

Hope for Haiti



"Haiti has always been cracked, but the earthquake just made it come down."

A word commonly used by Haitians is *degaje* meaning "to do what you have to do" or "to make do with what you have." This concept personifies the way Haitians approach life. Although they continue to face significant challenges, the people are resourceful. They are making progress to close tent cities and to rebuild their country. Presbyterians are there to help.

Several members of the Presbyterian Haiti Response Team (HRT), through ministries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC), traveled at the end of May to Port-au-Prince and Léogâne, Haiti. Their stories and experiences will challenge you and your congregation to prayerfully respond to the continuing needs.

The Streets of Port-au-Prince

Sikhumbuzo Vundla, the chief of operations for the Episcopal Church in Haiti and the HRT guide through Port-au-Prince, tells the team, "Haiti has always been cracked, but the earthquake just made it come down."

Driving through the earthquake-ravaged city, Vundla calls attention to an area of great need, a large tent city outside the capitol building, with its immense dome leaning forward and perched on the broken base of the building as if a giant came by and knocked it over.

Thousands of tents line the camp. Each tent is placed in any available space and pieced together from used blankets, tarps, or other recycled materials. Children in the tent cities play with toys made out

of sections of tire or plastic. Mothers cook with upturned buckets used to fetch water earlier in the day. The tent city is *degaje* in action, families doing their best to move forward.

"The government needs outside help to address moving people into homes and out of the camps," Vundla tells the group. "As you can see, they themselves are overwhelmed."

As the drive continues, there are signs of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are helping in the area. Vundla points out giant bladder-type cisterns filled with clean water for the medical tents. Vundla tells us that, despite the challenges, many displaced people are moving out of the tent cities to places like Carail.

A New Community Nearby

Carail, a new community located just outside Port-au-Prince near the base of the mountains, is about half an hour or more from the city, depending on the traffic. Little blotches of pink, green, and beige mark where thousands of new homes are built to create more permanent residences for displaced persons. There are more signs of NGOs at work and the strong presence of the United Nations.

There are community gardens, school buildings, and a small hospital. People are walking together along the dirt and rock streets, sitting on their porches, and enjoying music played by a DJ on a make-shift stage.



Some porches are decorated, and other homes have small gardens just outside their back doors. As you move around the area, fewer homes and tents appear. It is clear that progress is being made, but the work is not done. More help is needed for a better future.

“Many different NGOs are helping in this area,” Vundla says. “Each group was given an area to build homes. The need is so great that no one group or organization can help everyone.”

Even More Rubble to Move

Leaving the new community of Carail, several dump trucks are unloading rubble just down the road. Cracked concrete is moved from the neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince and other towns to one of four sites, including the one on the HRT tour route.

One agency currently handles the bulk of the waste removal. It is a slow and tedious process. Streets are packed with tap taps—Haiti’s transport vehicles—buses, pedestrians, and street vendors. Roads are narrow in places and cracked in others, making it difficult to move the machinery and trucks that deal with the rubble. It takes the trucks 45 minutes one-way to move the concrete to sites outside of Port-au-Prince. Some of the rubble is on private property, making matters more complicated and removal expensive. The government allows home and business owners to place rubble along the streets, which contributes to traffic issues and slows removal efforts.

Presbyterians Helping in Haiti

The GAMC’s Haiti Response Team approved funding to rebuild Holy Cross School in Léogâne. The school provides education for about 600 students yearly and is key to the future of this hard-hit area. In addition, HRT supplied agricultural aid through the local farmers’ movement of Haiti and spent nearly one million dollars to rebuild a nursing school and hospital in Léogâne.

The team is now exploring ways to use remaining resources to provide homes for displaced people, as well as to supply water and sanitary facilities.

The HRT’s goal is to use donated funds intelligently and help Haitians not just “make do with what they have” but find hope and opportunities for a better future. Pray for continued efforts in Haiti and learn what you and your congregation can do to help.

Responding to Disaster from Home

- Meet the people of Haiti and members of the Haiti Response Team. Visit pcusa.org/haiti
- Pray for the health, energy, imagination, and love of the Haiti Response Team and those working to make a difference on the ground in Haiti.
- Consider service as an international short-term volunteer. Find out how at pcusa.org/ministries/global/get-involved
- Discover “How to Help: Give, Act, Pray” by assembling “Gift of the Heart Kits” including medical and school supplies, as well as layette kits. Learn more at pcusa.org/pda

TellMeMore

Jessica Reid, communication specialist for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), is a Haiti Response Team communicator. Follow the progress of Haiti’s earthquake recovery at pcusa.org/haiti