

**JOURNALS** POSTED ON JANUARY 11, 2012

## Bringing hope in Haiti, slow and steady



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*A message from Lisa Rothenberger, World Relief Officer, ABCUSA*

Slow and steady. Those are the two most appropriate words I can think of that describe the difference your gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing Haiti Relief have made over the past two years. I often wish that when reflecting on disaster relief I could describe what has been accomplished as “fast and complete”. But it didn’t take too many years in this ministry to realize that wasn’t a realistic expectation—and most likely wouldn’t have even resulted in the best outcomes.

For years prior to the earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010, this small country was plagued with serious problems—poverty, malnutrition, unemployment, lack of

education, and an infrastructure that was far inferior to the needs of its millions of people. As is often the case, an extraordinary natural disaster serves to deepen pre-existing problems, not alleviate them. Haiti, unfortunately, in many ways has been a textbook case of why we need to find ways to alleviate and/or eliminate the chronic problems that are for billions of people the only way of life they have known. When resources and attention are primarily paid after the fact, or in this case after the earthquake, then “slow and steady” is the responsible way to move forward.

Since January 2010 American Baptists have given just over \$3 million for Haiti Relief. That is an amazingly generous response! In receiving these funds we took on a great responsibility to practice sound stewardship of these resources. Honestly, there are many ways that \$3 million could have been spent in the first 6<sup>th</sup> months, but most of that would have gone to waste as Haitians and the structures they live within struggle to absorb large increments of resources—at least not without a good portion of it going to waste or making no difference in the future of the country. And that’s what we set out to do: work in ways that respect the Haitian people and in some way improve their lives over the long-term, not just in the short-term.

We have worked extensively through our long-term partner in the Haiti, the Haitian Baptist Convention. I’m also very proud of the ways we have responded with our ecumenical partners. We have worked with Church World Service, IMA World Health, Eastern Mennonite University, and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. In each of these cases, our pre-existing relationships afforded us the opportunity to pool resources and respond in ways that were broader and had more depth than any of us could have done on our own. Each of these partners was/is working in a different geographic area of Haiti and providing different services. Church World Service focused on assisting the disabled (whose number increased exponentially due to the “crush” injuries that happen during earthquakes), repair of houses, and food and shelter in a refugee camp. IMA World Health focused on the strengthening of health care services in a rural area to which many of the displaced fled after leaving Port-au-Prince. Eastern Mennonite University offered their expertise and experience in trauma resilience training—the psychosocial element of disaster relief that is often overlooked or left unattended. And the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship focused some of their resources on the rebuilding of one school in Grand Goave—to give one community a strong sign that life as they knew it might not return, but some aspects of that life could be present once again.

I want to share just a bit more about the program that we have developed with Eastern Mennonite University. In the wake of our countries’ own September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University developed the Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience (“STAR”) program to increase the capacity of religious leaders to respond to the trauma and resilience needs of their congregations. Church World Service and its member denominations provided the funding for this pilot project. Since the initial STAR training in 2002, more than 5,000 U.S. and international religious and community leaders have received STAR training both in the U.S. and in more than a dozen countries worldwide.

It was with this experience and dedication to survivors of the Haiti earthquake that EMU approached a small group of denominations to ask if we would be interested in funding a Haitian-led, Haitian-developed, and Haitian culture focused training that would be offered to Haitians at all levels of society over a 3-year period. American Baptists, along with the Disciples of Christ, the Church of the Brethren, the United Church of Christ, and the

Mennonite Central Committee all said yes to pooling our resources to provide trauma resilience training. Even before the earthquake, Haiti was a country that experienced frequent traumas. Increasing the capacity of community leaders to identify the signs of trauma and provide tools for resilience is essential to the ongoing psychological health and recovery of the Haitian people. Since this program began in August 2010, the Creole-translated materials have been used to train hundreds of Haitians—including pastors, teachers, school directors, social workers, and market vendors. The Creole given name of the program says a lot: “Twomatizasyon ak Wozo” – “Trauma and Resilience” – “Wozo” being a local tree that bends with the wind but then rights itself and does not break and also does not bend if the same wind comes.

Thank you for your gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing Haiti Relief. Your gifts have made possible the “slow and steady” progress we continue to work toward day-by-day to truly realize a Haiti that is more stable and more capable of providing for the needs of its own people. It has been a blessing and privilege for me to carry out this ministry on your behalf.

Donations are still being accepted and can be made on the IM website. Go to [www.internationalministries.org/items/80](http://www.internationalministries.org/items/80) or write a check made payable to “One Great Hour of Sharing – Haiti Earthquake Relief” and mail to: International Ministries, P.O. Box 851, Valley Forge, PA 19482, or make a check payable to your church and write “Haiti Earthquake Relief” in the memo section.

Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with eight out of ten people living in extreme poverty, is about the size of Maryland, and is located on the western half of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola. The Dominican Republic is on the eastern half. The northern portion of Haiti, where most of IM’s mission work has been located, is approximately 100 miles from the earthquake’s epicenter.