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Day Six: Joyful, tearful, prayerful farewells

By Phil Kloer and Soyia Ellison

One hundred Bibles in Haitian Creole, each signed by Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter. One hundred dedication ceremonies filled with tears, gifts, laughs, photos, hugs. And 100 beautiful new homes for families left homeless by the 2010 Haiti earthquake. These are the legacies of the volunteers who boarded buses to leave the community of Santo on Friday.

As the final day of the 29th Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project drew to a close, volunteers at some houses worked against the clock to hang the last window or apply the last bit of bright paint. Others gathered on porches or front yards to reflect on the links forged and the work accomplished.

New homeowner Marie Sonie Jeanlis read aloud an emotional letter as Cassandra Nicaise, an American volunteer who speaks Haitian Creole, translated into English for the volunteers who helped build Jeanlis' house.

"I leave you back in God's hands so that He can accompany you and cover you as you return home," Jeanlis read. "You left your spouses, your families and friends so you could come here and help us. I know God will give blessings to you.

"We know that we won't encounter each other again easily. We are asking God that you never forget us. We will never forget you."

As she translated, Nicaise started crying and had to stop to collect herself. Other volunteers cried with her.

'Thank you is not enough'

A few houses away, Carol Dellecker, a retiree from Bellingham, Washington, organized a simple ceremony: Her team gathered stones from the lot and wrote messages on them for homeowners Joseph Mimose and Paul-Saint Carline, who will now be next-door neighbors.

"I hope this is just the beginning of many wonderful memories," wrote volunteer Fontaine Shu of San Diego, California.

They gave the stones to Mimose and Carline, then buried them in the yard between the houses.

"Thank you is not enough," Mimose told the volunteers. "May God bless and protect you."

Adrian Garry of Cavan, Ireland, was 15 words into his house dedication speech when homeowner Naomi Clavens sprang across her new porch and enveloped him in a hug. Then, with tears streaming down her cheeks, she turned to hug Marissa Abernathy of Cincinnati, Ohio, who by then was shedding tears of her own.

"We get so much more out of this than you do," Abernathy told her. She broke down again as she hugged homeowner Claudette Polycarpe.



New Habitat homeowner Jeanyves Pierre and his 2-year-old daughter, Yvesnaelle, celebrate the dedication of their family's new Habitat home on the last day of the 2012 Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project.
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Adrian Garry of Irish nonprofit Haven watches Marissa Abernathy of Cincinnati, Ohio, hug new homeowner Claudette Polycarpe during a dedication ceremony. Volunteers and workers built 100 homes with Haitians during this

"You don't really get to talk much because of the language barrier," Abernathy said a few minutes later, "but you still bond."

**year's Carter Work Project. ©Habitat
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'A real eye-opener'

Habitat's Carter Work Project, with major assistance from Irish nonprofit Haven, has now built more than 250 simple but sturdy core houses in the Santo community near Léogâne, where for almost three years hundreds of families have been living in small, stifling tents prone to flooding.

The Haitians who will soon be moving into their new homes weren't the only ones changed this week. Barbara MacGibbon of Canada said Friday that her first Carter Work Project has spurred her to change careers. MacGibbon works for the city of Toronto in shelter and housing, but as she climbed the ladder, her duties became administrative rather than hands-on.

"Doing this reminds me of what I really want to be doing, and what I value," she said.

Now that her children are grown and she can live on a smaller paycheck, she wants to begin a new life as a part-time college professor and part-time volunteer.

"I've been thinking about this for a while," she said. "This week has helped me reach the decision."

Three months ago, Shane Werle, a business consultant in Atlanta, stumbled across the CWP on the Web. He felt called to sign up. As he finished building a house with his new friend St.-Fort Abdias, a Haitian carpenter's apprentice, he reflected, "These people had virtually nothing, and then the earthquake took what little they had. It's made me really reflect on the blessings we have in America. This trip has been a real eye-opener."

And the work will continue. On Friday night, Habitat for Humanity International CEO Jonathan Reckford announced that the 30th Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project will return to the United States and be held Oct. 6-13, 2013 in San Jose and Oakland, California; Denver, Colorado; and New York City.

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