

# SALESIAN: TIME TO GET TO WORK RECONSTRUCTING HAITI

## Superior Tells Brothers to Roll Up Their Sleeves

ROME, MARCH 2, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- After visiting earthquake-devastated Haiti, the superior-general of the Salesians is urging the members of his spiritual family to "roll our sleeves up and begin the re-building of this country."

Father Pascual Chávez visited Haiti exactly one month after the earthquake hit on Jan. 12, destroying the capital and killing the archbishop of Port-au-Prince.

The superior said he wanted a firsthand assessment of the Salesian situation on the island, and the chance to reflect with local superiors on the choices to be made in the immediate future.

"I was totally dismayed when faced with the extent of the destruction, at the apocalyptic landscape of death, suffering and despair," Father Chávez recounted. "[...] It was as though, in those 28 seconds that the major shock lasted, the city had lost its head and its heart. In fact that it precisely what happened, since from that moment there has been a total lack of leadership, and life, immensely humbled, continues to go ahead, more by dint of inertia and by the struggle for survival than for any social organization which is supporting or stimulating it.

"While I listened to the accounts of those who survived, especially those who managed to escape death after hours or days being trapped between floors, ceilings and walls, and gradually as I looked at the buildings and homes destroyed, I tried to hear the voice of God which like the blood of Abel cried out with the voices of the thousands of the dead buried in mass graves or still under the ruins. [...] I tried to open my ears and heart to the cry of God

which could be heard in the anger and feelings of powerlessness of those who see everything that they had built up -- either great or small -- gone up in smoke, into nothing."

Better than before

Father Chávez noted how the poverty of Haiti -- it was the poorest country of the Western world even before the Jan. 12 catastrophe -- worsened the destruction and death.

"[T]he challenge for today," he wrote, "cannot be merely to reconstruct the walls of the buildings, of the houses and of the churches destroyed, but rather that of making Haiti rise again, building it on living conditions which really are human, where rights, all rights, are for everyone and not the privilege of some."

Guidance needed

The Salesian superior noted how the Church has suffered the toll of the quake: "The death of the archbishop, of the vicar general, of the chancellor, of 18 seminarians and 46 religious men and women, with the collapse of houses, schools and help centers meant a tragic loss of pastors, so extremely necessary for this people," he said.

And now, Father Chávez observed, "the city is in a state more chaotic than before."

He lauded a "religious sentiment" that is bringing Haitians to gather together in prayer, but also noted the sentiment is "being greatly exploited by the evangelical sects."

The priest added that "one is amazed at the efforts to return to normality when basically everything has changed."

Rising from ashes

Though leaders of the relief effort say a state of emergency could last for another two months, Father Chávez said that "the hour has struck to roll our sleeves up and begin the re-building of this country, or rather, its rising from the ashes."

"To make this dream come true, it is not a matter of starting from scratch, but a starting again, in the first place, by the Haitians themselves, who more than ever are being called to take the lead in this new phase of their history," he wrote. "They are not alone. On the contrary, it is very comforting to see so many organizations -- a total of 80 -- seriously committed to this challenging task, together with the very many people of good will who want to sow seeds of hope and to build a future for the Haitian people."

Considering the present and future, Father Chávez indicated: "The priority of the care and the education of the young is absolute, all the more so since what is at stake is the creation, through a new education, of a new culture, capable of building the new Haiti."

He concluded by entrusting to Mary "this new phase of history. May she guide us in rising to the challenge."

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