

Five Haitian communities receive food from Florida Baptists

By Barbara Denman
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PORT-AU PRINCE (FBC)—Ten days after the Jan. 12 earthquake, Florida Baptist relief efforts in Haiti have expanded to five communities surrounding Port-au-Prince, as the devastated nation tries to recover.

Rice—the basic staple of the Haitian diet—is being distributed by pastors in churches affiliated with the Confraternite Missionnaire Baptiste d’Haiti’ (CMBH), Florida Baptists’ mission partners in Haiti, according to reports from Craig Culbreth, director of the Convention’s Partnership Missions Department.

The Convention also sent additional funds to purchase rice for distribution in Cap Haitian, the nation’s second largest city. Again local CMBH pastors are coordinating the food distribution.

“We are giving hope to the hopeless. We are changing lives forever, mine included,” said Culbreth in a Jan. 22 email.

The Florida Convention has been in a 15-year partnership with the CMBH and employs seven missionaries who serve nearly 900 churches across the nation. These missionaries are experienced disaster relief workers, having provided food in the aftermath of five previous hurricanes.

The Convention’s assessment team is composed of staff members, Culbreth; Fritz Wilson, state disaster relief director; Dennis Wilbanks, associate in the partnership missions department; and Port-au-Prince native Joseph Gaston, director of Haitian church development.

An Arkansas Baptist medical team accompanying the Florida Baptist assessment team continues to do triage and treat other medical needs of those injured, assisting about 70 persons each day.

“No matter how bad the wounds are, the big issue is stress for all,” said Culbreth. “All victims are prayed for.” Culbreth noted that Gaston is leading the spiritual arm of the medical clinic.

Culbreth said the Convention team went to the homes of several CMBH staff members to inspect damage and counsel with families. “This is going to be very important to our recovery and future plans. Our staff must recover as they are our front liners as we try to help this crippled nation.”

Although all banks in the Port-au-Prince area are closed, the Florida Convention has paid the payroll of the 22 Haitian employees who either work at the Convention’s mission house or serve as one of the six regional missionaries. In addition, the Convention has provided cash assistance to 100 Haitian Baptist pastors, most of whom are bi-vocational and are without work.

Meanwhile efforts have begun to repair damage to the Convention’s mission house located in Port-au-Prince. The goal is to have it repaired and operational by Jan. 30 to accommodate the first wave of 55 Baptist disaster relief volunteers.

During their stay, the Florida and Arkansas teams have been housed in the El Shaddai orphanage in Bon Repos, located north of the Port au Prince airport. The private orphanage is managed by Marie Prinvil, a former Florida Baptist Convention employee.

The Florida and Arkansas team is returning to Florida this weekend to make plans and begin the process of taking disaster relief teams into the country.