In response to the devastating earthquake in Haiti, local churches within the Louisiana Annual Conference are praying for victims and taking offerings for the Haiti Disaster Advance #418325. Those donating should make checks out to their local church or to “Louisiana Annual Conference” and mark the advance number in the memo line of their check. Donations can be turned in during offerings on Sunday mornings or mailed to the Louisiana Annual Conference, 527 North Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70802. Donated funds are administered by The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), which is mobilizing resources and working with its partners to begin direct relief operations in Haiti. UMCOR has a four star rating from Charity.”

Volunteers build tent city on Centenary’s campus in support of Haiti

BY BETTY BACKSTROM

Built to show solidarity with the people of Haiti, a tent city now located on Centenary College’s campus in Shreveport, La., became a reality within only a few days. Volunteers assisting with the effort hope to raise awareness of the crisis in Haiti and to raise money for orphanages in the earthquake-ravaged country.

“The brainstorming period was very short,” said Britney Winn, 22, who evacuated on Jan. 15 from Haiti where she was serving at an orphanage sponsored by her church, First United Methodist Church in Shreveport.

“We got home on Saturday, and on Sunday morning, I made the first call about the tent city idea to Rev. Betsey Eaves, Centenary’s chaplain. The next call I made was to my parents. And then I called my church,” explained Britney, who said that the idea of the tent city, known as Cite Lespwa (City of Hope), was embraced immediately by everyone she contacted.

The idea for the initiative came during the trip that she and two other volunteers took as they evacuated Haiti, traveling from Les Cayes to Port-au-Prince, the epicenter of the 7.0 earthquake that struck the country on Jan. 12. “Seeing the tent cities and how many people were sleeping on the ground, the idea for the City of Hope just seemed like the right way to help. How many people in Port-au-Prince are sleeping outside tonight? Here in the tent city, we can sleep outside in solidari-
I waited until after the NFC Championship game to begin this article. I simply had to know how the Saints fared before I could concentrate on any sort of message. 31-28 is indeed a beautiful score! I thought this morning’s worship service was an omen for the outcome when the organist played “When the Saints Go Marching In” as the traveling music following the Children’s Sermon! Sure enough, they did go marching – or in this case, kicking – in! Congratulations Saints!

We returned from the Louisiana Conference trip to Israel this past Thursday afternoon. It was a great time with a little more than 100 Louisiana pilgrims. That number included some 17 Ordinands, many of whom had spouses accompanying them, who were making their first pilgrimage to this beautiful land. It was almost as meaningful to me just to hear the insights and reflections of this special group of people as we gathered in the evenings to talk about what they had experienced, as it was for me to experience for myself this land of our Lord once again. I don’t think the heart-touching joy will ever wear off!

While dealing with this distressing Palestinian conflict, we were deeply saddened while there to learn of the earthquake in Haiti. What can these impoverished people endure? And then we learned of our missing colleagues who were there on an outreach mission from our General Board of Global Ministries when the quake struck. They were meeting in the Hotel Montana when it collapsed. Fifty-five hours later rescue squads reached Sam Dixon, head of the United Methodist Committee on Relief, and Clint Rabb, whose responsibility was to direct volunteers to places of service across the world. Tragically, Sam Dixon had already succumbed to his injuries when he was found. Clint Rabb was alive and airdropped to the States where he later died of his extensive injuries. It is such a tragic and mysterious irony that those who were devoted to leading The United Methodist Church in their response to disasters around the world were killed as the result of the very thing they sought to alleviate. I know the saints in Heaven, alongside us, mourn their deaths.

While dealing with this distressing news on the world scene, we were seeing sacred places where our faith was born and where our Lord walked and taught. We could hear his unfading words of compassion and care, calling us to give a cup of cold water in his name to those in need. What a powerful mixture of experiences. We remember the chaos and devastation of Katrina and we weep. The destruction is Haiti is immeasurably worse and now it is our time to respond with as many ways of caring as we can muster. Isn’t that the work of the saints?

We also were learning more about the Israeli – Palestinian conflict. A trip to Bethlehem will paint this picture with vivid color! Just having to negotiate the check point at the huge wall that separates Bethlehem from Jerusalem, complete with armed soldiers and the knowledge that behind that wall a people are enclosed in an “open air prison” called the West Bank is enough to break your heart in another way. It is a situation of which we know very little here in the United States, but one that has tragic overtones in that land we call “Holy Land.”

Our guide for the Ordinands and their parishioners was a man by the name of Wisam, a Palestinian Christian. His stories of abuse and humiliation were wrenching. Those of us on our bus were quite moved by his witness and probed his mind as much as possible to get a more correct picture of the situation as it exists. To hear him tell of his difficult daily life, and the decline of the Christian population in this land of Jesus’ birth, was disturbing to say the least. According to him, the Christian population is declining so rapidly that within the next 30 years there will be very few left in either Israel or the West Bank. It’s hard to imagine the “Holy Land” as a place where the landmarks of Jesus are no longer living stones with worshiping congregations, but simply museum pieces and places of interest to those who come from afar to see places of antiquity. We are working to have Wisam come to visit us here in Louisiana and to bring his story and the stories of his Christian sisters and brothers for us to hear and respond. I just wonder if those who suffer under this oppression and remain faithful to the Gospel are truly marked as saints?

In the meantime, the Saints are marching to Miami. Wouldn’t it be fun to “be in that number!” I’ll just have to do that one by way of television. But I’ll be there to cheer them on to victory! And when I hear that rousing tune to which we sing, second line, and sway in the pew, I’m going to think a little broader about what it means to be a saint. A “Saint – capital ‘S’” and a “saint – small ‘s’” are two different things after all.

In Christ’s love,
Bill Hutchinson

ON THE JOURNEY

Alternative VBS: more than nine to noon

The model was simple. Kids were out of school. Dads were at work. Moms were at home. Let’s get together and have a church-wide school! Kids can come and Moms can volunteer. That is a fair description of the 1950’s view of Vacation Bible School. And there may still be places where that is a working model, but those places are fewer and fewer. Chances are that while children may not be attending a traditional school setting during the summer, they are probably in some organized, supervised program during the day—primarily because the adults in their life are working.

And with that in mind, many churches have abandoned traditional weekday VBS. Fear not, there is hope.

Alternatives to traditional VBS are not new. I attended an alternative VBS when I was a child. My family had a friend that would host a home-based Vacation Bible School. Typically, these were in the afternoon, while the traditional schools were always in the morning. This family friend would set up a large tent in her yard, inviting a missionary couple that she knew and about 30 neighborhood children to come. We did all the typical VBS stuff in her front yard. If you are considering a different path, here are some other alternatives to traditional VBS:

Night VBS. Although this has become so common it may not be alternative for many churches, consider hosting VBS in the evening. This is a way to engage children and adults who may not be able to participate because of daytime obligations. You can include a meal for those participating, and could skip planning a snack time. And the use of daylight savings time means that, typically, most of your activities will still take place in “daylight.”

One or two days. Some churches host a one or two day VBS, typically these are daylong events, and can even take place over the course of a weekend, or a Friday evening and Saturday. The standard curriculum is used, but compressed into a shorter time frame. Churches will do two lessons in a single day. This requires about the same amount of planning and preparation, but fewer volunteers over all.

Summer Sunday school VBS. Consider using a VBS curriculum as your Summer Sunday school curriculum. Each week’s lesson could be extended over two Sundays. Children could lead the closing worship service at the end of the summer, sharing what they had learned.

All summer long. Some publishers, aware that churches are looking for children’s programming for the entire summer, are preparing 10-week curricula. These tend to follow a theme like traditional VBS, but provide activities for the entire summer. If your church has a summer care program for children, this may be a way to have it revolve around Christian teaching.

Finally, just because your VBS is over doesn’t mean that it’s over for everyone. Why not take your VBS on the road? Ingleside UMC in Baton Rouge took their VBS to a public park last year to engage children that were unable to attend the one at the church.
Haitian Methodists and UMCOR size up needs following earthquake

BY KATHY L. GILBERT

As the day starts to become night, mothers tend to their crying babies by the pale blue light of cell phones.

In the distance, someone is softly strumming a guitar. A young couple strolls away from the crowd, enjoying a few moments of peace.

Since an earthquake hit Haiti Jan. 12, more than 500 families have found a new home on the grounds of the College Methodiste de Freres, in the country’s capital.

For most, home is nothing more than a thin blanket spread on the concrete basketball court or on the hard ground under trees.

But these are the fortunate ones. Thousands of others sleep in the open under much more dangerous conditions.

“They feel safer here than on the streets or in public parks,” said Rosny Desroches, former vice president of the Methodist Church of Haiti. “Methodists don’t only care for Methodists; the church assists all people in need.”

Pastors and lay leaders from the Methodist Church of Haiti met Jan. 21 with a team from the United Methodist Committee on Relief and United Methodist Communications to talk about the immediate needs of people in Haiti.

“We lost quite a few churches and schools that are important to the Methodist Church,” said the Rev. Gesner Paul, president of the Methodist Church of Haiti.

“One of the best-known schools in the country we lost in one minute,” he said, referring to a 50-year-old Methodist school in Port-au-Prince.

“The most urgent needs are for food, water, shelter and medicine,” Paul said. The church also needs to give emotional support to hurting people who have lost entire families, he said.

“Imagine losing your children and your wife or husband and you are the only one left,” he said. “Also there are a lot of children who lost their parents. How can you stand that?”

Over the next few days, the Methodist Church in Haiti will try to gather information on how many churches and schools have been destroyed. The church also is searching for missing church members who may still be buried in the rubble of their homes.

The quake killed as many as 200,000 people and left some 1.5 million homeless, according to news reports. The Haitian government has announced that it will move about 400,000 displaced residents to new villages outside Port-au-Prince. Some needs, such as getting food, water and medicine, can be addressed quickly, said Melissa Crutchfield, UMCOR executive and team leader. She stressed that The United Methodist Church’s response will be a long-term one.

Signs requesting help are a common sight in earthquake-damaged areas in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. UMNS photo by Mike Dubose

UMCOR joins the on the ground relief efforts for Haitian disaster victims

BY LINDA BLOOM

The United Methodist Committee on Relief and a host of other faith-based groups are on the ground in Haiti as they determine how to assist earthquake survivors.

With more than $2 million in donations received by Jan. 20, UMCOR already has provided emergency grants to the Methodist Church of Haiti and GlobalMedic, a Canadian relief agency, to address immediate needs.

An assessment team led by UMCOR’s Melissa Crutchfield was gathering in the Dominican Republic Jan. 20 and preparing to enter Haiti. She is accompanied by five others with the relief agency, the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries and United Methodist Communications.

Other United Methodist-supported organizations, including Church World Service, Action By Churches Together International and Stop Hunger Now, also are responding with aid.

Paul Jeffrey, a United Methodist photojournalist and missionary on assignment with ACT, watched a Mexican rescue team free Anna Zizi from the home of the parish priest at Port-au-Prince’s Roman Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption on Jan. 19. Photo courtesy of Paul Jeffrey/ACT Alliance.

UMCOR’s partnership with GlobalMedic will focus on the distribution of clean drinking water, says the Rev. Tom Hazelwood, an UMCOR executive. It also will provide medical attention to quake survivors.

GlobalMedic is deploying paramedics, water technicians and a doctor to assist the sick or injured, UMCOR reported. A water distribution hub will provide 65,000 people daily with clean drinking water.

Working through local nongovernmental organizations and the United Nations network in Haiti, GlobalMedic also will distribute 110,000 sachets of PUR water purification tablets and 110,000 oral rehydration sachets.

The supplies are being shipped into the Dominican Republic, and then transported by ground into Haiti, Hazelwood said.

One of the tasks for the UMCOR team in Haiti this week will be meeting with Gesner Paul, who leads the Methodist Church of Haiti, to assess how best to work with church members there.

Mission volunteers from The United Methodist Church have been a strong presence in Haiti for years, so another priority is organizing for future volunteer teams.

“We know the (immediate) need is for medical volunteers,” Hazelwood said. “We’re looking at trying to centralize the volunteer process.”

Bishop Joel Martinez, interim general secretary of the Board of Global Ministries, is advising volunteer teams not to set out for Haiti immediately. “The time for volunteers will come, and their assistance will be crucial,” Martinez said.

A planeload of 80,000 pounds of water, medicine and medical supplies organized by Stop Hunger Now is being distributed in Haiti, says the Rev. Ray Buchanan, the United Methodist pastor who is the food aid group’s founder and president.

He also has talked to Mission of Hope, the partner group in Port-au-Prince that received most of those supplies, about a previous supply of pre-packaged meals. “They told us that since the earthquake, they’ve been feeding 50,000 a day using the meals we sent in December,” Buchanan added.

“UMCOR is committed to staying for the duration,” she said. “We are going to build a solid foundation for the long term.”

“Thank you for being here and learning of our plight,” Paul said. “Every Haitian person has lost a loved one or friend.”

The families living on the church grounds weigh heavily on Desroches’ mind. So far, they have been lucky; no rain has come since Jan. 12. But the rain will come.”

Donations to support UMCOR’s Haiti Relief efforts can be made to Haiti Emergency, UMCOR Advance #418325. Checks can be made to your local church or to “Louisiana Annual Conference” with “Advance #418325 Haiti Emergency” in the memo line. Checks can be put in the church’s offering plate or mailed to: Louisiana Annual Conference, 527 North Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70802. The entire amount of each gift will be used to help the people of Haiti.
A banner promoting Cite Lespwa (The City of Hope) explains that volunteers constructed the tent city on Centenary College’s campus to raise funds and awareness for Haitian orphanages. The sign and city were located in front of the Gold Dome facing King’s Highway in Shreveport. One of the dozens of volunteers, left, receives a donation from a woman passing by the group on King’s Highway. Scenes below depict campers in the tent city, who slept overnight for a week. Volunteers stand on the sidewalk on King’s Highway holding signs asking for support for Haitian orphanages. A handmade sign, below, displays the name of the tent city, Cite Lespwa, which is City of Hope in Creole French. An exhausted Britney Winn catches a nap in the afternoon after working hard for several days to coordinate the construction of the tent city. Carrie Mercer, right, holds one of the signs as she waves to passersby. Mercer was heavily involved in the planning of the tent city. Nycki Sorensen and Britney Winn, who came up with the idea for the project, are pictured standing in front of some of the tents. Sorensen and Winn were serving on a mission to a Haitian orphanage when the earthquake struck several weeks ago. The orphanage is located 140 miles from Port-au-Prince, the epicenter of the first earthquake. A young donor places her gift in one of the containers used by the volunteers. Rev. Betsey Eaves, Centenary’s chaplain, looks on. Photos by Sarah Backstrom
The elementary school teacher is passionate about mission in Haiti, emphasizing that volunteers should work to provide the impoverished country’s children with “health, safety, love and education.”

Sorensen is quick to point out that she is concerned about certain media stories that have presented Haitian people in a negative light. “On that long road trip from Les Cayes to the embassy at Port-au-Prince, we encountered many people along the way. Every single person tried to help, pointing us in the right direction. No one tried to harm us.”

First UMC is a “village” partner with Global Orphan Project (GOP), whose representatives are currently onsite in Haiti building their nineteenth orphanage in Haiti to help meet the needs of children whose parents have died in the past weeks. The facility in Les Cayes is a project of GOP.

Winn, who is employed by First UMC as the church’s Haitian ministry liaison, has made four missions to the country. “Working with the orphanage is part of the church’s Haiti initiative. Rev. Hu Debo, who was also on this last mission, serves as Global Missions pastor for First UMC,” she added.

Carrie Mercer, a recent graduate of Centenary and college roommate of Britney, is one of dozens of volunteers who helped to organize the tent city. “We met Monday night, and in two hours, we brainstormed and divided responsibilities. Volunteers worked constantly on Tuesday, contacting businesses and churches for assistance. Bands volunteered to play for mini-concerts that will draw attention to what we’re doing. On Wednesday, tents went up in the midst of tornado warnings,” said Mercer, who added that local television stations reporting the construction of the tent city kept them apprised of Wednesday’s weather predictions. “It’s been really cool to watch all this.”

City of Hope organizers expect hundreds of volunteers this weekend, ranging from high school and college students that are out of class to individuals who are off work. “We’re planning a Monday evening candlelight worship service, and we’re praying for a big crowd,” said Mercer.

United Methodist churches in the Shreveport area and Centenary College have rallied behind the efforts of this volunteer group consisting largely of young adults. “I have known a number of these young people for several years and I have always been impressed by their passion and willingness to respond to God’s call,” said Rev. Betsey Eaves with Centenary College.

“The campus police have offered security by staying with us overnight. Others have helped us set up tents. Local restaurants are providing food for the volunteers. People all over Louisiana are praying for the Haitians and for the tent city,” said Mercer.

Throughout the day on Thursday, donations came to the volunteers in every denomination. “We’ve received every kind of donation, from one man who emptied his car ashtray filled with coins to a woman who dropped off a check for $1,000. One person even stepped off the city bus that runs down King’s Highway to make a donation,” said Mercer, who has been “awed” by the desire of others to help those in need. “Watching the Body of Christ at work in Shreveport has made us a witness to the larger body, reaching across the world to our brothers and sisters in Haiti.”
United Methodist Women for Assembly and School of Christian Mission

An urgent request from the UMW President

UMW Conference President Edna B. Hickman, along with Bishop William W. Hutchinson’s urgings, is challenging all UMW Districts and Local units to make donations and offer service toward those affected by the crisis in Haiti.

Per her comments and urgings to all Christian friends, President Hickman noted that “We have been called upon once again to show the LOVE OF CHRIST! What has happened in Haiti is beyond comprehension. But what we can comprehend is that we as Christians must do our part to assist those in crisis and in time of need.

I am calling upon all Christians and especially United Methodist Women, individually and collectively, and all units and districts in Louisiana, to make special efforts to send whatever monetary donations that you can.”

“May God continue to bless us as we partner with Him to express the Love of Christ to the people of Haiti.”

In his name,

Edna B. Hickman, President

Calling All Artists!

Each year a drawing depicting an interpretation of the School of Christian Mission Theme is selected as the winning logo and used as a cover of the program book for the various Regional Schools. In addition, it is recommended that each conference of that region use the winning drawing as its program cover.

This year’s theme is “Faith, Hope, Love in Action.”

You are invited to submit your depiction of this theme. We certainly want representation from the Louisiana Conference as our own Dillard University campus will again be the host site for the West Gulf Regional School. If you know someone who may be interested in the contest, please contact them and encourage them to enter.

Please submit two copies, one in color and one in black and white. Be sure to sign your entry and include your contact information as well as the name of your conference. Your signature will note your agreement with use of your entry in publications for and related to 2010 Schools of Mission.

Please send your entry by Saturday, Feb. 20 to Dorothy F. Kimball, West Gulf Regional Team, SCM, 3140 Nature Dr., Marrero, LA 70072-5922.

Entries may also be sent by e-mail to D122947@aol.com

Theme Description: Faith, Hope, Love in Action

As people of faith, we trust in the promise of Christ to bring light into the darkness and new life to brokenness and death. As people of hope, we celebrate and share the good news of Jesus Christ. Together in the world we are partners in God’s mission of healing and wholeness so that all might have abundant life.

As people of God, we love because He first loved us. It is out of that love that we welcome all into community, mend what is broken; call for peace where there is war; unite what is divided; make just what is unjust and offer hope where there is despair; Faith, Hope, Love in Action: All God’s people in mission together in the world!

Assembly Mission Opportunity

The Women’s Division extends an open invitation for United Methodist Women to put their crafting skills in motion creating prayer shawls and baby blankets for Assembly, April 30-May 2, 2010. The shawls and blankets will be on display in the Assembly Experience Hall and later distributed to mission institutions and persons in physical and/or spiritual need.

Shawls and baby blankets can be made of fabric, knitted or crocheted. Recommended size for the prayer shawls are: triangles, 65 inches long and 32 inches center back; and rectangles, 19 x 69 inches or 14 x 70 inches. Recommended sizes for the baby blankets are: 30 x 30 inches, 32 x 32 inches, 36 x 36 inches or 38 x 38 inches.

It is suggested that the shawls and baby blankets be brought to your local church and have them blessed. Send the consecrated items by March 1 to:

Linda C. Douglas
Women’s Division/ General Board of Global Ministries
475 Riverside Drive Room 1504
New York, New York 10115

For additional information go to www.ummission.org and click on the “Assembly 2010” box or contact Linda Douglas at: ldoglas@gbgm-umc.org or (212) 870-3753.

Gratefully,
Kathleen Conrad
Women’s Division Director

Membership, Nurture, and Outlook Report Reminders

Local and District MNO Coordinators should send “Membership Counts” reports for January and February of 2010. The reports should cover the yearly statistics for 2009.

Local Unit Membership Reports are due by January of 2010. If you have missed your date, it isn't too late to send it to your District Coordinator. Be sure your report accounts for all the women of your local church. Local officers, please get your reports in as soon as possible so that your District MNO coordinators can get reports to me by Feb. 28.

Please complete information from the Unit Membership Report and be sure to follow instructions 1, 2, and 3 at the bottom of the page.

Your cooperation in this important effort is most appreciated. Please contact me regarding any assistance you may need.

Ethel Lilly
UMW Conference Membership, Nurture & Outreach
Post Office Box 309
Mansfield, LA 71053
(318) 872-0612
eflilly@aol.com

UMW Publication Information and News Deadlines

*Please note that full coverage of the UMW insert will be included in the Feb.12 edition of the Louisiana Now! We are doing a partial coverage in this January issue due to urgent coverage being given to the earthquake tragedy in Haiti. The most time sensitive information about Louisiana Conference UMW efforts are included in this issue. Thank you for your patience.

This newsletter insert is published four times a year in the Louisiana Now!

Upcoming due dates for articles/news are as follows:

May newsletter: Due March 26
August newsletter: Due July 9
November newsletter: Due October 9

All UMW articles and news stories are welcome. Please send information to:

Lana P. Latham
131 Ogden Drive
Baton Rouge, LA 70806-5013

*Please note the change of E-Mail address for sending information:
lane.latham@yahoo.com

E-Mail is the preferable mode of sending information as pictures sent for release/publication need to be sent by e-mail and must be in jpeg format.

2010 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 24
UMW Sunday

*Please send pictures, programs, etc. of your UMW Sunday Celebration to your District Membership Coordinator soon!

February 6
Executive Committee Meeting, Wesley Center, Woodworth, La.

February 26-28
West Gulf Regional School Planning Team, New Orleans, La.

March 20
Concurrent meetings of Finance, Nominations, Membership

April 30-May 2
18th Assembly of United Methodist Women,
America’s Center in St. Louis, Missouri
gbgm-umc.org/umw/assembly

May 7
Church Women United May Friendship Day

June 26-29
West Gulf Regional School, Dillard University, New Orleans, La.

July 21
Executive Committee Meeting (SCM), Wesley Center, Woodworth, La.

July 22-26
Haitians help Louisiana volunteers evacuate the disaster stricken area

BY JOHN GORDON

Three members of First United Methodist Church in Shreveport, La., arrived Jan. 11 at the Big House orphanage in Les Cayes, Haiti, 140 miles from Port-au-Prince. One day later, a magnitude 7.0 earthquake destroyed much of the island nation.

The mission team and the 75 orphans escaped injury, and the only damage to the building was a crack in the wall. But the quake began four days of uncertainty as the Louisiana team sought a way back to the U.S.

“The house started to shake and it kind of looked like JELL-O,” said Britney Winn, 22, the church’s missionary to Haiti. “We were sitting on our beds, and we got up real quick because they were moving.”

Winn, along with the Rev. Hu Debo and volunteer Nycki Sorensen, sought to reassure their families they were unharmed.

Sorensen said the group soon realized parts of the island had suffered a “catastrophe beyond any imagination.”

Sorensen sent a text message to her husband, Mark, minister to college students and young adults at First United Methodist Church.

“Building shook, power out, but we are SAFE,” the message said.

Cell phones quit working for a time after the initial quake. But the group was able to make occasional calls with a satellite phone to update anxious relatives on their progress.

“My nerves were completely on edge,” Mark Sorensen recalled. “I couldn’t watch the news much.”

The trio first tried to find a small plane in Les Cayes to fly to the Port-au-Prince airport, but it was overcrowded with relief flights. They also could not drive across the border to the Dominican Republic to catch a commercial flight because the border was closed to Haitians, and a native driver would not have been able to take them across.

Three days after the earthquake, the group arranged for a driver to take them to Port-au-Prince. After waiting in line five hours to buy gas, the group began a four-and-a-half hour drive through roads sometimes blocked by rubble and makeshift camps and tents set up by survivors.

“We saw the tents and hundreds and thousands of people on the streets and sleeping out on the streets,” Winn said. “Everything’s just leveled,” she added. “I remember seeing three huge concrete slabs just stacked on top of each other. And somebody said that used to be a three-story building.”

Haitians helped them find the way to the U.S. Embassy where they received food and water and, within a few hours, a chance to return home. The three boarded a military cargo plane that took them to New Jersey. Then they took a bus to Philadelphia and flew home commercially.

“Every time we came to a place that we couldn’t pass, people pointed with smiles to the right direction for us to get out,” said Sorensen. “That’s not what was expected. The heart and the kindness of the people to help us get to safety were amazing.”

The Shreveport church has made a seven-year commitment to support the 75 orphans living at the Big House. Church members are posting updated information and videos about the orphanage on YouTube.

Soon after she arrived back home, Winn began organizing a tent city encampment at Shreveport’s Centenary College in an effort to raise $1 million for Haitian orphans. Nycki Sorensen said her immediate concern is making sure children at the orphanage have enough food.

The church also is planning to send a medical team to Haiti in February.

Winn said anyone who viewed the devastation had to find some way to help.

“You don’t have a choice.”

“I’m so thankful and so overjoyed to be home and so thankful for all the prayers that got me back home,” she said. “But then I think about the people who don’t have a home to go back to.”

Medical volunteers responding through National Disaster Medical Assistance

It will be some weeks before national responders will allow volunteer teams for general medical or rebuilding efforts in Haiti. Plans are underway for the UMC response and LA VIM will be prepared to send teams as soon as the “go-ahead” is given.

There is a need for medical teams now but only through the national agencies listed below. LA VIM encourages those medical professionals who want to respond immediately to contact these agencies.

This may be an option for some of our LA VIM health care volunteers. Note web sites: www.hhs.gov and www.medicalreservecorps.gov

Please see note below regarding medical volunteer responding through National Disaster Medical Assistance. This may be an option for some of your health care volunteers. Note web sites: www.hhs.gov and www.medicalreservecorps.gov

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is requesting physicians of specific specialties to deploy with the National Disaster Medical Assistance teams to Haiti. The need is for trauma surgeons, orthopedists, anesthesiologists, and others with experience in treating crush injuries. Volunteers must be able to serve for at least two weeks, and be willing to live and work in spartan conditions.

Preference will be given to physicians who are Creole or French speakers, and to those currently credentialed through the Medical Reserve Corps in their home state, or the ESAR-VHP program (Emergency Services Advanced Registration of Volunteer Health Personnel).

These volunteers will need to be credentialed as temporary federal employees and will need to be able to provide credentialing paperwork as soon as asked. Credentialing normally takes about a week. Volunteers with these clinical skills should contact Michala Koch at Michala.Koch@hhs.gov. Not everyone who wishes to help will necessarily be deployed, and those without the requisite skills may not receive a direct response.

For medical professionals wishing to help in this way in future relief efforts please take a few minutes to learn about the Medical Reserve Corps, identify your local unit, and register to become part of the corps. To do so, visit www.medicalreservecorps.gov.

This is the channel through which medical volunteers are deployed immediately following an event, and only those registered beforehand are likely to be deployed.
Survivor, James Gulley: UMCOR trio kept the faith in Haitian ruins

There were times, trapped beneath tons of concrete in the collapsed Hotel Montana, when the Rev. James Gulley thought help would never come.

Gulley, the Rev. Sam Dixon and the Rev. Clinton Rabb always knew they were in the hands of God.

When help did come 55 hours after a massive earthquake hit Haiti and reduced the hotel to a pile of crumbling concrete, Gulley was pulled to safety, but his friends both died of their injuries.

“I have no answer about why I was given the gift of life and Sam and Clint were not,” Gulley said in an interview with United Methodist News Service. “I can’t answer that any better than Job could answer why some people suffer more than others. All I can do is to try to use that gift in God’s service in whatever way it is intended. I’m grateful to be alive, and I accept that gift.”

The three men, working with the United Methodist Committee on Relief, were in Port-au-Prince to meet with members of the Methodist Church of Haiti to talk about ways to improve and develop the country. They had scheduled a meeting with members of IMA World Health, including United Methodist Sarla Chand, at the Hotel Montana.

“A driver from the Methodist Guest House dropped us off and when we walked in they were sitting in the lobby checking their e-mail,” Gulley said. “We had just passed the reception desk. I looked up and the hotel was shaking; in the third second, it fell on us.”

The group gathered and were heading to the hotel’s restaurant when there was a rumble, Gulley said. “We had just passed the reception desk. I looked up and the hotel was shaking; in the third second, it fell on us.”

The six humanitarian workers and two other men trapped inside elevators were suddenly confined to a small area.

“The first thing I heard was Sam saying his legs were broken. Then Clint said his legs were also broken. We called out to each other and the others said they were OK.”

The group struggled to remain calm even though Dixon and Rabb were “suffering terribly,” Gulley said. They were afraid they might run out of oxygen but soon felt some cool air coming around the edges.

“We tried to joke, to think of funny stories, but we didn’t have too many. We talked about how ironic it was that we had come to Haiti to offer aid and now we were the recipients of relief aid.”

After night fell on the first day, they knew no one was coming until morning. But when another day and night came with no help they began to feel despair, Gulley said.

At one point he started singing “Peace Like A River” and the others joined in. When help came from French firemen, Gulley and the others started singing the doxology, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.”

“It was good for those of us who were not so badly hurt,” Gulley said. “But I think it was harder for those who were pinned because they had such high expectations after some of us were pulled out.”

Gulley said it took the firemen four hours to get him out.

“Sam was still alive, he was the last one whose fate we knew about,” Gulley said. Some reports said Dixon had been evacuated and was alive.

Dixon had removed his wallet from his back pocket in an effort to get more comfortable, Gulley said. “I picked up his wallet and put it in my pocket. I didn’t realize I was taking away his only identity.”

Gulley and Dixon had worked together for many years.

“My first trip abroad in 1999 was to Haiti with Sam,” Gulley said. Fighting through tears, he said, “We began in Haiti and that’s where we parted.”