

Fr. Philip Nathaniel's Peruvian Mission

"Whatever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, you do for me"

(Matthew 25:40)

Serving the people of the Amazon Jungle

* felipenathaniel@msn.com

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Dear friends,

Greetings and best wishes to you all. After a short visit home to see my mum and family, followed by a few weeks in Lima helping out priest friends of mine in the shanty towns around the edges of Lima, I have been back in Iquitos since the middle of July. It is good to be back in my place of mission and serving the poor in this most abandoned and abused area of the country and our world.

You will have heard the news of the earthquake south of Lima, one of the most terrifying and devastating, 7.9 on the Richter scale, lasting for over 2 minutes and followed by hundreds of lesser quakes. The destruction is overwhelming leaving over 5,000 families without homes. The hospitals and clinics are overflowing with the injured lying on tables and floors, fortunately the number of deaths was fairly low for an earthquake of that magnitude – a little over 500 people – but that is no consolation to family, friends and neighbours. The whole country is in mourning and there is an feeling of tremendous sadness in all our hearts. We here in Iquitos are doing all we can to collect clothes, blankets, food and money to help the areas and people more severely affected.

Please don't worry about us, we feel shocked as does everyone but we are well and carrying on our work as normal. Thank you for the e-mails we've received from so many people who care for us and were worried in case we had been hurt. The bishop of Hexham & Newcastle Diocese phoned my nephew – Fr. Joseph Plumb – to make sure we were OK and for that gesture of solidarity we both felt deeply grateful.

My main task at the moment is to acquire land to build a centre from which we can serve the people who have been displaced by the flooding of the rivers and are forming new towns outside Iquitos (Over 50 miles of small shanty towns and villages).

Those poor people build their homes out of sticks, poles, rusty old oil drums, palm-leaf roofs and whatever else they can find; they use water from the streams to drink and wash. Some – those nearer to Iquitos – have managed to get the local government to provide electricity at least for a couple of hours each night but the majority still have to depend on candles and kerosene lamps for light, practically all have to cook on open fires – fortunately there are normally sticks around to collect for firewood. They are tremendous people, they work hard to make ends meet, and, they are so very grateful for our presence among them in their struggle to build up their homes and communities and for whatever service we can provide. There is little or no health care and medicines are expensive; small schools are provided but the fees and

