

The devastation in Haiti and the response made by people of all nations is horrific and magnificent all at once. We must not forget the people of Haiti as they try to cope with the losses and eventually rebuild their lives there. As I watch the response to the earthquake, I cannot help but compare it to the years that the people in New Orleans continue to survive in less than ideal situations.

I have just returned from an annual mission trip, and am happy to say *that I saw more hope in the faces and lives of many I visited and worked with than I have in the past two years. But, it is the volunteers who continue to go down to help rebuild, that raise those hopes.*

While in New Orleans, I called Sister Anna Raimon (originally from the Fitchburg-Leominster area) and asked if I could visit **Lantern Light Ministries**, an amazing ministry of the Sisters of the Presentation, PBVM, in the heart of New Orleans. Lantern Light Ministries is a day shelter/soup kitchen that is part of The Rebuild Center located behind one of the oldest churches in New Orleans, St. Joseph's on Tulane Avenue.

Sister Anna was delighted to give me a tour.

The Sisters and other Rebuild Center staff and volunteers are never idle. They are busy every moment from early morning when the shelter opens, providing a hot cup of coffee in the morning to a healthy lunch on weekdays; maintaining a food bank for the poor of the neighborhood; providing assistance with securing birth records or identification papers lost in the floodwaters; medical care or prescription medication; providing toiletries needed for physical hygiene; or providing counsel regarding job-related legal matters.

Lunch preparation is done with the help of many faithful volunteers, and then Sister Marie distributes mail. An address at which to receive mail is critical to homeless people seeking jobs or receiving benefits. You can only imagine the line-up outside the mail room.

The Sisters serve lunch at 1PM on the dot and I observed nearly 200 people being served in 10 minutes!

The center also provides emergency financial and grocery assistance, all until late afternoon when they begin to plan for the next day sorting donations of food and blankets (they do not provide clothing). The blankets were well received during the very cold weather (in the 30's) we experienced in January.

Another part of The Rebuild Center is called the Harry Thompson Center (named for a favorite pastor, I was told) where guests are provided shower, restroom, and laundry facilities as well as phone rooms, hygiene kits and shaving facilities. This is also the area in which the guests sign up for legal assistance, medical and mental health services.

I was so impressed with this ministry I asked Sister Anna if I could return the next day with volunteers from our mission trip. Five of us helped make sandwiches, serve up a hot meal prepared by one of the many groups of volunteers who sign up monthly to work in the kitchen, served the drinks and spent time talking with the guests of all ages, including moms with young children. At the end of the week our mission group voted to send \$250 of our trip's "money for materials" to the center to support their extraordinary work.

It was amazing to be even a small part of this incredible community. I look forward to being able to reach out again on next year's trip.

Please join me in praying for these amazing women...Sister Anna, Sister Vera, Sister Enid, Sister Mary Dennis, Sister Marie, and others. Drop them a note and tell them you are praying for the success of their good work. Their address is Lantern Light Inc., office@lanternlight.org or 1802 Tulane Avenue, New Orleans LA 70112.

It is all about reaching out – supporting light and hope...

Their Web site: www.lanternlight.org

“Offering assistance to those who have been made poor on their journey so one day they will be employed and working and able to afford and supply their basic needs of food, clothing, and housing.”

Simone Blake