

## How Much Can Humans Stand?

This is an old, old question. Unfortunately, events continue to provide awful, heart-wrenching tests of human endurance of adversity.

In September, 2004, when Tropical Storm Jeanne shook Haiti with the flooding of the city of Gonaives in September, 2004, Organization of the Christian Force of Bayonnais (OFCB) Ministries' Rev. Actionnel Fleurisma and business administrator Dimilsaint Mondelus were in Charlotte, NC visiting with supporters of OFCB. The church and school are located in the mountains outside Gonaives. Over several agonizing days, they became aware of news of over 3,000 deaths plus the destruction of many households and devastation of personal possessions. Dead bodies (animals and humans) and other debris floated in the sewage contaminated water, which rose to the top of thousands of homes. Many people were sleeping on their roofs that hot summer night and they found themselves with nothing left but the clothes on their backs. People could not move from their rooftops. Food and potable water were unavailable. Fathers, mothers, children – many, many were missing with no way to learn of their fate. Gonaives' only road to the capital was



flooded and impassable. Some days later, Dimilsaint and Actionnel finally got home to Gonaives.

As the water receded, the Fleurisma's house became headquarters for a relief effort. The naked were clothed. The little food available was shared. Many prayers were said for those who were safe, who were dead or who were missing.

Finally, as some food became available, funds put in OFCB's US bank account by South Mecklenburg Presbyterian (SMPC), First Presbyterian, other churches and individuals were used for an organized program of relief for many, many dozens of families in Gonaives. As travel was possible up into the mountains of Bayonnais to the church and school, aid was also provided there. Good records were kept to account for the money and for this ministry.

Now, here we are in 2008, with flooding in Gonaives from Tropical Storm Hanna, with even more water than in 2004! Devastation of fall crops

in the mountains has happened again! The only change is that people were better prepared this time, and the death toll known so far (26 reported by the AP late on 9/3) is a fraction of that in 2004. Gonaives is cut off from the capital and most help can't get through yet, although there are reports of UN inflatable boats reaching the edge of the city with a few supplies. The Fleurisma house is again packed with people. Little food is available. Many families with flooded houses have lost most of their worldly goods, documents, food and clothing. In the mountains, both crops and farm animals were swept away by flash flooding. The poorest became poorer. School (1,500 at OFCB), which started on September first, has been rained out since that first day.

This morning (September 4) Actionnel reports that many homes and other buildings in Gonaives have been swept away by the torrents. Fortunately, the incessant rain stopped early this morning. Alourdes Saint-Louis, Lucner's wife, has been helping treat the injured at the

Fleurisma's house.

OFCB Ministries is prepared to be part of the solution in Gonaives and in Bayonnais, but it does not have the available funds to do this work. This is another time and place for those of us in the richest country in the hemisphere to help some of the poorest in the poorest country. Our prayers are desperately needed and so are financial resources. There is no way to get food there other than to enable local purchase. One church not mentioned above has already deposited \$3,000 into the OFCB account. Much, much more is needed...to prevent starvation, to reorganize family life, to give hope for the future. All fall crops have been wiped out – the biggest issue is food, but transportation infrastructure has been totally incapacitated. Churches of all denominations are meeting to discuss various methods to deliver food and supplies that will be needed in months to come. **This is an immediate emergency need.** We should encourage all who have ears to hear to help show God's love for our fellow human beings in so much trouble in and around Gonaives, Haiti.

## You can help!

Donations given can be safely deposited in the US account of OFCB Ministries here in Charlotte by SMPC. If you wish to donate, please send a check to South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church, 8601 Bryant Farms Road, Charlotte, NC 28277 attention: Mary-Katheryne Zagora. If you wish to donate stock, please contact her at 704 544-0404. Thank you for your help!