From the pastor of the Assumptionist parish in Lota, near Concepción and the epicenter of the earthquake.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, one and all,
Now that Internet access has been restored, I can share with you some of what has happened here in Lota and the area.

Frs. Ruben, Nelson, and I are well. Nelson, who just returned from Pucón where he was on vacation wth his family, brought food and other necessities.

Lota was severely affected by two earthquakes, the one that you all know of and the"social" earthquake of pillaging. Some people took what they needed and that seemed almost normal; but then there occurred widespread pillaging and stealing and there is no justification for that. Three large supermarkets were pillaged, small businesses and the local market were next. Very little was spared. What is worst is that they destroyed everything in their path, even light bulbs. Part of the damage affected our elementary school, Francisco de Crozé:, especially the entrance and the administrative offices. Part of a wall fell up against the rectory, but the rectory held up well. There are cracks and fallen pieces of concrete and plaster, but we are not sure yet if there is any structural damage. As for our high school, Colegio d'Alzón, there was some damage to a few walls but nothing structural, it seems. It is OK to use; two architects examined the building and submitted a written evaluation to that effect.

Three days ago I was called in by the mayor who named me to head up the distribution of food in town. I have a very efficient team of professionals who are helping me as well as Fr. Jorge from the other parish in town and three Protestant ministers. The idea is that food distribution be fair and that there not be any theft of food. So far so good. 10,420 food baskets have already been distributed, not counting some previous help. We have been blessed because much help has come and is still coming. Everything has been gone through municipal channels and I have been asked to be one of the official spokesmen for the people.

At this time when the Telethon is taking place in Santiago, another one is taking place in Patagonian Chile and Argentina to come to the aid of Lota and Coronel. More than 14 tons of food, diapers, milk, water, etc. have arrived already with the help of a great friend, the mayor of Punta Arenas, Vladimiro Mimiça. As it is said, it is better to have friends than money (which at this time isn't worth much because there is nothing to buy). I had to go out this afternoon to help those who had come from Patagonia to show them what had to be done. What is most remarkable is the people of Patagonia have committed themselves to help us over the next several months.
At the moment, supermarkets are being re-stocked and gas stations will soon receive deliveries. Little by little.

I am the dean in this area of the diocese and as such I have been visiting various parishes in the region to see what has happened. Schwager lost its chapel and the rectory suffered extensive damages, both inside and out; it'll have to be evaluated to assess how bad. Coronel also suffered damages but not structural ones, at least at first view. Villa Mora has a chapel in bad shape and the rectory had a ceiling fall down. There was little damage in Lagunillas. At St.

Matthias in Upper Lota there was some exterior damage; they were able to hold Mass outdoors in the Blessed Virgin's grotto. In our parish in Lower Lota, thanks to the recent renovations, there was little damage in the main church, although one of our mission chapels sustained some significant damage that will need immediate attention.

I forgot to mention that the cemetery sustained very serious damage in many of the tombs and columbaria. A number of bodies will have to be dug up and re-interred.
We will be in touch later with further information.

In Christ and the Assumption.
Fr. Esteban Monsalves a.a., Pastor
Lota, Chile, March 6, 2010