

40,000 pounds of rice become 'Bags of Hope' for Haiti

By Meredith Hays

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Jacksonville (FBC)—Standing before 40,000 pounds of rice destined for Haiti, a team of Florida Baptists prayed for those who would receive it, asking God's blessing on their lives that they will come to know Jesus Christ as their redeemer.

"This is more than rice; it's hope," said Craig Culbreth, director of the Partnership Missions Department of the Florida Baptist Convention.

"This isn't just food for a day, but will give the Haitians substance and energy to go forward. Many of them have lost their will."

Each of the 100-pound bags was donated by a \$20 gift from individual Florida Baptists as they seek to help victims in quake-ravaged Haiti. For \$20, Florida Baptists can purchase a 100-pound bag of rice to feed a Haitian family of four for a month.

The rice had arrived in Jacksonville Feb. 3 from Arkansas to be placed in containers and trucked to West Palm Beach. Then the "bags of hope" will be shipped to St. Marc, Haiti, located about two hours from Port-au-Prince.

"We always pray over the rice in Haiti before distributing it to Haitian families," said Culbreth. "And we were able to pray over it today before sending it."

Once the rice arrives in the Caribbean nation, it will be dispensed through churches affiliated with the Florida Baptist Convention's Confraternité Missionnaire Baptiste d'Haiti (CMBH).

Since the earthquake first hit, Florida Baptists have distribute rice three times to nearly 15 Haiti communities from centralized locations. CMBH pastors arrive at the locations to gather rice for their own communities. The Florida Baptist team is in position for another four distribution efforts.

The original bags of rice were purchased in Haiti, which also serves to pump up the Haitian economy, explained Culbreth, who has been in Haiti twice since the earthquake. But availability of rice in that country is expected to become scarce in future months.

Looking at the 400 bags of rice in Jacksonville and knowing how it will help the hungry in Haiti brought a catch to Culbreth's voice. "For someone who has been on the other side and seen how vital this rice will be to the Haitians, this is a pretty big deal," Culbreth said.

The Florida Baptist Convention has partnered with Missions Harvest, who is assisting with containers and shipping, for this project.