



UNITED METHODIST VOLUNTEERS IN MISSION
Christian Love in Action!

MISSION VOLUNTEER TEAMS FROM US NOW AT WORK WITH HAITIAN METHODISTS

By Elliot Wright

New York, NY, May 20, 2010--United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) teams from the United States are now working in collaboration with Haitian Methodists in post-earthquake cleanup and rebuilding.

The first two teams in early May were from the Kansas East and North Alabama Annual Conferences. Those groups are now back home and additional teams have gone from the Alabama-West Florida and Rocky Mountain Conferences, as well as one from several parts of the country organized by the Northeastern Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church. About three teams per week are anticipated in the immediate future.

"We are currently engaged in deconstruction, reconstruction, and meeting community-based needs," said the Rev. Mike Willis, who is coordinating the Haiti volunteer program in Port-au-Prince in close coordination with leaders of the Methodist Church in Haiti. "We are leveling and building temporary structures, many of which are for Methodist schools."

Teams Scheduled into 2011

"There are 52 teams scheduled through 2010," said Susan Meister, who is the calendar coordinator for a Haiti pilot project developed by the Methodist Church in Haiti, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), UMVIM, and the Mission Volunteers Office of the General Board of Global Ministries. Twenty-six more teams await date clearance and another 30 have requested dates into 2011.

"It is only now that volunteers can be effectively and safely deployed to Haiti," said Jerald McKie, an executive with Global Ministries who has been involved in setting up the pilot. "We had to be concerned with transportation and supplies, and accommodations for the volunteers." The Haiti teams, organized by congregations or annual conferences, consist of up to 10 persons who have received training from UMVIM with a team leader with previous experience in Haiti, Meister explained. "When an appropriate team is formed, I am contacted and we work out a date. A team works in Haiti for seven to nine days."

"We now have five primary work sites," he said. "Teams follow a week or so apart, and we are also hiring local Haitians to work alongside the volunteers." The first projects include the rebuilding of a wall at a Methodist boy's home, and the rebuilding of a school in the village of Mellier.

The Haiti volunteer effort is a partnership among UMVIM, UMCOR, and Global Ministries. Each UMVIM team contributes of \$3,500 per project, with construction matching grants from a \$565,000 allocation by UMCOR for the six-month pilot.

At sites a distance from Port-au-Prince, team members are sleeping in tents. Projects in the city or close by make it possible for teams to stay at a Methodist guesthouse that has long been a rallying place for mission volunteers.

"There are still shortages of gasoline and material prices have escalated 10 to 15 percent," Willis said, "but we are able to obtain sand, gravel, concrete, plywood, and materials for roofs. It is very hot at this time of year and rains are increasing, so shelter for classrooms is essential."

Staff and Process

The project has three staff members. Meister lives in Belleville, Illinois, and works from her home. Willis is a pastor from Vestal, New York. He speaks Creole and has been in Haiti more than 20 times with UMVIM work teams. Nagle worked with volunteer teams in Louisiana following Hurricane Katrina, and will be joining Willis in Haiti.

Over the past four months, thousands of people registered online as potential volunteers in Haiti. News of the volunteer work in Haiti can be followed on a website, umvimhaiti.org. A digital newsletter on the work is also being sent to all those persons who have registered online as volunteers, and to other interested persons