

Missions Hotline

Wednesday, January 12, 2011

A Day of Remembering

Free Methodist World Missions is committed to serve Free Methodists as together we make disciples among the peoples of the world. The Free Methodist Church has ministry in 81 world areas.

Rick Ireland - 4 a.m., January 12, 2011

I can't sleep. I have gotten up, dressed, fired up the coffee pot and am sitting here at my computer, well ... reflecting. Last night, even Haitians that have repaired and/or rebuilt their homes (there are many) slept outside. A rumor has been going around that a second earthquake will hit on this anniversary of the first one. For Haitians it has been a year of loss. They have lost family members, homes and jobs. It has been a year of putting their lives back together. Today, a holiday has been declared, and churches all over the country will have special services. In a few hours, I will attend a special service at the site of the collapsed guest house. The spouses of all those who died a year ago will be there. Dale Woods from World Missions will lead a special service. We will remember, and there is a lot to remember.

One year ago, I was the pastor of the Nash Road Free Methodist Church just north of Buffalo, NY. I had begun to prepare for being a missionary to Haiti but didn't expect to get there for another year. Shortly after the earthquake hit the news, my daughter Kate called. She was engaged to be married to Been Valcin, a Haitian who lived in Port-au-Prince. Somehow he had managed to get a brief phone call out so we knew he and his family had survived. We didn't hear anything more for ten days. Two weeks later, I was on a plane to the Dominican Republic. From there I drove into Haiti with a small advance team. The stench of death was everywhere. I had been given the task of working alongside the Haitian national leaders in relief and recovery, and in putting the mission operation back together. And over the last year, that is what we have done.

In almost 30 locations, Free Methodist schools and churches were damaged or destroyed. Most people of Port-au-Prince (2.5 million people) were living in tents, at best. The most recent estimates are that a million people are still in tents. We have made substantial progress, but there is still a long way to go. A full recovery is years away. But as I look back, I see a lot has been done. In the early days, we had food distributions in all our earthquake-impacted churches. We had special programming for the children. We organized free medical clinics conducted by Haitian doctors and nurses. We provided for temporary housing for our pastors. One year later, our focus is rebuilding. In those locations where buildings could be repaired, they have been repaired. We have managed to get decent temporary structures in those locations that lost everything. We have provided training for pastors and builders to know how to build earthquake-resistant structures, and they have repaired and rebuilt using what they learned.

As I look at the state of the church here in Haiti, I am filled with hope. The last three Sundays I have been in three different churches. One was a permanent building that survived the quake, and two were temporary structures designed for 1,000 or more to attend. None of them were big enough to contain the people who showed up. God is moving across the face of Haiti, and it is a privilege to be here and watch.

Dale Woods - January 12, 2011

I sit at the FOHO complex as I write. Just down the street, the largest Free Methodist church in Haiti began services at 6 a.m. The services will last all day. I can hear the people worship. They are not sad. They are not defeated. They do not mourn. Instead, I hear joyous singing. Shouts of "Hallelujah!" Church overflowing. The church being the church in times of great struggle and great opportunity.

Yes, as I have been in Haiti, I have seen the U.S. headlines on the internet. "Haiti Still in Crisis." "Haiti Struggles to Rebuild." Many sound bites, many authors. I can only report what I see in Haiti. I think my headline would be: "Progress and Accomplishment." The nation has changed and progressed. It is amazing what has happened in the last year. Much, much progress. Personally, I cannot believe how much has been accomplished from one year ago. Yes, much still needs to be done - the task is huge.

Yes, people still live in tents. But, fewer people than a year ago. Rubble is being cleared; houses are being built; people are working; and students are going to school. The nation faces many challenges, but there is great hope.

I am proud of the church. I am proud of the Free Methodist Church and our partner organizations in Haiti. Sunday we worshipped at Puit Blain, a church that was overflowing, as many churches are today in Haiti. I was able to participate in an infant dedication. The pastor told me the stories of the mothers and fathers coming to Christ after the earthquake, and now, a year later bringing their children to be dedicated.



Yes, many of our churches are in temporary structures like the one you see here. On Sunday we worshipped under tarps - all 1,500 of us! We worshipped in tarps; however, all of us could look out and see the new church being constructed - again, great hope for the future.

Perhaps you have heard stories of aid organizations not spending relief money. This is not true of the Free Methodist Church. According to missionary Rick Ireland, 95% of the relief money has been distributed. Medicine. Tents. Water. Wells. Schools. Churches. Houses. Thank you for making a difference in Haiti!

In a few minutes, all the families of those who died in the FOHO building will gather at the gravesite. Haitians and Americans, united in hope and anticipation of what God will do tomorrow in Haiti. This will not be a service of grief, but of anticipation for what God will do in the future.

Thanks for praying. Thanks for giving. And, thank you for your willingness to continue support of an amazing movement of God in Haiti!