

April 2009  
Report on the Lutheran Church of Haiti  
By Pastor Revenel Benoit

Dear Lutheran brothers and sisters in Christ:

The Bible says it is good for the brethren to dwell together. Divisions between brothers and sisters in Christ never benefit the Church, particularly in a country like Haiti where the voodoo religion has a united front in its worship of Satan and its opposition to Christianity. I must acknowledge that it was not good for the Lutheran Church in Haiti to split 6 years ago over administrative and ministry philosophy differences. As a result, Haitian Lutherans became separated into two groups and there was no dialogue between us. Each group harbored ill will toward the other; individuals were offended, and we would not even speak to each other.

A year and a half ago, our brothers from the LCMS called for a meeting in Haiti between the two Lutheran groups of Haiti: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Haiti (ELCH) and the Lutheran Church of Haiti (LCH). For the first time in 6 years, we were face to face. The meeting got off to a rocky start with the leaders of each church making accusations against the other. Airing our dirty laundry in front of LCMS officials made it especially embarrassing. And, of course, no one wins when accusations are exchanged.

Fortunately, Rev. David Mommens came up with a good idea. He suggested that we Haitians meet in his hotel room and discuss things in our native language (Creole), and then rejoin the others. Since I am an emotional guy, the idea really appealed to me; I was about to explode, and if that happened, I would have been even more embarrassed.

We went to Rev. Mommens' room. Our brother, Rev. Paul Touloute, acted as moderator. He led our discussions in such a wonderful way that both sides finally understood that being divided was a "no win" situation for either side. Fruitless fighting between those who confess faith in Jesus makes us weaker and a target of ridicule among the voodoo people. In unity there is strength.

The leaders of both churches repented and apologized to each other. We resolved to put the past behind us and to reinstate dialogue between ourselves. Later, when we rejoined the LCMS officials, there was a new spirit of cooperation, and a desire to work together in the future.

I was delighted when our ELCH brothers went out of their way to help us after the severe flooding in the City of Gonaives last September. The President of the ELCH, Marky Kessa, requested a grant from Lutheran World Relief that included *both* church bodies. He also called me after the flood to inquire about how my family and I were doing. I praise God for such a wonderful brother who cares about ALL of his Lutheran brothers and sisters in Christ.

To further our unity, Rev. Darrell Stuhenberg, pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Davie, Florida, had the idea to host a meeting of both church bodies under the leadership of the Florida-Georgia District President, Gerhardt Michael. That meeting was took place in Florida on April 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Prior to this meeting, President Kessa, of the ELCH, and I met in Port-au-Prince to do some brainstorming about ways in which our two church bodies could work together, with the idea of formalizing these ideas at the Florida meeting.

When we met in Florida, we quickly resolved to work together in evangelism, church planting, disaster relief, and education, including seminary training for our lay pastors. All of this with the ultimate goal of merging the two church bodies back into one as some time in the future. At the end of that Florida meeting we had the

privilege of meeting with Haitian Lutheran pastors who are working in South Florida and who also have congregations in Haiti which they would like to connect to either the ELCH or the LCH, depending on the regions where they are located. In another very positive development, both the ELCH and the LCH agreed to work together on some self-help projects with the goal that Lutheran churches in Haiti would be self-supporting in five to ten years.

Dr. Jorge Groh, from the LCMS Board for Mission Services, is considering hosting a meeting of all mission societies and churches that are involved in direct, regular financial support to Lutheran churches or individual Lutheran pastors in Haiti, to discuss the possibility of unity or at least cooperation in providing financial assistance to Haitian Lutheran churches and/or church bodies.

My special thanks to Reverend Gerhard Michael for hosting that Florida meeting. Also thanks to Rev. Doug Kallesen, Dr. Jorge Groh and Rev. Darrell Stuehrenberg for all your input and ideas concerning the ELCH and the LCH.

Three months ago the LCH launched a mass media evangelism effort over our FM and TV stations. Our goal is to reach 3 million people with the Good News of the Gospel through these media ministries. One popular evening radio broadcast (8:00 PM to 10:00 PM) has people from all over Haiti calling the station with prayer requests and to find out more about the Christian church. This has brought us to forming a follow-up team that will respond to those who want to receive Jesus Christ; they will attempt to direct people to a local Lutheran church in their area. Based on feedback from viewers and listeners, our FM and T.V. stations are reaching  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Haiti! The only heavily populated area we are not yet able to reach yet is Cap Haitian, on the northern coast.

In conjunction with the FM and T.V. station blitz, we will soon launch a church planting movement starting in the Artibonite district. This movement is called the Church Multiplication Coalition (CMC); its aim is to set up pastor networks that meet regularly to pray for each other and assist each other in establishing new churches in areas where there are none. This will get started in August. I think our LCH media ministry will help a great deal with the CMC movement.

With recent purchases of new equipment, the church owned quarry, the computer school and the thrift store are now generating enough income to cover about 50% of the LCH budget, with the other 50% coming from the U.S. and Canada.

Our LCH boy's orphanage was blessed to have a team from a church in Ohio do construction work at the orphanage last March. For over 6 days we kept these six men busy making many repairs and much needed additions. My special thanks to Pastor Dale and his team. Their church also blessed the boys with 25 bunk beds and mattresses.

Currently my daughter Melissa is staying with my in-laws in Boynton Beach, FL. She is doing well and we are trying to make arrangements so that she can go to school in there in September. Please keep Melissa and my family in your prayers.

God bless you all.

Rev. Revenel Benoit  
President, the Lutheran Church of Haiti