

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

It took me a while of reflection and prayer before I decided to write this newsletter. In early January three short-term missionaries from Canada came to work with us in my hometown of Gonaives. Howard and Wally Bogusat and Lynette left Gonaives on January 11<sup>th</sup> to go to the Port-au-Prince area to visit Good Shepherd Lutheran church in Caradeux. They intended to fly home on the 13<sup>th</sup>.

The big earthquake hit at 4:45 P.M on January 12<sup>th</sup> just as they were approaching the church in Caradeux. I was very concerned for their safety and had no way to communicate with them, so I drove to Port-au-Prince to look for them. I praised the Lord when I saw the LCH SUV they had borrowed and their three white faces! They were about to return to Gonaives because the airport in Port-au-Prince was closed.

Even after finding our Canadian missionaries, my blood sugar continued to skyrocket (I have diabetes) because of the devastation I saw in Port-au-Prince. A couple hundred thousand lives were lost! Thousands of buildings were destroyed including the National Palace and other government buildings. Over 600,000 people became homeless and 95% of the university facilities were destroyed. Port-au-prince is becoming a deserted city where people live like they are in a refugee camp. As I write this letter to you, I am still in shock. A number of my relatives and about 40 former members of my church in Gonaives, who had moved to Port-au-Prince, were killed in the earthquake. In all, across the country, about 250 LCH members were killed and another 700 were injured.

What affects me greatly is that over 70,000 people have not been found, including over 100 Lutheran youth and former LCH members who were attending universities in Port-au-Prince. Can you imagine how busy pastors and church leaders have been providing spiritual and physical assistance to so many families in need? And also conducting many funerals for those families where the bodies of their loved ones were found.

All the major cities such as Gonaives, St Marc, Cap Haitian and Les Cayes are having to provide accommodations for tens of thousands of people who have fled the areas around Port-au-Prince. This creates more problems for these cities to host over 60,000 to 75,000 people. Most churches in town are hosting some of these people. Here at Faith Lutheran Church we are hosting about 300 people and providing for their daily needs until. The UN plans to provide tents for them to stay in temporarily.

Port-au-Prince had a population of about 2,500,000 people; it was the political and economic center of Haiti. The city was not designed for more than about 500,000 people, so it was bursting at the seams. Important universities and trade schools were all located in Port-au-Prince. About 90% of the people who lived in

Port-au-Prince came from other regions or from the countryside. That's why almost everywhere in Haiti you see people crying and hurting because many had sons, daughters or other relatives that are now dead, injured or missing.

No one in Haiti, particularly in Port-au-Prince, imagined that a natural disaster of such magnitude would strike Port-au-Prince, Leogane, Jacmel and Archaie. Hundred of pastors and church leaders, including myself, believe that the Lord sent his judgment on these four cities. Up until the earthquake, Port-au-Prince was the sin city of Haiti. Political crimes and kidnappings were commonplace.

During his presidency, former President Aristide participated in voodoo rituals including human sacrifices (including infants) *in the national palace*, so he could remain in power. It was also a city filled with corruption, rich people becoming richer and poor people becoming poorer. About a week before the earthquake the government committed to spend 5 to 10 million dollars to support satanic carnival ( Mardi Gras). Hundred thousand of dollars were spent by the government to build up voodoo worship facilities.

Typically, before the Lord sends his judgment on a nation he sends a messenger to warn the people about their sins so that they have an opportunity to repent, as was the case when he had sent Jonah to Nineveh. Three weeks before the earthquake, the Lord sent a Christian man to the national palace to see and visit with President Rene Preval. He communicated to the President that God had spoken to him in a dream, and that it was urgent that the nation repent of its sins and turn from voodooism and crime, and that the President should call for three days national fasting.

That man carried the message to the Presidential Palace but the President's body guards refused to let him see the President. He spent two days in the waiting area of the Palace, vainly waiting to convey God's message to the President. Finally he sent the message via the President's secretary, but the President replied, "I am not interested in your message," and said that the country will be "OK". Two weeks later the earthquake caused the National Palace to collapse; it is beyond repair. Since the quake, the President has no place to stay. If the President and his wife had not left the palace 20 minutes before the big earthquake, they would both have been killed.

Today our church body, the Lutheran Church of Haiti, has a message of repentance to preach to the nation. We are broadcasting lots of repentance messages on both our FM radio station and our TV station. Every Wednesday we have a street service where we proclaim the message of repentance and bring the Gospel to the people. Every Sunday my Church is packed full with 400 to 500 people. I have received encouraging reports of numerical and spiritual growth from all 192 congregations of the LCH scattered all over Haiti. All over Haiti people are asking the Lord to forgive the sins of the country.

Besides preaching the message of repentance to the people of Haiti, the LCH is committed to assisting people with their physical needs. Currently about 25 of Faith Lutheran Church's members are in Port-au-Prince helping provide medical care, food, water, clothes and shoes. Two doctors from Gonaives will provide medical care to over 1000 people during a two-day period. This outreach alone has cost us over \$5,000 U.S.. The funds came from Haiti Lutheran Mission Society in Canada. Our priority to date has been the several thousand Lutherans living in Port-au-Prince. We plan at least 6 other outreaches to Port-au-Prince, Leogane, Jacmel and Arcahaie, and are budgeting \$40,000 to help those in need.

Even as the UN and the international community are trying to help, there are bandits who steal many of the relief shipments. This creates frustration in those who are weak and unable to hold their own in a long waiting line. That's why it is important that the Church get involved in order to get assistance to the Christians in an orderly way. Haitians Christians are naturally timid. They won't fight for assistance from agencies if there is no order. They would rather go back home empty-handed.

I request your prayers and continued financial support so that these 6 planned outreaches may go forward, supplying food, tents and medical care to many hurting people.

If you receive this letter in Canada, please send your donations to:

Haiti Lutheran Mission Society  
400 Glenridge Avenue  
St. Catharines, Ont. Canada  
L2T 3L2

If you are in the U.S. please send them to:

Haiti Lutheran Ministry  
P. O. Box 14275  
Santa Rosa, CA 95402:

Thank you, and may the Lord bless you.

Rev. Revenel Benoit  
President, Lutheran Church of Haiti