

# **National Baptist Convention of America, Inc.**

**Rev. Stephen J. Thurston Jr., President**

**Foreign Mission Board**

**Rev. John C. Raphael Jr., Executive Secretary Treasurer**

**Rev. Quinton E. Hammonds, Chairman**

## **Haiti Earthquake Response**

### **Field Report**

February 3, 2010

#### **Overview**

##### **1. Human situation:**

Estimates of 3 million people were impacted by the earthquake including estimates of 200,000 deaths and an even greater number of injured individuals. While over 100,000 have been buried (most in mass graves), tens of thousands of remains are still entombed in the rubble of collapsed buildings. Even worse than the citywide odor of decaying bodies is the possibility of the spread of disease which could result. Thousands of survivors are currently being housed in tent cities set up in parks and other areas around the city. A great number of these persons were either jobless and or homeless before the earthquake, or have become jobless and or homeless because of the earthquake and are therefore totally dependent upon outside assistance for the basic necessities of life.

A very large number of relief groups are currently in Haiti and are attempting to respond to these needs. However, because there is little or no coordination between groups, the needs of many are not being met on a daily basis. Since relief groups are for the most part working independently from the Haitian Government and no one nation responding to the tragedy has the authority to control the actions of other nations involved, aid is being distributed sporadically mostly at the discretion of the individual relief organization. Even these efforts have been hindered by the internal bureaucracy of some of the relief groups involved. An example is that one of the major international relief agencies has a policy that requires the presence of four local Haitian officials at the time of distributing food, but because the mayor of Port-au-Prince would not come they refused to give the food to those who needed it. It is obvious that the amount of aid that is actually reaching individuals is disproportionate to the number of dollars that has been raised in response to this tragedy. Although food and water distribution is less than what it should be, all of the injured persons that I have personally seen have been and are being treated by doctors.

Some who are trying to help are now discovering or will discover that a very high percentage of those who are now in need of food, water, clothing, and shelter were already in need of those things even before the earthquake. Although the entire population of Port-au-Prince sleeps outside because of fear of aftershocks causing structures to collapse, most street vendors have been back on the streets selling their wares since 3 days after the earthquake. Some of the stores are open either operating with generators or without lights at all. Some of the warehouses are selling commodities at slightly inflated prices. Most areas have no running water. I have yet to see any while in Haiti.

##### **2. Physical situation:**

In some areas of the city entire blocks have been nearly destroyed. In other areas one or two buildings in a block are totally collapsed while others are standing with obvious physical damage while still others have no visible damage but may have sustained structural damage. The city of Port-au-Prince is largely built within a mountainous area. Thousands of concrete type homes are constructed on the mountainsides. These homes are so closely constructed together that there are no roads to them and they must be accessed by foot on paths down the mountainside. Thousands of these structures have been reduced to rubble. Because of the density of the construction the rubble cannot be reached by machinery. City streets are mostly passable and gas is available for vehicles.

#### **Missionary Trip**

In response to the earthquake in Haiti, Rev. John Raphael, as a representative of the N.B.C.A., was sent to Haiti by President Stephen J. Thurston to:

1. Assess the impact of the earth quake on the churches and schools supported by the N.B.C.A.
2. Provide assistance to leaders and members of N.B.C.A. churches and schools
3. Assess ways in which N.B.C.A. can assist in rebuilding and maintaining the Haiti field

On Monday January 25 Rev. Raphael accompanied by Deacon Arthur Garrett traveled by plane to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic with plans on traveling by road from Santo Domingo into Port-Au-Prince, Haiti. We arrived in Santo Domingo on Monday evening and were met at the airport by Mr. Ricardo Nicholas who is an English teacher at the Nouvel Institute Emmanuel School in Port-Au-Prince (see below for information on school). With the permission of President Thurston and the Foreign Mission Board, Rev. Raphael began attempting to locate a used vehicle in Santo Domingo. One week prior to the earthquake the Foreign Mission Board was notified by Field Superintendent Edouard Nicholas (who is at this time is in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida recovering from injuries sustained in the disaster) that the field was in need of a vehicle. Rev. Raphael attempted to locate a van which could be used to carry supplies into Haiti and later used to transport field members as needed. A search for a van proved unsuccessful; however on Wednesday January 27 a 2004 Ford Explorer was located and purchased at a cost of \$13,750. It was later learned that this 4 wheel drive vehicle was much more suited for the ride to and through the earthquake ravaged city of Port-Au Prince.

On Thursday January 28 two tires were purchased for the vehicle at a cost of \$450 and supplies for earthquake victims (water, milk, Huggies diapers, Tylenol and canned foods) were purchased at a cost of \$1,000 (at the time of the purchase we did not have “pesos” and the store would not take U.S. dollars so I paid with my credit card). On Friday we began the drive from Santo Domingo to Port-Au-Prince arriving without incident after about 7 hours. Evidence of the earthquake was obvious. We found the streets filled with people, many selling items on the street, many others traveling on foot and the streets filled with cars. We made our way to 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church of Pentionville, which is the main church associated with the N.B.C.A. Haiti Mission Field. Contrary to reports we received earlier we found the structure still standing. Members were in the alleyway of the church cooking and serving hot food to individuals we later learned to be church members. (the church has been feeding hot meals to individuals everyday since the earthquake) We were met at the church by acting Field Director Pastor Rooseguel Vixama. We entered the structure and were shown a large fissure in the wall in the upper level of the building. We were told that the rear of the building had been separated from the main structure on the upper level but determined that it was too dangerous to travel to that level. Pastor Vixama also informed us that the face of the building although appearing to be intact was slightly separated from the structure. We determined that an engineer will have to evaluate the structure to see if it can be repaired or will require demolition and rebuilding.

We next visited the Nouvel Emmanuel Institute, our mission’s main school in Port-au-Prince. The school suffered severe damage and appeared to be beyond repair. Our assessment was verified when we discovered a few days later that a government official marked what was left standing of the school as in need of demolition. We went to the home of Filed Director, Rev. Edouard Nicholas and saw that it was only a pile of rubble. It was immediately apparent that it was a miracle that he was pulled out alive. We were met at that location by a woman whom we later learned to be a member of the church and whose daughter’s body was believed to still be under the collapsed structure. We learned that this woman had not left the location since the earthquake and would not leave until she was able to bury her daughter. We promised to pay to have the body located.

On Saturday, January 30 we were lead by pastor Viximar to a heavily damaged warehouse district where we located one warehouse that was still intact and selling commodities. We hired a truck and purchased beans, rice, cooking oil and spaghetti at a total cost of \$3,500. We later purchased \$500 of water. Later that day we visited three tent cities housing thousands of displaced residents. The area we visited did not have tents but consisted of sheets, clothes and pieces of tarp tied together by string. Pastor Vixama who had earlier visited the location introduced us to many of the members of 1<sup>st</sup> B.C. and students of Nouvel School. We were able to locate over twenty families with the number of family members ranging from 3 or 4 to 16. The families had no running water

or restroom facilities and slept on sheets or blankets we saw strewn about the ground. We prayed for each family provided encouragement and financial assistance. Approximately \$3,000 was distributed.

On Sunday, January 31 the members of 1<sup>st</sup> B.C. were determined by faith to hold service inside of the church facility. Over 1,500 members of the 3,000 member came for service. Overcrowding caused some members to have to stand outside. I had an opportunity to greet the members in the name of President Thurston and the N.B.C.A., pledging our commitment to help in any way that we could. Afterwards I offered words of encouragement. The members were overwhelmingly thankful to the N.B.C.A. for responding to their time of crisis.

On Monday, February 1 we returned to the collapsed home of Rev. Nicholas to discover the mother of the girl whose body lay under the rubble still holding her vigil. Workers were breaking the concrete in an attempt to locate the body of the 20 yr old girl learned to be Cheri Rachel. We later learned that this young lady was known to us as a lead singer in the choir having sung during our last mission trip to Haiti. After several hours the remains of Cheri were found. I paid a man in the area to build a casket. The remains were placed in the casket and we held a funeral service on the spot. A hole was dug nearby and we buried her. The total cost of digging out the body and building the casket was \$500. When we left the mother she was singing and praising God thanking him for sending us to retrieve her daughter's body.

Later on Monday we purchased bags (\$100) and made packages of the rice, beans and other commodities that we earlier purchased. These supplies were then distributed to members and other individuals who came to the church.

On Tuesday Feb. 2 nearly out of funds we returned to Santo Domingo. It was our intent to open a bank account in Santo Domingo through which money could be wired to the Mission Field. We also planned to purchase a truck load of food and supplies at a cheaper price and bring them back to Haiti. Traveling with us was Pastor Viximar, Mr. R. Nicolas and evangelist Victor Wilguinse. Pastor Viximar had been sleeping on the ground since the earthquake and was nearing exhaustion being burdened with the responsibility of the entire field while trying to care for his own wife and two young kids. For several days we went to numerous banks but each time we were told that we needed documentation not available to us in order to open an account. We were wired \$18,000 from the Foreign mission board. These funds were withdrawn from the F.M.B. account and wired by Mr. Eric Brown to me in two \$9,000 increments. We were hoping to avoid Mr. Brown having to use his social security number and being questioned concerning such large amounts as well as myself for receiving those amounts, however because we have no account here we will have to deal with those matters as need be.

We located a truck rental company who agreed to bring supplies Haiti at a price of \$528.00. On Monday February 8 we found a wholesaler and purchased a truck load of beans, oil, sugar and spaghetti. We also purchased pampers, clothes, shoes from two other outlets. The total cost of the items being trucked to Haiti is approximately \$9,000. We will drive following the truck to insure that it is brought to 1<sup>st</sup> B.C. of Pentionville where it will be stored and distributed.

We tried to have additional funds wired to us while still in Santo Domingo so that we could leave a greater portion of the relief funds that has been allocated to preachers and school staff. In order to avoid Mr. Brown sending a large amount we had five separate individuals to wire the money through Western Union. I was able to receive one of the wires in the amount of \$2,000 but was directed to the main Western Union office in Santo Domingo to receive the remaining four. Once there I was told that the money would not be released because one person could not receive multiple wires totaling that amount. Mr. Brown had \$3,800 rewired to us and we were able to receive it.

Our plan is return to Haiti on Tuesday, Feb. 9. We will purchase additional water and rice in Haiti (the Haitians prefer the rice which is sold in Haiti and the price is not extravagantly more than the cost of rice in Santo Domingo).

Although our accommodations are quite comfortable while in Santo Domingo, while in Haiti we sleep either in the car on the ground in the yard of one of the church members of 1<sup>st</sup> B.C., Deacon Jamarque Charles. Upon our return to Haiti we will visit other areas of our field affected by the earthquake and also Lily Grove B.C. of Haiti which is located in another city near Port-au-prince and a church planted by the Cornerstone General Association in Haiti near the area of LaSaliene where we feed thousands of hungry persons on our last Missionary trip to Haiti. We will also attempt to assess how many of the nearly 200 homes of church members can be rebuilt. I learned that although many of the larger businesses in Haiti had insurance coverage that home insurance is rare to non-existent. We are also waiting word on how we can get some of the supplies which have been collected in Charles, La

shipped to the field. Pastor Sam Tolbert is working on facilitating that aspect and I have a call into Sen. Mary Landrieu and Congressman Coa's office.

### **Recommendations**

It is my recommendation that we continue to do all that we can to meet the physical needs of the over 5,000 people associated with our Haiti Mission. The 1<sup>st</sup> B.C. of Pentionville also needs our assistance to continue feeding the hungry. The church spent an average of \$1,200 a week buying food to cook for the hungry in the weeks following the earthquake. While there are millions in Haiti who need help I believe that the funds that we are able to raise as a convention could best be used by making a direct impact on the lives of those we have committed ourselves to on our Haiti mission field. The leaders of our field will be of great benefit in directing us as to the best use of funds, whether it's physical needs, the rebuilding of the school, homes, or the repairing or rebuilding of 1<sup>st</sup> B.C. Prayerfully after the needs of every member of our field are met the Lord will use us to be of assistance to those outside of our field.

### **Partial list of expenses:**

- Vehicle \$13,750
- Tires \$450
- First food purchase in Santo Domingo \$1,000
- First food purchase in Haiti \$3,500
- Water purchased in Haiti \$500
- Financial assistance for tent city residents \$3,000
- Retrieval of body and casket \$500
- Bags \$100
- Truck to transport goods from Santo Domingo to Haiti \$528
- Goods purchased Feb. 8 to be trucked to Haiti \$9,000
- Camera for Pastor Vixama to continue documenting after our departure
- Partial relief for Pastors \$2,000 (Pastor Vixama)
- Mr. R. Nicholas \$500
- Mr. Wilguinse \$300

### **This list does not include money spent on:**

- Gas (approximately \$100 per fill-up)
- Meals for myself Deacon Garrett, Pastor Vixama, Mr. Nicholas and Evangelist Wilguinse
- Taxi fare in Santo Domingo at \$15 per hour ( although we had a vehicle we did not know the city and hired a taxi to stay with us throughout the day)
- Vehicle serviced for return trip to Haiti (oil change, wipers etc.)
- Tips

### **This list also does not include:**

- \$2,000 wired to Field Director Rev. Edouard Nicholas in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. (Rev. Viximar was air lifted by a medical flight without even clothes.)
- Hotel expenses in Santo Domingo for myself, Deacon Garrett, Pastor Vixama, Mr. Nicholas and Wilguinse
- Satellite telephone 200 minutes (I later learned that my cell phone worked in Haiti)
- Cell phone for international calls

Rev. Samuel C. Tolbert, Jr.