



## FIRST REFLECTIONS AND ACTIONS FOR HAITI

Dear friend,

For the past 30 years, my wife Sandy and I have been working with our dear brothers and sisters in Haïti to advance practical, theological education. For the past 15 we have served as professors at the Faculty of Theology in Limbé near Cap-Haïtien in the north and, most recently, at the Institut théologique pour la francophonie-Haiti, a new programme we launched last year in Pétienville with ACF (Association chrétienne pour la francophonie). Our Christian Direction-URBANUS graduates are doing splendid work on the ground in five cities across the country.

Like many of you, we have lived a roller coaster of emotions as we have watched the carnage of the earthquake. The images that flash across the screen have brought us to tears and shock. It is a sobering thought that, in mid-December, I was staying in one of the hotels that is now demolished. But also I feel angry because for so many years the national and municipal leaders in Haïti have shown no will or concern to set any kind of

the standard in building, house or road construction, with no oversight for zoning provisions or safety precautions. We teach pastors and lay leaders to care for their cities and we have actually discussed the practicalities of safety and well-being for all. The footage we all are witness to illustrates what happens in a disaster when there is no infrastructure or standards in urban planning and development.

Finally, 72 hours after the earthquake we learned that all of our colleagues and friends are accounted for. But scores of people in *their* extended families and churches are unaccounted for or have died.

My philosophy on disasters is this – let's allow the international community do the heavy stuff – Christian Direction does not specialize in relief nor do we have the competency to be among the first responders. This situation is very complicated because 1) access into the cities is horrible 2) thousands of people are fleeing to other parts of the country and 3) little help or direction is coming from the government. We suggest that you support Christian non-governmental organizations for relief – my option is always for World Vision, especially in Haïti. They are the largest in the country with the best infrastructure and extremely qualified staff. Your gift will receive a matching amount from the Canadian government until February 12<sup>th</sup>.



Our Christian Direction *Urbanus* partners who have gone through previous crisis situations tell us that because of the overwhelming cry to address material needs, other levels of crisis are often left unanswered. One major area is the need for trauma and grief counseling. Healthy and injured survivors face a multitude of emotional and spiritual challenges as they walk through the process of physical healing and rebuilding their lives. How many pastors are dealing with their own losses while they care for their congregations? How many pastors and spouses have died? How many beloved church members are missing or have died? For Haitian Christians, the destruction of many of their church buildings contributes to the sensation that their spiritual foundations are also crumbling under their feet. The loss of their Bibles, pews, choir rooms for practicing are just a few of the material symbols of the loss they experience as a worshipping community. Those returning to Canada on the first flight from Haiti told of hearing people singing hymns in the dark. Haitian Christians have memorized hundreds of hymns and Bible verses. What a comfort in dark times! But they will need counseling, Bibles and help to rebuild their communities and to reach out to comfort others.

Christian Direction actively partners with Christian leaders in five centres in Haiti: Cap Haitian, Balan, and Gonaïves in the north and Pétienville and Port-au-Prince at the epicentre of the earthquake.

### **SPECIALLY FOR HAITI: PROJECT PARACLETE**

Our partners in each of these five centres will hire people to become grief counselors for their communities. We know that thousands of people are moving every day from the capital to Cap-Haitien. We will help them train the counselors and mobilize them through the church communities to serve the hurting in their cities. Second, we will begin to replace Bibles in French and Creole for the churches in these five centres. Christians excel in times like this in trauma counselling.

We are seeking to raise \$50,000 for these two initiatives. With the help of our Haitian Board member, Félix Pauléus, we are forming a team to train these

grief counsellors. Once we have our funding and the situation is secure enough for non-emergency people to be on the ground, they will go. We will prioritize helping and equipping our networks. We are coordinating all our efforts with ACF.

If you have ever walked through a tragedy in your community, you understand the important role that trauma counsellors play to help a community accept, heal and move forward in redemptive ways – together. The counselors of *Paraclete* will walk alongside and help others

work through their grief, with the presence and help of the Holy Spirit, THE *Paraclete*. Perhaps this service will bring the spiritual comfort while the relief agencies address the structural and physical needs of this dear country – *Haiti chéri*.



Glenn Smith  
Executive Director

P.S. Upon the recommendation of the Canadian Council of Christian Charities, Christian Direction is collecting funds for the Haiti earthquake and project *Paraclete* until February 12<sup>th</sup> which will be matched by the Canadian government for direct relief to Haiti. Check our website for updates.

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