

Text of Bishop Bickerton's Call to Action on Haiti Relief

January 15, 2010

Dear Friends & Colleagues,

Over the past few days I, like you, have sat in disbelief as we have watched the horror and heartache surrounding the recent earthquake in Haiti.

Today, I sat with colleagues in a Global Health Initiative meeting where we expected to see our friend and colleague UMCOR executive Sam Dixon. We have prayed for Sam, the Rev. Clinton Rabb, who leads our United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, and Jim Gulley, an UMCOR consultant, who were in Port-au-Prince, when the earthquake hit. They were in the Hotel Montana, which was destroyed. As of Friday morning, they had been located and were alive. We also prayed for the people of Haiti, members of mission teams who had not been located, and for all those affected by this devastating natural disaster. I know you have been praying too. Now, in the midst of turmoil and uncertainty, we must mobilize.

As a people of faith we have lifted many prayers, but also felt a tremendous sense of helplessness as we witnessed so many stories of despair and suffering. Due to the magnitude of this disaster, the need for earnest and urgent prayers will not fade anytime soon. Neither will our ability to respond in creative and tangible ways.

Today, I am calling on us as United Methodist Christians to mobilize our congregations and communities for action. Below are four suggestions:

- **GATHER for Prayer.** Yesterday I visited the websites of churches in Texas, Indiana, & New Jersey that were gathering their people together for prayer vigils focused on work teams from their congregations that were missing. This is one of those significant moments when we should call our people together to intercede for those who may not be able to pray. Of course, the best vehicle for this is to call people to worship together. Beyond that, I hope that prayer vigils and prayer resources would be developed which would intentionally lead our people to focus their prayers for all of those affected by the Jan. 12 earthquake.
- **GIVE an Offering.** I am asking every local church in the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference to immediately receive an offering to help Haiti through our United Methodist Committee on Relief, which is already at work providing emergency assistance. This Sunday is not too early to receive a special offering for the Haiti Emergency, Advance #418325. Churches are asked to send checks made payable to WPAUMC and marked for the Haiti Emergency through our Conference Treasurer's office, Box 5002, Cranberry Twp., PA 16066-5002. This money will be immediately forwarded to UMCOR for distribution. Let people know that 100 percent of gifts to UMCOR go directly to the people affected by the disaster. Individuals may choose to give to this effort online, at any time, through www.umc.org.
- **GENERATE UMCOR Kits.** One of the hallmarks of Western Pennsylvanians is our ability to assemble UMCOR health and school kits. This is one of those times when that need is significant. I encourage you to mobilize your people to construct those kits and get them to the Conference Center or the Mission Barn. Volunteers at our Eastbrook Mission Barn have already loaded a truck with more than 4300 health kits and about 1100 school kits bound for Haiti. **Given the magnitude of this disaster, many more kits are needed.** There's more information on the www.wpaumc.org website, including bulletin inserts that

you can copy for your congregation and community. An insert and health kit recipe are also attached.

- **GET Volunteers.** Currently, it's not safe or desirable for recovery teams to go to Haiti, although specialized emergency efforts are underway. Our Volunteers in Mission coordinators will let us know when teams can go. Team leaders with VIM training and Haiti experience will be needed. Please notify our Mission/VIM Director Diane Miller (Diane.Miller@wpaumc.org) if you have volunteers or a willingness to participate in teams that will be organized. Watch the wpaumc.org website for updated information.

In times of uncertainty and desperation, there is no better place to turn than God's word. I leave you with these words as a focus for our prayers and as a driver for our work as the hands and feet of God's love in the world:

*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
(Isaiah 43: 1-3)*

Let us not be afraid to lead in the midst of perilous times. It is our calling, our mandate, and our opportunity. May it be so!

The Journey Continues, . . .

Peace & Joy,



+ Thomas J. Bickerton

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