

## Haiti Earthquake Relief Update

OFCB Ministries

Rev. Katie Crowe, First Presbyterian Church, Charlotte

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An Update on Haiti and the Earthquake Relief Efforts of OFCB Ministries in Bayonnais:

Evacuees from the January 12 earthquake continue to flood into the Bayonnais region of Haiti. The UN estimates that roughly 168,000 evacuees have arrived in the area, with great needs and no resources following them. In Gonaives, the city at the base of the hill from Bayonnais where our partners in ministry are located, vast tent camps have emerged, with hundreds of evacuees struggling to meet basic needs. Rev. Actionnel Fleurisma, Director of OFCB Ministries, and his team have been working around the clock to deliver food, hygiene kits, and other supplies to evacuees in the tent camps and overwhelmed hospitals in the city as well as to the roughly three hundred evacuees who have found their way up the mountain to Bayonnais. Actionnel himself is hosting seven evacuees in his home, while his colleagues also shelter displaced friends, family members, and strangers alike. "When you have very little to eat yourself, and suddenly your entire extended family comes to live in your home, it is extremely difficult," Actionnel shared. Wired funds from our special offering combined with support from OFCB partner churches and the Presbytery of Charlotte have provided them with the ability to purchase food and supplies while they await the release of the first buses shipped from Charlotte from customs. The school at OFCB has received ten new students thus far on account of the earthquake, and support is needed for their education.

While Actionnel described the situation in the hospitals where they have ministered as "nightmarish," he reports that the psychological effects of the trauma on evacuees and the families who have lost loved ones has been significant and far reaching. College students who have returned to OFCB from Port au Prince report piercing headaches and stomach pains, as well as nightmares. Evacuees who are amputees face the stigmatization and spiraling poverty that comes from being unable to participate in a culture that works with its hands. "All of Haiti is traumatized- they need counseling and the love of Jesus Christ to know that there is still hope," Actionnel shared. While evacuees have been suffering the stress of trauma, all of Haiti remains deeply shaken by the earthquake. "We believe we feel the ground moving all the time," reports Pastor Amilor, a graduate and employee of OFCB and recently ordained minister. "It is in our heads. Whenever there is a loud noise, the people go screaming and running out of buildings. They think they are coming down." While the school at OFCB opened just one week after the earthquake, it had to close down operations again after fearful students rushed out of classrooms and jumped from the second floor of the school building to the ground after hearing a door slam. Similar incidents have been reported throughout

Gonaives. Several students were admitted to the hospital, but all have been cleared and released. In response to this fear, OFCB hosted a seismologist who came to speak with the children of each classroom and their parents in a series of meetings, explaining earthquakes and what to do in response. On Feb. 15 the school reopened again, trying to restore stability in the lives of the children and families in the community.

Due to significant difficulty in communication with our Haitian partners given a disabled internet system and extremely limited cell phone coverage, on Feb. 15-17, First Presbyterian Church member Thold Gill, Rev. Katie Crowe, and Rev. Kevin Wright, Minister of Mission at Myers Park United Methodist Church, traveled on behalf of the OFCB US Steering Committee to Cap Haitien, Haiti to meet with the OFCB leadership. Rev. Actionnel, Pastor Amilor, and three other leaders from OFCB as well as two medical residents, graduates of OFCB, met them to share stories from the relief efforts first hand, discuss relief strategies going forward, and develop a transition plan for the ministry as it returns to the 'new normal' after the earthquake and steps into the future that God has prepared. The three days were filled with sharing and planning, and from that time a roadmap for the upcoming year in the ministry was plotted together. While the Haitians have been struggling under tremendous odds, there emerged stories of hope and triumph as well. "Haitians are coming to know the love of Jesus Christ like never before," Pastor Amilor shared. "It is so beautiful and it fills me with hope. This is how I know God is with us. I can see him alive in the people. Even in their suffering, even when they have lost limbs or are paralyzed, I have seen them give praise to God and thanks for their lives." The Haitians expressed an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the generosity of the congregations in the US that surround them, and send their deep thanks to all of you for enabling them to minister to the needs of their community. "I can see him through the support of our family in the churches in the United States," Amilor said. "We know that you all love us very much and are praying for us. This means so much. It keeps us going. We love you." While the group was in Cap Haitien, tens of thousands of Haitians filled the streets in a parade to give thanks to the Lord for his goodness, and to pray for Haiti to emerge from the rubble of its suffering. Dressed in white, they sang songs and cheered, "Hallelujah! God is good."

In the weeks ahead there are several ways in which you can connect to the ministry in Haiti. Sundays from February 28-March 21 during the Sunday School hour, the Emmaus class will host members of the Haiti mission teams who will teach on why Haiti is so poor, the history of Haiti, the work of OFCB and the US Steering Committee, and how you can be involved in the ministry. All are welcome to attend.

First Presbyterian Church has also purchased a school bus which will be loaded with bulk rice and beans as well as badly needed food and hygiene kits created by all of you. These will go to direct aid for evacuees as well as supply the Granary of Joseph at OFCB for a work for food program, much like the one implemented to rebuild the

road to Bayonnais in the wake of the devastating hurricane of 2008. "There is no dignity in charity." Actionnel reflected, "But there is dignity in work, and we want to give not only food but dignity to the people of Port au Prince who have come to live among us. We are striving not just to help people survive but develop." OFCB will provide evacuees and members of the community unable to afford food due to skyrocketing prices the ability to receive a wage of rice and beans in exchange for work on a community irrigation plan developed by OFCB to help crops grow amidst the crippling drought. We have also had a special request from Actionnel to pack soccer balls in this bus, as he has witnessed soccer bring people together and provide a healing outlet for fearful and traumatized children. Please bring kits of the items listed below, bring a ball, or make a card of encouragement for a student and deliver them to the stage in the Fellowship Hall. The bus will be loaded and prayed over after worship on April 11, then driven to Florida to load a ship en route to its new home in Haiti.

Finally, in an effort to better serve the needs of the growing school and meet the challenges of the community, the Global Mission Committee will be sponsoring a campaign to recruit new child sponsors and they need your support. Watch the website and church publications for more information about how you can be involved in the life of a young person in Haiti who is being filled body, mind, and spirit by the church and school at OFCB.

On behalf of our brothers and sisters in Haiti. Thank you for your continued prayers.