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of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ

Home > News > Latin America and the Caribbean

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Haiti Update News Release

February 25, 2010

Death is Not the End

"Death is not the end," said Rev. Patrick Villier, a Haitian pastor, as he mourned the loss of his 25 year-old foster son, Gustav, one of the victims of the January 12, 2010 earthquake in Haiti. "Although I could not have a feast to receive my son back, like the father in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son, I still hope to embrace him in the afterlife," added Villier.

"That's the spirit of Haiti, friends," said Félix Ortiz, Global Ministries Area Executive for Latin America and the Caribbean. "That's the spirit of Haiti."

Villier is not just a pastor of a local congregation in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince, but he is also the President of the National Spiritual Council of Churches of Haiti (CONASPEH), a denominational partner in that country for 20 years of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. CONASPEH is formed by 6,700 grassroots churches with a membership of 1,600,000, equivalent to 20% of the total population of Haiti. Approximately 2,500 of those churches are located in the area directly affected by the earthquake.

Reflecting on his second pastoral visit to Haiti after the earthquake, Ortiz (who was accompanied on this trip by Daniel Gourdet, a former Global Ministries missionary) reported that CONASPEH's priority is not just securing what is needed to survive the immediate emergency, but also to re-establishing the programs and services to the communities where its member churches are located. In a comprehensive recovery plan prepared by CONASPEH's Board and regional coordinators, the priority is to restart the health care clinics, the vocational training school, the nursing school, the seminary, and a credit union (cooperative) designed to give preferential treatment to the amputees, who number 6,000 so far, so they may secure their prostheses. The urgency to rebuild its headquarters in Port-au-Prince and various church structures throughout the affected area is precisely to facilitate the re-establishment of these programs and services, as well as the development of new initiatives.

In the meantime, CONASPEH is fully engaged in the emergency and relief efforts, in spite of the scarce resources available. At the time of this release, 230,000 persons had died as a result of the earthquake, and approximately 200,000 were still unaccounted for. Many people have been buried without any identification, which makes healing and the road to closure very difficult. As part of the emergency phase, which is envisioned for the next three months, CONASPEH has been providing support for the families of those who died, including assistance for dignified burial for the victims. Also, they are joining the community efforts to identify the still many unidentified dead and locate the still missing.

Thanks to two containers (trailers) of basic supplies sent by boat by the Adventist Church and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Puerto Rico, and 13 large boxes containing health and infant kits provided by Church World Service, CONASPEH was able to provide assistance to 3,000 people in seven communities. Now, windows, doors and electricity are being added to one container to be used as temporary offices for CONASPEH.

Following its initial support for Haiti, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico passed a resolution at its February 18-21 Annual Convention in support of CONASPEH's ministry with a commitment to provide support in the recovery efforts. As informed by their General Pastor, Rev. Esteban González Doble, the next remittance from the Disciples in Puerto Rico will include medicines and four generators.

Ortiz also reported that he was a witness to CONASPEH's church members serving their community. Pastors are feeding many in their homes, including Rev. Villier and his wife, Francoise, who have 30 people eating with them every day, thus making reality one of CONASPEH'S projects, "One Helping the Other."

For the implementation of its recovery plan, CONASPEH has indicated an urgent need for a dump truck, a 4-door pickup truck, and a minibus with 18 seats. These vehicles will help in the removal of rubble in the current emergency phase, serve in the reconstruction phase, and will provide the transportation needed to receive volunteers from Global Ministries' People-to-People Pilgrimages in the months and years to come.

As of February 25, 2010, Global Ministries has disbursed \$20,000 to House of Hope, another denominational partner of Global Ministries in Haiti that has been successfully serving children in various centers, for its emergency efforts (including \$2,000 each for the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and \$72,026 to CONASPEH for its emergency efforts).

3/12/2010

collaboration with Global Ministries, Holt International contributed toward CONASPEH's purchase of emergency supplies, and expenses for personnel and transportation in their emergency response activities;

-- \$19,982 from the Presbyterian Church of North Korea (PROK), earmarked as emergency aid for CONASPEH. PROK, a partner church that relates to the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) through Global Ministries, projects additional support for the recovery and reconstruction phases of both CONASPEH and House Hope. Reverend Seung Min Shin of the PROK and an International Partner Common Global Ministries Board member reports: "Some PROK representatives want to visit Haiti to share our support, love for and concern to the people in Haiti;"

-- \$12,500 each from Week of Compassion and One Great Hour of Sharing designated for CONASPEH's emergency response activities;

-- \$15,326 from the Global Ministries Child Sponsorship Program as a four-month advance sponsorship support for each of the nearly 140 children and their families (\$100 to each), as well as special gifts from some sponsors, funds for administration, and a laptop computer for the CONASPEH child sponsorship site. CONASPEH leaders continue to work diligently to locate all the sponsored children in order to report back to the Global Ministries Child Sponsorship Program and the children's sponsors the children's whereabouts and situations.

In addition, Global Ministries has granted CONASPEH \$16,932 from its program funds, and also the following equipment: four laptops, two printers, two digital cameras, and two flip video cameras (total value: \$3,148).

Ortiz concluded his report with a series of remarks and reminders for our Disciples and UCC communities of faith, including the following:


1. We as Global Ministries reaffirm our commitment to work with our partners in Haiti.
2. Know that the Haitian government, such as it is, is functioning, but with many limitations.
3. Church leaders in Haiti are expressing their frustration with some of the international community's emergency response. For example, tents are not being given away in some areas for fear that these will be placed in areas where others don't want them to be. Indeed, the United Nations peacekeeping forces have already removed two new tent communities from where they were being settled.
4. Many Haitians feel the media is only showing the chaos and violence, which is minimal to what is working within the processes established.
5. The international community needs to continue its support of the government of Haiti by canceling its international debts.
6. Listening to and understanding the Haitian people and their views is needed. Haitians need to have the leading role in rebuilding their nation.

"Haitians make eye contact with everyone as part of their culture," added Ortiz, who was a Global Ministries missionary in Haiti for nine years. "In a place where there are little or no human rights, people will look at you in the eyes as a survival mechanism seeking respect. It is important for us to understand this; we need to reaffirm that Haitians are relational people, therefore we need to be careful not to impose our styles as a requirement for them."

"And above all," concluded Ortiz, "remember that 'Death is not the end.'"

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