

# In Haiti hope grows from earthquake's ruins

By Barbara Denman  
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PORT-AU-PRINCE (FBC)—Nearly a month after an earthquake ravaged the Port-au-Prince region of Haiti leaving 200,000 dead, stories of anguish and hope are rising from the rubble.

A weary, hungry and thirsty Daniel Cadichon arrived at the Confraternité Missionnaire Baptiste d'Haiti's mission house in Port-au-Prince this past week. The high-ranking police official had not been paid since the Jan. 12 earthquake.

He told of his plight and that of fellow officers as they work long hours with few resources, untreated wounds and destroyed homes. They grieve for the loss of family members and 200 fellow officers who died in the disaster, he said.

Officer Cadichon—a bi-vocational pastor of a CMBH church—came to the mission house to discuss security issues with Dennis Wilbanks, associate in Florida's Partnership Missions Department. But he left with much more.

Wilbanks found resources to help, providing food, water and tents for the policemen. A medical clinic held at the mission house catered just to them and their families, treating wounds, cuts and infections.

Pastor Jinelet Moise of the Crusade Church of Haiti was leading a Bible study when the earthquake struck and collapsed the top floor where they met. Members suffered broken legs, broken arms and other injuries. Two columns and a concrete roof fell on the pastor, pinning him for hours before he could be rescued.

Yet in the days following the quake, Pastor Moise "was rejoicing in God for His protection and for our coming to Haiti to help them," Wilbanks said.

Wilbanks, a member of the Florida Baptist Convention disaster relief team, entered Haiti five days after the quake hit and found disaster relief-trained missionaries and pastors already at work assessing needs and damage. Since creating the CMBH 15 years ago, Florida Baptists have distributed food in the aftermath of six catastrophic events—hurricanes, flooding and civil unrest—and in the process trained local missionaries to carry out a disaster response.

Except for a brief time in Florida, Wilbanks has been on site in Port-au-Prince since Jan. 17. While there, he is able to meet needs of the Haitian people based upon his 10 years of experience and relationships built in the impoverished nation.

When he first arrived in January, Wilbanks said he heard "over and over" from the CMBH pastors and missionaries, "We knew you would come. We knew Florida Baptists would be here."

Within hours, the Florida DR team had purchased rice and began distributing it through local churches to the hungry and needy. A medical team of Arkansas Baptists began treating the wounded and injured.

Weeks later, the food distribution efforts still continue in locations across Port-au-Prince and outlying areas where refugees have fled. In these locations, the food is disbursed from churches to the surrounding villages. Then pastors from other towns come to the churches to take back food to their own communities.

Despite media reports of crime at feeding stations, Florida Baptists and the CMBH "have never had an issue with violence in all the times we have distributed food in Haiti," said Wilbanks, "because we work within a church. Even thugs show respect for churches in Haiti."

During the first week of February, four strategic medical teams from Kentucky, South Carolina, Mississippi and Florida were sent to Port-au-Prince to begin treating earthquake victims. The teams worked in makeshift clinics located in the shadow of the Presidential Palace and in a tent city for the homeless, called a "sinistre" camp. Each day the medical teams saw hundreds of patients and led persons to faith in Jesus Christ.

Florida's disaster relief director Fritz Wilson is working alongside Wilbanks in Haiti, marshalling forces with the SBC Disaster Relief to work out logistical arrangements involved in bringing teams of trained DR workers to help rebuild the troubled nation.

God is at work in Haiti, despite difficult circumstances, Wilson said.

"One Sunday we went to a 'sinistre' camp where 3,000 to 5,000 people had moved because their homes were destroyed. A CMBH church held worship in the adjacent amphitheater because church members were still afraid to go inside their own church building" for fear of aftershocks.

About 100 people were sitting in the theater, Wilson recalled. "But everyone in the sinistre camp was attending church because the loud public address system could be heard throughout the entire camp."

Wilson said many churches across Port-au-Prince and Carrefour continue to worship outdoors, unable to get beyond their fears.

"God passed through Haiti after the earthquake and many of the people heard God's voice because His true church—the people—was outside the walls of the buildings," Wilson said. "Maybe God is trying to tell the church in the US to do the same. Get outside the walls and let people see, hear and feel His love."

Immediately after the quake, Marie Prinvil, director of the El Shaddai orphanage in Bon Respos and former Florida Baptist Convention employee, opened her doors to Florida and Southern Baptist disaster relief workers.

In those early days, Prinvil and others, including Joseph Gaston, director of the Florida Baptist Haitian Church Development department, began meeting nightly at church to worship, a practice they still continue, she reported.

"Many people attend each night and they cry out to the Lord," Prinvil said. "Their worship is sweet and they have spent much time repenting for themselves and their country."

These Haitian Christians have set Feb. 12-14 as a time for fasting, prayer and renewal, she reported.

"This fast is specifically for repentance for the country of Haiti," Prinvil said. "We are trusting God to rebuild Haiti for his glory."

Florida Baptists, too, have set a time of prayer for needs in Haiti. On Sunday, Feb. 14—the final day of the Haitians' fast—Florida Baptists will observe a Day of Prayer for Haiti.

Wilbanks said the designation of the dates in the two countries is not a coincidence, "but God's hand guiding His people."

Bulletin inserts and a downloadable video to use during the Day of Prayer for Haiti observance are available.