as well explaining the purpose of our mission on behalf of the association, we headed to Calvary Baptist Shelter where 200 people have been initially relocated. At the time of the visit, there were about 80 of them still living in precarious conditions at the church ground floor, with no hope of being able to sustain themselves anytime soon. Pastor Walter Junior Lucien who is the head of the congregation told us that there is a shortage of everything in his shelter: detergents for laundry are needed, quarters to make the laundry machine turn, water, juice, soda, etc. He had just finished collecting a $50 - Bahamian dollars from a passerby when he agreed to talk to us at the entrance of his church. He said, waiving the $50.00 bill, this is all that I must help those people. He added that he was still waiting for a new freezer from the government officials who have come to visit two days ago and had promised to replace the broken appliance. There again, there were nurses, doctors and social service employees ready to attend the hurricane victims.

The third place we visited after the Gymnasium and the Calvary Baptist church was the Pilgrim Baptist temple, a majestic all-white building that was occupied by about 68 of the hurricane victims. Eleven of them were children who are expected to go back to school soon. We were asked to bring chips, backpack and reading book, color pencils so they can draw pictures and get themselves involved in design and artistic work to keep themselves occupied. On top of the elements previously mentioned as part of the shelter structure, there was even a physical trainer whose job was to encourage the residents to exercise in a make-shift fitness room that was erected for the occasion. We were told to bring everything that we could as there is a dire need for food, water, and coversheet at the shelter. We thank sincerely Mrs. Genette Gardner, the Social work employee who welcome us with opened arms and described so brilliantly for us the situation at the Pilgrim Baptist temple.

Last but not least, we visited the Fox hills community Center where we found people at both end of the block, joking, cornering father Calixte from all directions asking either for phone and money or for a calling card in order to reach a family member. He reports being overwhelmed sometimes by the magnitude and the complexity of the situation, but he has a very soothing tone of voice that helps calm down and reassures in the most difficult of the
circumstances. Cell phone were not allowed inside the fox hills center and in neither one of the other centers that we visited. There were 52 kids out of 142 residents relocated at the Fox Hills shelter. We took some time to talk to the officers and the soldiers posted at the entrance door and to thank them heartfully for their service to their country and to our fellow brothers and sisters.

After visiting the last shelter, we stopped for a short while at the Residence of father Calixte to drop the six bags and carry-ons that we brought from the states to help address the needs of the victims. We were supposed to attend a meeting of the prime minister with the religious leaders of the Haitian community in order to further debate the fate of the Hurricane victims. However, due to several foreign dignitaries visiting the Bahamas on that day, the meeting had to be postponed.

Fortunately, while at the residence of father Junior Calixte, we were delighted to know that the Archbishop of the Bahamas, His grace, Patrick Pinder wanted to meet with us to discuss the current crisis. He was very open minded, well informed of the plight of the hurricane victims. He told us that ABACO will have to be rebuilt and people will be able to find jobs and rebuild their own homes. He reminded us how then father Sansaricq was always an inspiration for him when he was a young kid attending mass at the parish. He added that he has always been surrounded by Haitians for most of his life. We had a picture with him and father Calixte on the steps of the old cathedral and he insisted that this picture be sent to Monseigneur Sansaricq today living in Brooklyn, as a place that he will recognize and in remembrance of the days when he was a priest at the parish, years back.

Upon leaving the Archdiocese, just before stopping for a bite at one of the restaurants in town, Father Calixte, made one last effort to take us to Pasteur Saint-Louis' church, one more community leader involved in the plight of the Haitian diaspora in the Bahamas. We missed Pasteur Saint Louis by a few minutes as he had to leave to attend another function in town. We were able to talk by phone and we promised to see him at the next visit. After a well-deserved recess at one of the small restaurants in town, it was almost time to head back to the Airport. We closed the day with a last-minute meeting with a representative of OATH, a recently founded Haitian-Bahamian philanthropic organization whose goal is to help Haitians overcome the difficulties of integration and to represent their interest in front of the Bahamian government. Father Calixte and a Bahamian activist woman named Janet Brown are the co-chair of the Organization. Father Calixte is solicited from everywhere, and by many with all kinds of needs. We left the organization with a check for $1000.00 that will serve to facilitate laundry services and access to phone cards and other basic needs. Father Calixte is required to assess the needs wherever they arise and to help with this check as he sees fit. This is one
of the organizations that we should support from time to time with a check as the rehabilitation process is going to be long and strenuous.

**GENERAL FACTS:**

In the meantime, came a declaration from Prime the minister, Dr. Hubert Minnis which was published in Wednesday TRIBUNE, where he says that there will be no more shanty houses in ABACO. For too long, added he, those constructions have proliferated in complete violations of any building code and were not able to withstand the test of time and assaults from hurricanes and other bad weather conditions. He said that this is going to stop. Every sign is there to indicate that the Island of ABACO will be rebuilt.

ABACO is closed for the moment. However, Archbishop Patrick has promised to contact the minister of health on our behalf in case we would like to arrange for a visit. We promised to get back to him once a bigger group of doctors will be willing to make the trip with the Association. According to the TRIBUNE, a daily paper in the Bahamas, the death toll rose to 51 yesterday (September 17) after a new body was discovered. However, many believe that he real number will never be known as many victims were carried away into the ocean.

The rules at the shelter System vary from one place to the next. People have up to 10:00 PM every night to come back if they leave the shelter. The Bahamian army that is mobilized and deployed for security purpose has been able to maintain law and order and the needs are various from money for laundry machine, refrigerators and freezers that need to be repaired, detergents for people to wash their clothes, linen sheets to cover at night, let alone back pack for children, color pencils, food, chips and candies, phone card with minutes for people to reach their relatives, reading books for children who will be return to schools soon, under wears for women, clothes for people to wear, jobs opportunities, etc. There are between 8 to 12 provisional shelters where people have been relocated. We were able to visit only four (4) of them hoping to visit the other ones the second time around. It is reported that at the early stage of the crisis, many preferred to stay away from the shelters system out of fear that they might end up being deported. But we have full reassurance from the Bahamian Authorities that there will be no massive deportation of Haitian immigrants back to their native land.

**CONCLUSION**

We have seen the despair and the desolation in our people’s eyes. The anguish is everywhere. Many are asking themselves for how long they will have to be at the shelters? The fear of massive deportation has been dissipated as we were given the assurance that the Government has no intention of deporting anyone at this time. They are even encouraging people to come to the shelters and have themselves registered. We know that life will never be the same,
especially for those family members who have been separated from their loved ones by the high tides of the ocean and by the flood, and who will never see them anew or alive. Their lives have been changed forever. We will need to revisit with them again and again and try to make a difference in their lives. You will be amazed at the big impact a few dollars can have on those peoples' lives. Do not hesitate to help and contribute to this mission. In a last discussion with father Calixte on how to help someone whose life has been so terribly disrupted by the misfortunes of life, he responded that all we can do now is to give them hope for a better tomorrow. Hope is the vehicle of faith which is itself a true assurance of things to come that are yet to be seen. We concluded the conversation by agreeing that "sometimes after losing everything, in the middle of your calamity, any little hope that you find, can take you a long way forward." I saw hope in the eyes of those children who were running among the air mattresses, giggling and playing as if tomorrow was as bright as yesterday. I see hope in the generosity of those two ladies who gave us respectively a bag of goodies and a bill of $10.00 to add to the purchase when we were paying for the items at the Dollar tree store. We hope you can continue to support the local relief agencies, the AMHE and you will not turn your heart away from their needs.

Submitted by:

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