

Florida Baptist Convention Haiti Response

National missionaries found in Haiti, assessing damage; mission guest house damaged

By Barbara Denman
Jan. 15, 2010

JACKSONVILLE (FBC)—Seven native Haitian missionaries serving as employees of the Florida Baptist Convention have survived the earthquake and are believed to be assessing damage within their churches and communities.

“These men have been trained in disaster relief by the Florida Baptist Convention,” said John Sullivan, executive director-treasurer. “They know their country, their people and have experience responding in the aftermath of hurricanes. We are grateful to God that they are safe and are there to minister to the Haitian people.”

Sullivan expressed concern that the Convention-owned mission house has been damaged. Early reports indicate the damage may be severe.

The house, located in Port-au-Prince about 10 miles from the airport, was expected to be the base of operations for the Convention’s relief efforts. The mission house sleeps nearly 50 volunteers at a time and provides food and safety for mission teams traveling into Haiti.

A Florida Baptist Convention assessment team is expected to travel to Port-au-Prince Monday, Jan. 18, to determine how Florida Baptists can meet needs and provide assistance to the residents of the earthquake-damaged city. The team also expects to learn the condition of the Convention-owned mission house and the safety of employees who serve as missions leaders and mission house staff.

The Convention assessment team has had difficulty getting into the country. On Thursday afternoon the Port-au-Prince airport was shut down due to overwhelming demand of its facilities by relief planes and supplies being airlifted to the Haitian nation. The United States Federal Aviation Administration restricted air traffic from the U.S. to Haiti.

There are other logistical problems. The shipping port is said to have been destroyed by the 7.0 magnitude earthquake. Transportation from the airport to the neighborhood where the mission house is located is expected to be an issue due to limited gas and impassable roads.

Craig Culbreth, director of the Convention’s Partnership Missions Department, said to access the condition of the mission house required a Haitian pastor to walk five hours from his home to the Baptist facility.

The team expected to arrive in Port-au-Prince on Monday will consist of Culbreth; Dennis Wilbanks, associate, Partnership Missions Department; Fritz Wilson, director, Disaster Relief and Recovery Department; and Joseph Gaston, director of the Language Haitian Church Development Department.

The Convention, working in cooperation with Baptist Global Response and other Southern Baptist Convention agencies, is planning to establish feeding sites in and around Port-au-Prince, offer medical personnel and supplies, help those hurting in the churches and assist local Baptist churches get back on their feet.

The Convention has received assurances of financial support, equipment and medical resources from

across the SBC as well as 40,000 volunteers who are ready to be mobilized.

In preparation for the response, the Convention has purchased 42 tons of rice to be transported to Miami and readied for shipment to Haiti.

Culbreth asked Florida Baptists to remember in prayer the people of Haiti who were suffering even before this latest disaster struck.

Financial contributions are being taken to secure food and humanitarian assistance. Florida Baptists and their churches can contribute directly to the Florida Baptist Convention. Every dollar donated will be used to purchase food and to provide humanitarian resources. All administrative costs are being underwritten by the Cooperative Program and Maguire State Mission Offering.

18 Florida Convention staff remain unaccounted for in Haiti

By Barbara Denman

Jan. 14, 2010

JACKSONVILLE (FBC)—Prayers are being urged for the 18 Florida Baptist Convention employees in Haiti who have not been heard from after a 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit the impoverished nation Jan. 12. Three of the 21 Haitians employed by the state convention have been found uninjured.

"They are like our family," said Craig Culbreth, director of Florida's Partnership Missions Department, who has traveled to Haiti for the past 11 years. Florida Baptists have a 15-year partnership with Baptists in Haiti and have helped plant 890 churches during that time.

"They have been in our homes and we have been in theirs. We have laughed together and we have cried together; we have walked side-by-side and shared our vision for the nation of Haiti to come to Christ," he said.

"They are mothers, fathers, sons and daughters and they are hurting right now. Many of them have small children. Some of their homes may be damaged and they are sleeping in the streets. It is a desperate situation there."

Culbreth will lead an assessment team of Convention staff members to Port-au-Prince, Haiti this weekend to learn the condition of the Convention-owned guest house and employees who serve as missions leaders and guest house staff.

They will also begin preliminary plans in coordinating the delivery of disaster relief aid to the hurting nation, checking logistics and the availability of transportation of food and medical supplies into the damaged neighborhoods.

Traveling with the group will be Dennis Wilbanks, associate, Partnership Missions Department; Fritz Wilson, director, Disaster Relief and Recovery Department; and Joseph Gaston, director of the Language Haitian Church Development Department.

Gaston, a native of Port-au-Prince, has not heard from his wife's family since the devastating earthquake, but has learned that his own family survived. He will search for the wife's sisters and brothers while in Haiti.

Culbreth has determined that he will "have faith and be optimistic" that the Convention staff is safe, he said.

"Communication in Haiti is difficult in good times," said Culbreth. "We have not been able to communicate by landlines for the past year. And we understand the cell phone towers have been

damaged, making cell phone communication non-existent."

Seven of the employees serve as mission leaders to start new churches throughout the nation and another 15 work in the convention-owned guest house. The guest house can sleep nearly 50 volunteers and provides food and safety for mission teams traveling into Haiti.

Wilbanks recalled that 65 employees and their children attended a Christmas Party hosted by the Convention at the guest house this past December. "There were lots of little kids there," he said.

"It is risky to live in Haiti when times are good," said Wilbanks, noting that he often asked his Haitian co-workers why they remained in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. "They all reply that God has called them to Haiti."

Culbreth said as he has watched the news reports originating in Port-au-Prince, he was dismayed at the lack of vehicles or cars on the roads. That signifies for him that there is no available gas or passable roads, which will negatively affect the relief effort.

"I am not concerned about getting to the Port-au-Prince airport," Culbreth said. "I am concerned about being transported into the neighborhoods where the hurting people are."

All designations made to disaster relief through the website will be channeled directly to Haiti relief. All donations will be used for disaster relief efforts in Haiti. Administrative costs will be paid by Cooperative Program gifts and Maguire State Mission Offering fund.

Florida Baptists on alert to begin feeding and bring humanitarian help to Haiti after 7.0 earthquake

Jan. 13, 2010

JACKSONVILLE (FBC)—A 7.0 magnitude earthquake shook the impoverished nation of Haiti Tuesday, Jan. 12 with the epicenter located 14 miles from the center of the capital city of Port-au-Prince. Early reports indicate massive damage, devastation and large loss of life.

Florida Southern Baptists have placed on alert their disaster relief team and resources to travel into Haiti as soon as transportation and safety issues have been worked out, said John Sullivan, executive director-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention.

"Florida Baptists will do everything within our power and response to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the people in Haiti, and especially in our 890 churches," said Sullivan.

The Florida Baptist Convention has a 15-year partnership with Haitian Baptists and employs six indigenous directors of mission and a mission coordinator for the Confraternité Missionnaire Baptiste d'Haiti (CMBH). Fifteen Florida Baptist employees work and live in the Convention's guest house, located about 17 miles from the earthquake's epicenter. During the past 15 years of the partnership, Florida Baptists have started 890 churches, including 95 new churches in 2009.

"We have an assessment team prepared to go in to the nation and find out the status of our missionary personnel and our compound, added Sullivan.

In the past, the Florida Baptist Convention has provided beans and rice to the Haitians after the impoverished country has been hit by hurricanes.

"But we have never had anything of this magnitude to deal with before," said Sullivan.

"We believe security is a major issue. We are working on getting our foodstuff in Miami, and are

working with our network which we established in our previous disaster relief response," Sullivan explained.

Sullivan indicated that a three-prong response effort is in the works. The primary concern is the feeding and humanitarian such as medical supplies; phase two, assessing the damage of our church facilities and what can be done with our basic feeding; and phase three, churches rebuild effort.

Craig Culbreth, director of the Convention's Partnership Mission Department, said "Florida Baptists will be in Haiti for the long-term."