

## **HAITI TRIP REPORT – FEBRUARY, 2010**

**By Pastor Andrew Samuels**

It has been six weeks since the massive 7.0 earthquake hit Haiti's capital city and surrounding areas. With hundreds of thousands of people injured, displaced, or dead, there are many questions about the future of the survivors.

My opportunity to spend 4 days in the disaster-ravaged country was profoundly sobering, yet richly fulfilling. I was part of a 7-person Team put together by my good friend, Dr. Richard Heron, a native Jamaican Pastor living in Miami. Pastor Haman Cross from Detroit, Michigan; two psychologists also from Detroit, Michigan, Drs. Sabrina Black and Pamela Hudson; our Translator, a Haitian native living in Miramar, Florida, Margaret Aboite, and an Architect from Kansas City, Missouri, Devan Case, completed the Team.

On Monday, February 22, we flew from Fort Lauderdale to Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, the country which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti. We braced ourselves for the 6-hour drive to Port-au-Prince, and after a more than two-hour wait for our Driver, plus lunch in the airport, we were finally on the road. Our drive was uneventful, and after crossing the border, the striking difference between the two countries became more and more evident. We were allowed into Haiti without a question or a search or a stop. Our Team Leader then drove from the border to Port-au-Prince which would be our base. Since we had to drive through Croix des Bouquets, the location of our Seventh Day Baptist Church in Haiti, I had opportunity to see Pastor Jean Lucas Julien that night.

Getting closer and closer to Haiti's capital, we were hit with the realities of the earthquake's fury. On some of the streets were tents and tarpaulins and beds providing sleeping quarters for thousands of displaced Haitians. Privacy was a virtually non-existent commodity and sanitary conveniences were rare. In the ensuing days, as we drive through the streets of the city, we saw many of these "tent cities", the name being given to these makeshift communities which had developed on streets, on open lots, and in yards. Our place of residence while in Haiti was a Church Mission House. For sleeping purposes, this Mission House was accommodating a total of 3,754 people from 688 families in its vicinity. They had established their own community with scheduled security personnel on duty each night, a very orderly food distribution system when they received a supply, and organized activities for children every other day since schools were still closed. Their discipline and organization were impressive. Our Team slept in a tent in the yard of the Mission House and I was awakened the first night of our visit, by an aftershock at about 1:25am. None of the other five people in the tent felt it, so after verifying that I did not need to leave my location, I returned to my comfortable sleep on the pavement cushioned by a mattress.

The following day (Tuesday) we met with a group of Pastors to find out what the greatest needs of their people were. Although the Mission House had offices in the interior part of the building and on the second floor, the meeting was held with us sitting on chairs close to the exit door because there is a very real fear of being in buildings, not to mention being on an upper floor. Among the most urgent needs were food, tents, clothes, toiletries, and medical attention. While

the Pastors met, our two Psychologists conducted individual sessions with as many children as they could, helping them to cope with the trauma, grief and loss of their experience. Psychological help is also a major need.

That evening I traveled to the Seventh Day Baptist Church and preached in an open air setting in a lively Service of music, worship, praying and the Word. There was good response on the part of the congregation which had gathered from the Church and community. I preached again the following night, and my emphasis was on hope and encouragement for a people very prone to frustration, disillusionment, and despair. There is a great evangelistic opportunity in Haiti now because people's spiritual sensitivities have been aroused and they are paying attention to spiritual matters. What a marvelous harvest for the Church!

The following day (Wednesday) I traveled to Pastor Julien's Church once again and conducted a Seminar with about 25 persons. We dealt extensively with their questions about the earthquake and what its origin, message, and significance might be, from a theological perspective. The building in which the Church had been meeting was completely destroyed. The other school building of the school operated by Pastor Julien, had significant damage but was not destroyed. Pastor Julien's house has minor damage. The Church now meets in the school yard in the open air. Pastor Julien and his family are still sleeping outside. I visited the plot of land owned by the Church, and which is intended for the permanent Church building. Its location is less than one mile from where Pastor Julien's school and house are situated. The erecting of that Church building is one of their most pressing needs. Pastor Julien introduced me to another Pastor, Yralus Dijene, from the area called Tomaseau. This Pastor says his Church is Seventh Day Baptist and he has been fellowshipping with Pastor Julien for several years. He and two of his leaders attended the night Services and the Seminar.

Each day we spent some time traveling around the city and were moved at the sight of damaged and collapsed buildings including the once-majestic Presidential Palace. We saw a plethora of "tent cities," we saw clear disruption of lives, we saw evidence of businesses unable to function, we saw many government buildings destroyed, and many school buildings demolished. At the same time, we also saw optimism and hope in the attitudes of the people. They want to believe that there are better days ahead for Haiti.

On Thursday afternoon, we departed Port-au-Prince for our return road trip to Santo Domingo. Again, we were allowed across the border without a question. However, while driving in the Dominican Republic, we were stopped about 7 times at military checkpoints on the road from the border and each time, the soldiers wanted money. What cause us to escape their demands, was that our Driver was also a military personnel who knew all those soldiers. He had rejoined us at the border and it was absolutely Providential that our Team Leader had made arrangements to have him drive us, precisely to combat encounters such as those. We spent the night in Santo Domingo and then flew from there the following morning (Friday) to return to Fort Lauderdale.

We are so grateful that the Lord provided, protected, sustained, guided, and orchestrated everything during this trip. All who contributed through prayer and finances, and hence, allowed themselves to be channels of blessing, are also greatly appreciated