

# Florida Baptist assessment team arrives in Haiti, reports survival of national missionaries, damage

By Barbara Denman

Jan. 18, 2010

Port-au-Prince(FBC)—“There is a desperation here among the Haitians that they are not going to make it through this,” said Dennis Wilbanks after he arrived in Port-au-Prince Sunday, Jan. 17.

“No one wants to sleep inside a building for fear they won’t come out of it alive the next morning,” said Wilbanks, associate in the Florida Baptist Convention’s Partnership Missions Department.

Wilbanks and Joseph Gaston, director of the Language Haitian Church Development Department are in Port-au Prince to determine how Florida Baptists can meet needs and provide assistance to the residents of the earthquake-damaged city.

They believe they are bringing a new hope to the city. Gaston, a native of Port-au-Prince, led a Haitian woman to faith in Christ while in the city’s airport.

Wilbanks, who directed the Convention’s disaster response in Haiti after five previous hurricanes, will be working with seven national missionaries serving in Haiti--employees of the Florida Baptist Convention who survived the earthquake. The group together are 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.”

In preparation for the response, the Convention has purchased 21 tons of rice to be transported to Miami and readied for shipment to Haiti.

Wilbanks reported that the Convention-owned mission house is severely damaged but may be useable.

“This will be among our first rebuild priority because it will allow us to facilitate teams of constructions and clean up crew much more quickly,” said Sullivan.

The house, located in Port-au-Prince between the airport and city, will 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.

“We anticipate having a word this week about our churches in Port-au-Prince, as well as our pastors’ homes,” he added. “These are our brothers and sisters serving Christ in this difficult nation.”

Sullivan, who traveled to Haiti this past September and 14 times in previous years, pled for patience as preliminary assessment is being done. “If you have never been to Haiti, it will be difficult for you to understand the security and infrastructure issues.”

Craig Culbreth, director of the Convention’s Partnership Missions Department, who has traveled to Haiti 60 times in the past 11 years, and Fritz Wilson, director of the Disaster Relief Department are scheduled to travel there on Tuesday.

Florida Baptists' 15-year partnership with Haiti Baptists has resulted in the starting of 892 congregations across the nation.

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.