

Motivated for Mercy: LCMS Members, Organizations Aid in Haiti Recovery

By Sarah Schafer

Dcs. Irma Rojas of Orlando volunteered with Lutheran Services Florida at the airport in Sanford, Fla., where thousands of U.S.-Haitian citizens have entered the U.S. She met a volunteer translator from Kissimmee, Fla., who lost four family members in the Jan. 12 earthquake in Haiti. “Her grief was overwhelming,” said Rojas, who told the woman that Jesus is with His people even during trying times, and that her efforts are part of a larger group that God is working through in great ways.

Rojas is just one of the many LCMS members from congregations, schools, Haitian mission societies, and LCMS Recognized Service Organizations (RSOs) across the U.S. sharing their time and talents to continue LCMS relief efforts stateside and overseas.

At least 30 Lutheran medical professionals have volunteered for four Mercy Medical Teams caring for injured Haitians along the Dominican Republic- Haiti border and in Jacmel and Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

More than 200 volunteers with Lutheran Church Charities (LCC), www.lutheranchurchcharities.org, gathered 43 tons of aid in February from 22 Chicago-area locations to sort, pack, and ship to Haiti. LCC is also paying for the travel expenses for an LCMS pastor to assist the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Haiti.

Hundreds of volunteers with MISSION: HAITI, a Florida-Georgia www.flga-lcms.org mission society, also sorted and packed aid supplies at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Davie, Fla. and St. Paul Lutheran Church in Boca Raton, Fla. LCMS WR-HC provided MISSION: HAITI with \$125,000 in grants for shipping and travel expenses.

Orphan Grain Train (OGT), www.ogt.org, already sent hundreds of thousands of meals to Haiti and is accepting material goods for future shipments. LCMS WR-HC will provide OGT with a \$25,000 grant to ship 250,000

‘Kids Against Hunger’ meals and generators to Jacmel, Haiti. “This is going to be a developing thing,” said Richard Jostes, director of development with OGT, speaking to the long-term nature of relief efforts in Haiti.

LCMS WR-HC granted \$150,000 to the Dominican Republic Lutheran mission, a partnership of Dominican Republic Lutherans, LCMS entities, Bethesda Lutheran Communities, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil. The funds covered the purchase and shipment of rice, beans, and cooking oil to Haiti.

Two RSOs received grants from LCMS WR-HC to provide support to Haitians coming to the U.S. Lutheran Services Florida, www.lsfnet.org, received a \$25,000 grant to assist Haitians entering the United States at the Sanford and Tampa airports. “People are coming here basically with nothing except maybe a backpack after losing everything in the earthquake,” said Eric Tillich, LFS vice president for agency advancement. The grant will help the RSO provide water, food, medical attention, and short-term housing to incoming Haitians.

LCMS WR-HC also awarded Lutheran Services of Georgia, www.lsga.org, with a \$10,400 grant to help staff its new ministry for Haitian children and adults in Georgia with medical, mental health, housing, and other needs, connecting them to community and congregational resources.

Among the RSOs aiding with Haiti relief efforts stateside, are:

- Lutheran Counseling Services (Florida)
- Lutheran Child and Family Services (Illinois)
- Amigos Center (Florida)
- Wheat Ridge Ministries (Illinois)
- Martha & Mary (Washington)
- Lutheran Haven (Florida)
- Grace Place Lutheran Retreats (Missouri)
- Lutheran Social Services of New England
- Lutherans in Medical Mission (LIMM)



Youth from Immanuel Lutheran School in Freeport, Ill., load a truck with material goods donations, including food, water, hygiene items, and first aid supplies, part of a Lutheran Church Charities project to send immediate aid to Haiti.

The Tennessee-based Haitian mission society, Trinity/HOPE, www.trinityhope.org, also received a \$25,000 grant from LCMS WR-HC to continue its 10-year feeding program for children in 65 Christian schools in Haiti. It provides daily meals for nearly 11,000 Haitian children, teachers, and cooks. The LCMS WR-HC grant will help offset the 19% increase in costs per meal since the earthquake.

Other Lutheran Haiti mission societies working in Haiti include:

- Haiti Lutheran Mission Society, Canada
- Haiti Theological Education
- Haiti Lutheran Mission and Ministry Fund
- Haiti Lutheran Mission Society, USA

LCMS WR-HC will make a significant grant to the Baltimore-based Lutheran World Relief, and is in dialogue with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service as they work with LCMS districts, congregations, and RSOs to provide services in various states.

A Trauma Observed

The following narrative was adapted from Rev. Matthew Harrison’s blog <http://mercyjourney.blogspot.com>, and features his time with the LCMS pastoral care team in Haiti.

Today (February 1) we made our way slowly through the refugee camp at Jacmel, south of Port-au-Prince. An area some 175 yards square, encompassed by a high concrete wall, surrounds perhaps a thousand makeshift tent shelters. At one end of the camp, smiling ten-year-old boys fly kites made from garbage, indicative of the resilience of the human spirit in dire crisis. All around the camp in the heart of the city, home after home is collapsed. The rubble has been pushed and swept aside so that cars can pass. Tents ... pop up everywhere and fill the streets to impassibility in the evening. Most feel unsafe sleeping inside buildings, even three weeks out. A great many of the buildings left standing are not safe.

It’s rather obvious to me that there will be no grand solution to Haiti’s ills. There will be pockets and places that receive attention and a lot of it. There will be fantastic aid given and capacity increased. There will be confusion and chaos. There will be hundreds of thousands, yes millions, who go about their lives “falling between the cracks,” as it were, with homes neither totally leveled nor safe for continued dwelling. They’ll patch the cracks as best they can and turn to the future. In other words, Haiti will be Haiti.

I am struck again by the kindness of the Haitians — their ready greetings, their deep appreciation for a word of love, a touch, and a prayer, a blessing in Christ’s name. This graciousness has been universal thus far. Everyone has a story. Every story is filled with significance and meaning and pain and death and lives spared. The most significant factor here in Haiti is a people who — in the midst the greatest chaos, corruption, and government dereliction in the hemisphere — manage to rise each day to a new task, a new opportunity, a new hope. And the majority of those I’ve met are Christians, know they are baptized, and say things like, “Pastor, I don’t know... I just trust in God.”

We will be able, are able to help such a relatively small number of those affected. For some reason, Jesus’ parable of the shepherd who leaves the 99 to seek the one, turns in my mind and has been doing so all day today. Our vocation is not to save the ninety-nine, but to seek the one. One at a time. One here and one there. One child cared for. One person nursed to health. One life saved. One hurting soul comforted with the name of Jesus. Our vocation is not to change Haiti, or to change the whole world, or to change the economic realities with which Haitians wrestle. Our vocation is to act and make a life-changing difference one at a time. And acting one at a time, we find that over some hours, over a few days, and over a couple of weeks, the flock of those helped in the name of Jesus has grown to be surprisingly large.

Pastor Matthew Harrison
Executive Director, LCMS World Relief and Human Care

