

September 2008
Haiti Flood Update
By Pastor Revenel Benoit

Greetings to all of you in the name of our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

As the water has now receded in most parts of the City of Gonaives, the people now face the challenge of cleaning up all the mud inside and outside their homes; the whole city is busy cleaning up mud that is everywhere. Nearly all of the church buildings in town were flooded. For the past three weeks there have not been any church services in the whole city, and as a result the peoples' spiritual lives are way down. Most Christians are seeking a place to pray and worship the Lord, but no such place exists that is not filled with mud, yet the people are hungry for the Word of God.

Two days ago, a pastor in town called for several pastors in Gonaives to get together for a meeting. We met the following day at my church, Faith Lutheran. It was about plans to reopen our churches by Sunday, September 28th. We came up with a clean up plan that involves local church members assisting with cleaning up church sanctuaries so that all the churches in town might be ready for Sunday worship services by the 27th. We also discussed ways to assist the peoples' spiritual needs as well as helping to meet their physical needs. We have set up a committee of 25 pastors who have committed to work 6 hours a day visiting and assisting Christians who are in need, regardless of their denomination. We know the people in Gonaives are suffering and need the comfort of the Gospel. They also need to be able to pray and worship together with others in their own congregations.

Praise the Lord, there are health organizations in town that are providing good medical care to the people free of charge. There are several thousand people in line every day waiting to get medical care because of an epidemic of fever, cough, and diarrhea all over town. They also provide free medicine to the people. UN physicians, the Red Cross and "Physicians Without Borders" are working hard to assist a population of over 200,000 people. It is hard for just three health organizations to handle so many people.

Sleeping overnight in the city of Gonaives is a big problem. It is hot with a temperature of 90-95 F and lots of mosquitoes. However, I learned an interesting thing from two American friends, John Gebuhr and Fred Goetze, a year and half ago. One day I drove them to the quarry where they planned to work on repairing the heavy equipment. They did not have a good day because they did not have the parts they needed. When I drove them back home, they started singing some strange songs, so I asked John about those english songs. He replied, "Well, when things get boring in the U.S., like on a long trip or something, we sing some popular songs to cheer everyone up." So this is what I have been doing when I and other people cannot sleep because of the heat and mosquitoes. An army of mosquitoes are eating the people up and causing many cases of malaria. Electricity and phone services have not yet been restored.

About three weeks ago (a week after the flood), I went to St Marc to get food and water for my children. I had to walk most of the way. While I was there I went to a local Bank. A friend of mine who was in line came over to greet me. He saw I had mud in my shoes and wet clothes, so he asked me, "Pastor, how are you?" I told him that things were very bad in the City of Gonaives. He then asked me, "Why are you still in Gonaives? You don't have to stay in that cursed city. You should leave." He went on to remind me that I have a green card and that all of my children were born in the U.S. He encouraged me to leave Gonaives and go to the U.S. since most of my belonging were lost and my house is damaged.

I looked at him and said, "I am not in Gonaives for myself. I live in Gonaives, and will continue to live there because God called me to be in the midst of the people to serve them in the ministry of His Word, while also assisting them with their social and physical needs. I want to help them break the cycle of poverty that Satan is using against them." He listened closely to what I said, then shook his head and left.

Despite the fact that all of our family belongings are lost, and that we have not even had a bed to sleep in, we are not feeling alone. Despite the fact that I now have no operational vehicle to get around in to do ministry, I am not discouraged, and will continue to serve the people of Gonaives.

I was encouraged by my dear brothers and sisters in the U.S. and Canada. Several of them called to encourage and assure me of their prayers and support. My ministry received some food for distribution from the International Red Cross and Haiti Lutheran Ministry and Mission Fund. I know there are brothers and sisters in both Canada and the U.S. who are working hard preparing pallets of food, health kits, clothing, and shoes to be sent down for the Haitian people. I know other Christian organizations are preparing to send down 20' and 40' containers of much needed items for the flood victims. That is why in the midst of this tragedy I do not feel alone. I am assured of the Lord's presence in my ministry and that all things will work together for the good of we who love God. I am also assured by the support of my brothers and sisters in North America.

In fact, last week Faith Lutheran Church had the opportunity to assist the people of Gonaives with two food distributions. We were providing food to over 8000 families with the help and assistance from Red Cross International and Haiti Lutheran Ministry. This was a good witness to the people; despite the roads leading to Gonaives being virtually impassable, they had Christian brothers and sisters in the U.S. and Canada who were praying for them and working on their behalf. At the two-story building we have some medicine that we bought that is now being donated to people who are sick; it is like a little pharmacy. I have a food distribution video that I can send you upon your request.

We just put together a team of 20 people from various denominations to handle the distribution of food, clothes and medicine from containers and food pallets we will be getting from the U.S. and Canada. The Lutheran Church of Haiti is experiencing a good relationship with the UN. In fact, they assisted us in two food distributions we had last week, and they will escort any food shipment we might get from the U.S.

While the people of Gonaives are thinking about reconstruction of their homes and replacement of their belongings, we at Faith Lutheran Church, the orphanage, the elderly home, High Tech Computer School, the bakery, medical clinic, the quarry, and the credit union are also thinking about reconstruction and replacement.

In the credit union alone we may have lost as much as \$80,000 U.S. that we loaned out. Nearly everything the borrowers bought with the money was lost in the flood.

Please continue to help and assist us through the reconstruction process.

If you are on or near the east coast, it may make sense to send clothes, shoes, medicines, and mattresses. If you are further west, it probably makes the most sense to send a cash donation to:

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

The President of Haiti Lutheran Ministry, Paul Klenner, will wire the funds to us. His email address is: paulsemailbox@yahoo.com and his cell phone number is (707) 328-9505.

God bless you all. Please keep us in your prayers.

Rev. Revenel Benoit
President, the Lutheran Church of Haiti