

PERSONAL REPORT on the CHRISTCHURCH EARTHQUAKE

Seen through the eyes of a Survivor - Murray Straight (Passionist Family Group Director)

Soon after the news broke about the devastating earthquake in Christchurch NZ, **Fr Peter McGrath CP** phoned the Directors of the Passionist Family Group Movement, Murray & Aileen Straight in Christchurch. Their daughter, Nicola, answered the phone, but Mum and Dad were not at home. Later that evening he phoned again and learned why Murray had not been at home earlier. From their conversation, **Fr Peter CP** now relates, with permission, Murray's extraordinary experience:

Immediately before the earthquake, I was in a building in the city centre when a mate of mine, asked me to come outside while he had a smoke. We both got coffees and left the building. Then it happened. Everything started shaking; buildings were rocking; debris was starting to fall. *Only time stood still.* Being of a practical nature, I said to my mate, "Let's get in the middle of the road". I looked up and made sure we weren't in the direct line of falling debris. It was simply shattering, in every sense of the word. Then all of a sudden, it was over. I looked across the road. A woman on the 1st floor was looking at me. She was trapped. Where do you get a ladder in the CBD? I ran down the road. I spied one in a shop window. It was a boutique ladder by my standards and by my weight. A young sales girl was standing there, shaking with absolute fear. I asked her, "Young lady, do you have another ladder?" "There's one out the back, but you can't go there, the roof could cave in!" I replied, "She'll be right. I'll fetch the ladder."

Where do you get a ladder in the CBD?

Carrying the ladder to the trapped woman, I was able to get it to reach the window. I looked and **there was in all 12 people!** I thought we could get another 'after-shock' any moment. So I found a large brick, tried to break the window. The window wouldn't smash. It was unbreakable glass. After 5 minutes of frantic pounding, I made some impact on it, but it still wouldn't give. Then I noticed the rubber around the window and ripped it out. Using all the force I had, and I still had a bit left (*you should see the size of this Murray Straight- he's a man-mountain!*), the window caved in and we had a 2 x 2 metre hole.

I was able to get all **12 people** out, one by one, down the ladder, **thanks to the Good Lord's help and the trusty ladder.** As you have all seen on TV, the place was in absolute chaos. So many thoughts were rushing through my mind..... Who's been buried and lost their life? Friends? Relatives? Images came to me. What can I do? *I know my old car is buried in the mess.* It could have been me. How precious life is. How fragile we are. As regards our **Passionist Family Groups**, I have been able to contact all the Coordinators in our parishes here and they in turn have been able to contact their Leaders who have contacted the members of their Groups. Thank God, all seem accounted for and no one has been harmed. As you would appreciate, our network of the extended family throughout the Family Groups has been such a help. They are all gathering together. They are supporting each other. They are reaching out to others.

How precious life is ... how fragile we are.

It amazes me how our people are so resilient and ready to help each other. We know that there is such support in our country. The Aussies are pouring in to help and we love you. Goodness me, we fought together as ANZACS. Now we are together again. You with your fires, floods and cyclones. We with our Mine Disaster and now this immense tragedy, our second, more terrible, life-taking earthquake.

I must say a good word about the concern and comfort offered by our Politicians, not only here, but also in Oz and around the world. The whole world seems to rally and it is of immense consolation for all the victims. I've been talking to **Brian Traynor CP**, our beloved Passionist Brother, who has been with us through thick and thin from one end of New Zealand to the other. Fr Brian is the **Founding Father of our Passionist Family Groups and Companions here in New Zealand.**

When **Father Brian** comes it will be the right time for us to receive his spiritual help, to sooth the deep trauma of our minds and hearts and bring his compassion and understanding to us all. It couldn't be better. While speaking of Religious matters, I heard the Dean of the Anglican Cathedral on TV telling all his Ministers to get their dog collars off, roll up their sleeves and get out there with the people. I was delighted. We, the old working laity, have been saying that for years!!

Nothing can ever diminish the power of prayer.

Seriously **Fr Peter**, on behalf of us all here in NZ, thank you. Tell everyone how appreciative we are of all their love and concern. Above all, tell them their prayers for us are not wasted. Nothing can ever diminish the power of prayer. Through you, I send them my whole-hearted brotherly love and wish them every blessing.

Your brother,
Murray Straight,
Christchurch, 24 February, 2011.