

Christian Musician Meets Needs in Haiti

✖ Mark Stuart of the Christian rock band Audio Adrenaline was in Haiti when the magnitude 7 earthquake devastated the Caribbean island nation Jan. 12.

“The whole earth shook, and it felt like the end of the world,” Stuart told a packed house at Ventura Missionary Church last week. “Haiti was the world’s worst place to live before this happened. Now I cannot even describe the hurt, the needs, the devastation.”

Stuart was in Haiti at the Hands and Feet Project orphanage in Cyvadier when the quake struck-about 15 miles southwest of the epicenter in Leogane and the same distance from the epicenter as Port-au-Prince. Stuart’s parents, Drex and Jo Stuart, run Hands and Feet, and Audio Adrenaline has actively supported and physically assisted the work, which began six years ago. They care for 44 children in Cyvadier and 32 at a second facility in Leogane.

“We all were very scared,” Mark Stuart recounted, “but everyone is OK.”

All but two of the buildings in Leogane were lost. In Cyvadier, no Hands and Feet buildings collapsed, but the church was damaged and people, including the Stuarts, slept outside as aftershocks rocked Haiti. “So many of the homes that did not fall were damaged and people are afraid the go back or just cannot go back because it is not safe,” Stuart said. (Watch interview with Mark Stuart below.)

After the earthquake, the worst in the region in 200 years according to National Geographic, Stuart coordinated immediate relief and aid efforts. The airport at the nearby port city of Jacmel was closed, and people were sleeping on the runway because it was away from buildings that might fall.

Working closely with the mayor of Jacmel, Stuart arranged a series of aid flights, the first being a private plane

dispatched from Santa Barbara, Calif.

Since the quake, donations have flooded in, and Stuart is moved. Green to Grow has donated \$30,000 worth of baby bottles, which Stuart said were a perfect match for the formula and powdered milk Hands and Feet already had.

Ventura Missionary Church in Ventura, Calif., and Calvary Chapel in Las Vegas have hosted fundraising concerts, and individuals have donated through the Hands and Feet Project Web site. In addition, a group of schoolchildren in Ventura raised \$1,417 through a cookie sale, and Kids Against Hunger has donated 10,000 packaged meals.

Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive last week announced that at least 200,000 people died in the earthquake, 4,000 people are now amputees, and 300,000 were injured. There also has been a growing concern about child trafficking escalating with so many children losing their parents in the quake.

According to the U.S. State Department's 2009 trafficking in persons report, Haiti has no laws against trafficking. In fact, as reported by Deborah Tedford on National Public Radio, Haiti has a long-established system of unpaid, forced child labor called *restavek*, which is a Creole word meaning "stay with."

Children in the *restavek* system, often orphans, work as household servants for a family with no pay, often little food and no access to their birth families. Sometimes they are as young as 5 and usually work until they are 15.

Stuart underscored the need to be a voice for all the children in Haiti. "Kids are sleeping on the streets, not knowing if their moms and dads survived. They are injured not knowing if they will be able to keep their arms and legs," he said. "But there is hope."

It was the 44 children in Cyvadier that gathered to sing and pray, even though their church building was cracked and not usable. "In the midst of tragedy, it was the kids who were praising God," Stuart said. "Then they started to pray, and they prayed with hope of what God would do for them and for

Haiti. It was so emotional, but so hopeful.”