

Religious orders lose youngest members in Haiti quake

ROME - As religious orders mobilized to help the suffering people of Haiti, many of them had people sitting by computer terminals in Rome waiting to hear news about their youngest members.

The Inter-Institute Center for Religious Formation, known by its French initials CIFOR, was one of the many buildings in Port-au-Prince that collapsed after the earthquake Jan. 12. Seminarians and novices from several religious orders were in the building at the time.

The Spiritan Fathers and Brothers, who run the center, said Jan. 15 that they did not know exactly how many students were inside when the quake hit or how many students had died, but the Oblates of Mary Immaculate informed them that one Spiritan student was dead. One Oblate also was killed.

The Montfort Missionaries reported that eight of their students died at CIFOR and that Montfort Father Jean Baptiste Henri, the novice master, died when part of the Montfort guest house crumbled.

Father Donald LaSalle, vicar general of the Montfort Missionaries, said, "Words can't express the degree of tragedy. My only hope is that this disaster might move the international community to find a way to help Haiti move out of the vicious cycle of poverty and victimization."

Father Mark Francis, superior general of the Viatorian Fathers, said the situation in Haiti was catastrophic.

The Viatorians have 40 members - 34 Haitians and 6 Canadians - working in Haiti and all of them survived. The Villa Manrese retreat center, which the Viatorians staff, was destroyed and the receptionist was killed when the building collapsed, Father Francis said.

Now, he said, "there are around 400 people who have fled to the area just in back of

the retreat house," where they have set up a makeshift camp, "but under terrible conditions: no water, sanitary facilities, food or medical care."

"This could not have happened to a country less able to sustain a disaster of this nature," he said. "We can only pray that the relief efforts are able to organize in order to help these suffering people."

The Salesians also reported Jan. 15 that they had lost two of their young members in formation when the St. Francis de Sales Institute in Port-au-Prince was destroyed.