



The mission crew.

LAFD

Mission In Haiti

Group including firefighters helps out at an orphanage.



Capt. Rick Godinez with some local orphans. Can you tell they love getting their picture taken?

Story and photos by Capt. Rick Godinez, Fire Station 2

On July 23, Firefighters for Christ (FFC) sent a team to Haiti for one week to continue the work of previous teams that were sent following the devastating earthquake in 2010.

The team consisted of 12 members comprised of a mix bag of firefighters, nurses, a chiropractor, a teacher, a music teacher and an LAFD wife.

Their mission was to assist in an orphanage that was teaching English Camp to 250 kids. It was an opportunity for the team to minister to the children ranging in ages three to 15, along with the junior counselors who assisted with interpreting for the team.

The orphanage was run by Byron and Shelley Tuluchek and their seven children, who assisted in every aspect of the day-to-day operations.

"Once our team arrived at the orphanage, we quickly settled in and were anxious to receive our assignments for the week" says Capt. Godinez.

As our team toured the facility, we were taken down a dirt road to a vacant house that served as the school building. This house was constructed with cinder block and finished with cement for a smooth texture. The floors were dirt and the windows were open with no glass. Each room served as a classroom with no chairs, which meant each child would have to stand or sit on the dirt floor.

The daily routine was to rise early and get breakfast ready for the kids. 250 eggs have to be hard-boiled then wrapped in a napkin. Bananas have to be washed and cut at both ends, and the Kool Aid had to be made in quantity.

Before the kids arrived, the counselors and staff would meet for a morning devotional and discuss any pertinent items for the day.

As the kids arrived, the team served breakfast and prepared for stretching and the bible story for the day. After the story, the kids were lead down a dirt road to the classroom.

The kids seemed to be very receptive toward learning new skills. We weren't sure how they would do with simple knots, but they caught on quickly and were able to utilize them later in the week when we taught splinting and bandaging.

The next day was a whole new adventure for the kids and the team. The Firefighters taught Burn Safety and Stop, Drop and Roll. The kids really got into it and most of them shared how they had been burned. The living conditions in Haiti are very crowded, and most families have to share a very small living space where cooking hazards often occur.

The earthquake last year left many families still living in a tent constructed with only tarps or open windowed structures made of block walls.

As we started our third day of class, we couldn't believe our time here was halfway over. The firefighters on the team taught the kids wound care and treatment for broken bones. The kids used the knots that they learned on day one and did a great job splinting each other and the counselors.

As we demonstrated various ways of splinting and bandaging, I shared with the kids how God continues to heal my daughter Marisa from a recent head injury. The kids were curious about my daughter and how God intervened. I told them that we can help people that are hurt with splints and bandages, but we still need to pray to God for healing. I shared that Marisa spent three days in the hospital and had to undergo surgery

able to review all of the lessons taught during the week, which included: Knots; Burn Safety; Stop, Drop and Roll; wound care; and splinting and bandaging. The kids did great!

The vacant house that served as our classroom was hot, humid and dusty. Despite the conditions, the team remained in good spirits and energetic to work with the kids.

At the end of the day, the team enjoyed dinner

the performance started and the kids did an amazing job. They sang and danced to several worship songs. Shortly after, we started a picture slide show and the rain also started.

That evening marked the conclusion of our trip and it left the staff, counselors, and our team with feeling that we really made a difference this week.

Even in a Third-World country that was devastated by a severe earthquake, continued poverty, and homelessness, the children could still see God at work and trust that they are not forgotten.



Thea Van Gordon and Jen Elizarraras teaching a bible story.



Retired San Luis Obispo Capt. Rik Grecnik poses with one of the orphans.



Walking to school from the orphanage with Tom Zeulner leading the way.



Capt. Rick Godinez teaches the kids to make knots. These knots were later used for splinting and bandaging during the wound care demonstration.

for an epidural hematoma.

At the end of the day, the team was treated to a trip into town. This proved to be an eye-opening experience. The people of Haiti continue to survive despite the overwhelming destruction that is still evident from last year's earthquake.

Many people still live in shelter constructed of tarps, while others continue to live in earthquake-damaged structures.

The fourth day was our most challenging day. The kids arrived wound up and a little more difficult to control. Things settled down and we were

followed by a devotional and worship music.

Tom Zeulner, Rik Grecnik, and I spent the day rigging electrical wire to the vacant lot that we used for P.E. class. We strung lighting, hung a makeshift screen (plywood and a sheet) for our video and picture slide show.

As parents and relatives arrived (approximately 250 people), they were amazed how this dirt field was transformed into an outdoor theater. The team members were relieved that we got this far and close toward pulling off this concert. As the clouds moved in and threatened rain,



From left: Jennifer Elizarraras, LAFD wife, and Thea Van Gordon, teacher.



This is one classroom used for Bible class. Notice the dirt floor and open windows. This was a vacant house that used for classrooms.



Tom Zeulner, Retired, San Luis Obispo Fire Dept.



Game time with Dr. Ben Griffes, chiropractor.