Serious floods on Guadalcanal

Dear All,

It is Sunday Afternoon April 6th and I want to thank you for your concern for us. This is not a comprehensive report on the serious floods we have experienced here on Guadalcanal. It is just an attempt to share with you the bits of information I have been gathering since the floods started.
On April 2nd it was already clear that we were going to have problems as we had a lot of heavy rain. It would seem that the flooding problem is on the lee side of Guadalcanal and not on the weather coast. From what I know going west in the direction of Visale, Sacred Heart Parish, which is over 20 kilometers west of Honiara a number of the bridges have been spoiled. It may not be the actual bridge that has been spoiled but the approach to the bridges as the rivers in flood when they are obstructed by the bridges they eat away the approach to the bridges on both sides.

East of Honiara the situation is much the same. The some of the bridges on the road to Tetere, Christ the King Parish, have been spoiled; again I am not sure of the details. The Good Samaritan Hospital at Tetere lost their ambulance, it seems that it was on a rescue mission and got taken away by the flood and is now useless.

Let me go back to west of Honiara, we have a Care Centre, San Isidro, for young people with speech and hearing disabilities and the good news is the centre is not damaged by the floods. The Director, Brother Joris van der Zant sm has been isolated from the centre; he seems to be stranded between two damaged bridges. Unfortunately I do not have phone contact with him. Just a moment ago I call the Marist Regional House in Tanagai and Brother Joris is there. His truck remains stranded between two damaged bridges.

East of Honiara has been the cause of much worry for me. St. Joseph’s Catholic Secondary School has had to evacuate many if not all their students. The flooding waters covered the school area and went into the girls’ dormitory. With difficulty they were able to get a high truck that could wade its way to reach the school and evacuate the students. Many of them are in Honiara with relatives and others are sheltered in Kukum Parish Hall. St. Martin’s a Rural Training Centre close to St. Joseph’s Catholic Secondary school had also to evacuate their students, some of them are with us here at Holy Cross. Nazareth Apostolic Centre Tenaru has been under water, but there are no reports of buildings being destroyed. Holy Name of Mary Interdiocesan Seminary also in the Tenaru area has been under water, again there have been no reports of damage of building. Of course in all three places the food gardens have been destroyed.

Part of the problem during these days of flooding is that power lines were cut off and so all the institutions I have mentioned are without power. Even the mobile phone connections are not working well. The information we have is very scanty.

Honiara City has suffered very much. Holy Cross, where I live, is close and overlooks that Mataniko River, April 3rd, 4th and 5th the river was wild. I have never seen it is such a state before. The village area of the original settlers of what has now become Honiara City had their homes upstream on the banks of the river. Many of their homes were built with bush materials in the traditional way and many of them were permanent homes. That settlement is known as Mataniko and there has been major destruction of home and a number of cases of loss of life. Closer to the river mouth, in what is known as Chinatown many of the Chinese properties backed on to the river bank. They too have suffered major losses of the building which backed onto the river bank. Chinatown bridge; a metal bridge was swept away leaving only the approaches on both sides hanging over the raging waters. From the rear of our property in Holy Cross we could view the raging waters and watch all kinds of things being swept down towards the river mount. Even one large ship size container was swept along to the bridge closer to the mouth of the river. That bridge closest to the river mouth is the main bridge linking east and west Honiara. It is still standing, but the use of it is restricted as the water has dug away a lot of the foundations of that bridge. Between that bridge and the river mouth there is a community of people in what is known a Manawata [The mouth of the river] that community has suffered very much, most of the homes have been swept out to sea.

Today 6th of April, we have seen blue skies and the rain seems to have stopped. As I look out from Holy Cross the sea front is a mass of muddy water. The Mass of today which focused so much of Resurrection had a message of hope for us. While the numbers were down, it was clear that many of those who came have suffered a lot. Their tired faces tell the story. Holy Cross Parish Hall and the few classrooms in the Holy Cross area are relief centres with about three hundred people sheltering there. The National Disaster Committee has done well in supplying food for them. The nearly twenty-four hour power cut from Friday Night until late evening yesterday added very much to the worrying situation we find ourselves in.

West of Honiara is St. Mary’s Parish, Tanagai. It would seem that the loss of homes is not so great; the loss of food gardens has been major. That is going to be a serious problem for the next few months, trying to find food to feed the many families in need. I have been through Cyclone Namu back in 1986, I think it was and I can remember the mountain of work it loaded on us as we tried to assist our people. Everyone wants to know the facts and the figures, but in such a situation trying to have these details on hand is next to impossible. The Solomon Islands Red Cross has suffered real problems, their office was flooded and all their records and computer systems destroyed.

Please understand this is not an official report, it is my way to thank those who have sent messages asking what the situation is. I am sorry that I can’t give you more information, but I do ask you to pray for us that we can find the resilience we need to cope with what we face. We look forward to Easter; it offers us hope as we try to rebuild Honiara and the communities east and west of it. I have just come back from having a look at the Mataniko River from the rear of our property here at Holy Cross. The wild river is now tame again, it is one mass of muddy water and the river banks look like they have been ripped apart. There is a massive cleanup needed, I hope that our City Council and our Government are able to find the resources to manage the clean up. There is a danger now of serious sickness becoming part of our problem.

The Lenten Road leads to Easter and it is there that we must place our hope. Thank you for your concern of us.

In Christ,

+Adrian Smith sm
Archbishop of Honiara