

to. My family tries to help us, but it is hardly enough for food."

The Nuñez family owns land — a rarity in El Salvador, where more than 90 percent of all land is owned by the country's few wealthiest families. They can't rebuild on it, however — it was condemned by the government after the quakes. The first quake structurally weakened their home, and the second, a month later on Feb. 13, destroyed it.

"I wanted to cry," Berta Nuñez declares. She grasps Luis's hand. "Everything we put into the house, years and years of work, was gone in seconds." She sighs. "But we are alive. God must have a plan for us here."

Natividad de Jesus, of Santa Gema, has a similar philosophy. "Jesus still loves us ... we are alive," she says. The 54-year-old, who used to make a living selling clay cooking pots at the San Salvador market, lost her house and all her wares in the earthquakes.

For now, Natividad is living in a provisional house of bahareque, a traditional Salvadoran mud-and-stick mixture. Her son, Jose, who is helping her with food, built the little shelter for her. She worries about thieves, and about the safety of her hastily-assembled house — especially once the torrential daily downpours of the rainy season begin.

Natividad estimates that to repair her little house properly would cost her 2,000 colones, or US\$230. It's a princely sum for a poor, aging Salvadoran woman, especially now that she no longer has anything to sell. But despite her troubles, she is upbeat. "I feel lucky," she says. "I will pray. It is all I can do."



More than 1 million people in El Salvador today are homeless and struggling after two devastating earthquakes.

Food For The Poor Rebuilding a country on its knees

Immediately following two deadly earthquakes, thousands in El Salvador turned to their churches and clergy for emergency food, water, medicine, bedding and clothing, as well as plastic sheeting and housing repair materials that would offer scant protection from the elements. To ensure no desperate person would be turned away empty-handed, Food For The Poor immediately began shipping containers of emergency aid, and within weeks more than \$20 million of help had reached El Salvador.

But in an already poor country where earthquake damage totals exceed \$1.5 billion, \$20 million is a very modest start. More than 1 million men, women and children have lost their homes, making housing far and away the country's most pressing need, particularly with the rainy season under way.

Father David Blanchard, a Carmelite priest and the pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes parish in Calle Real, near San Salvador, has had thousands of people come to him begging for houses to replace the ones destroyed in the earthquakes. He explains: "A home gives a poor family security and stability. It allows them to get back on their feet again. After all these people have been through, they desperately need that support."

"I beg every American Catholic who wants to help the poor to consider the value of Food For The Poor's building program. I know firsthand — it makes a real difference in the lives of very destitute people."

Building homes through Food For The Poor is simple and cost-effective. Each \$2,000 contribution to the home building program allows Food For The Poor to construct a home for a poor family on behalf of a mentoring priest

or pastor like David Blanchard.

"In fact, on behalf of the pastors and priests who serve the poor in Central America, I want to thank everyone who has contributed to build a home through Food For The Poor. Know that we are all grateful for your support," Father Blanchard said. "The gift you give is a powerful testimony to the love and mercy of Christ among the poor. May God richly bless you for the sacrifice you have made."

"But so much more needs to be done," Father Blanchard continued. "I have a waiting list of thousands of requests for homes. And the rainy season that is just getting under way threatens to create mudslides that could wash away as many as 500,000 additional houses standing on land weakened by the earthquakes."

"This will create an emergency more grave than anything that we've seen yet. Without help from many caring people, I don't know how the people are going to get through this," Father Blanchard continued. "I don't know how I will help them."

"I pray these families can sustain themselves until we can locate a sponsor for them. I pray for miracles."

The prayer of Food For The Poor President Robin Mahfood is to be able to help Father Blanchard and pastors like him answer the prayers of the thousands in El Salvador who need the miracle of safe housing.

"I hear it so often from the families we help — the houses we give them are miracles from God," he declared. "And the benefactors who sponsor these homes realize this, too. They are responding to God's blessings in their own lives by embracing this opportunity to help someone else — someone in desperate need. They are God's tools of mercy in the modern

world. And these wonderful people give the poor a sense of God's mercy."

Mahfood continued, "Those who donate to the home building program also enjoy a unique sense of purpose and accomplishment. They see a tangible outcome of the gift they have given."

To involve as many people as possible in the housing program, Food For The Poor has created a variety of ways to make it easy for donors to contribute. Basic, 12-foot-by-12-foot, cabin-style homes can be built for a single donation of \$2,000. Smaller gifts can also be combined with those of other benefactors to sponsor a single home. These "miracle teams" are great for church groups, schools and clubs.

Once a gift to the housing program is received, Food For The Poor works through local clergy in the Third World to locate the neediest people in their communities. Lumber and supplies are then purchased and distributed to the area of need. When it arrives, this "house kit" is assembled by local carpenters — if possible, with help from the recipient and church volunteers.

"Thanks to the wonderful response we've had from American Catholics, the home building program has been able to provide thousands of homes to the poorest of the poor in the Caribbean and Latin America," Mahfood said. "You can't imagine the difference these houses will make to the families who receive them. It gives them a stable foundation on which to rebuild their lives. It returns their dignity and gives them a new sense of hope. It's a uniquely direct and meaningful form of charity."

"El Salvador, with more than 1 million homeless, is truly a country on its knees. I pray that those with true hearts for the poor — those who see Jesus in the hearts of these suffering people — will come forward and bless them with the gift of a home," Mahfood said. "I pray that through them, Food For The Poor can end the suffering."

Our compassionate donors have made it possible for us to build several hundred temporary homes for the very neediest Salvadorans. But with more than 1 million people in need of safe, permanent shelter, much more must be done NOW.

Many thousands more houses must be built in El Salvador. But as the rainy season — the Salvadoran winter — gets into full swing, Food For The Poor is working against the clock. We need to make as much progress as possible before nightly torrents can wash it away. Thousands of Salvadorans need our help — and we need yours.

An Archbishop's plea for his flock

On Saturday, January 13, as the aftershocks of a massive, magnitude 7.6 earthquake repeatedly jolted the ground beneath him, Fernando Saenz Lacalle, Archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador, began begging organizations who could help his devastated country for assistance. Food For The Poor, Inc., was one of them.

In a letter addressed to Food For The Poor President Robin Mahfood, Archbishop Lacalle wrote: "The earthquake has truly been a national disaster; no area of El Salvador has been spared its fury. The damage has been unthinkable. It is in times of grief and terrible suffering that we raise our voices to the Lord, thanking him for the life we share and asking him to please remind our brothers and sisters in the north of the needs of his people. Help us, please."

Food For The Poor heard and immediately heeded the Archbishop's plea. Within days, we dispatched 80 containers of medical supplies, nutrition bars and drinks, plastic sheeting for temporary shelter, bedding, shoes, clothing, building materials and more to the country. A grateful, but truthful, thank-you letter from Archbishop Lacalle arrived in response.

"I thank you for your prompt response to my plea, but I need to ask you for more. The truth is, we will require about three times as much assistance before the year runs out. Please help us. May God bless you."

HOW TO HELP

To make a tax-deductible donation to Food For The Poor to sponsor a home or contribute toward a team-built home, please send your check to Food For The Poor, Dept. # 30100, 550 SW 12th Ave., Deerfield Beach, FL 33442. You may also make a donation by logging onto www.foodforthe poor.org.