

Members in Haiti Moving Forward, Firm in the Gospel

By Lauren Allen
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When an earthquake struck Haiti in January 2010, Jean-Elie René raced home to make sure his family was safe. Upon arrival, he spotted one of his three sons crying in the street, and he could hear the screams of another son from beneath the rubble where the family's home once stood.

The 32-year-old father followed the cries and dug through the rubble until he found his five-year-old son and the body of his pregnant wife, still sheltering their nine-month-old baby from the collapsed roof of their home.

Brother René serves as ward clerk in the Leogane Ward, Port-au-Prince Haiti Stake. Although he lost his wife, his unborn child, and his home, he doesn't complain or get angry about his situation. Most days following the earthquake, Brother René could be found at the

meetinghouse, with the baby on his lap and his two other boys at his side, helping the bishop coordinate relief to ward members and others who made the meetinghouse their temporary home.

The story of Brother René is touching, but it is not unique. Members of the Church throughout Haiti suffered greatly from the magnitude 7.0 earthquake's destruction, but the calamity served to reveal the strength of Haiti's growing membership. Like Brother René, many members—both longtime and first-generation members alike—rose to the challenges and found peace and comfort in faithfulness and obedience.

Proven in Trial

Throughout their trials, members of the Church in Haiti have stood strong in the gospel as they continue to care for and strengthen each other and those in their communities.

"It is true that all we possessed, even our material possessions and our families, disappeared. But our faith in Jesus Christ was not destroyed," said Yves Pierre-Louis, bishop of the Leogane Ward. "It was a good opportunity for us to evaluate ourselves as disciples of Christ."

Local priesthood

leaders in particular were a great example of faith and testimony as they rose to the challenge, learning to fulfill their callings in difficult times and help others in need, said Elder Francisco J. Viñas of the Seventy, Caribbean Area President.

"They used their priesthood keys to bless the lives of members and nonmembers," he said. "They worked in council and received guidance from the Spirit to deal with the difficult challenges day by day."

The aftermath of the earthquake's destruction created a challenge, particularly for bishops in Haiti, said Prosner Colin, president of the Port-au-Prince Haiti Stake. Bishops and other Church leaders were left responsible for the care and aid of hundreds of ward members, as well as their own families.

"[The bishops] continue to help," President Colin said. "They understand that they lost many things, but they have the gospel. They encourage [members] to continue to live worthily."

Bishop Pierre-Louis became a community leader after the earthquake. Through the weeks and months following the devastation in Haiti, he devoted his life to the service of members and nonmembers in Leogane—tending to the needs of hundreds.

"He is the most amazing, humble servant you will ever meet," said Chad Peterson, a doctor from Arizona who spent time with Bishop Pierre-Louis as a volunteer following the earthquake.

Faith for Now and the Future

Many stories have been shared of members throughout Haiti whose resilience and faith in the Lord carried them through their trials.

"Though the faithful Haitian Saints have suffered greatly, they are filled with hope for the future," said Elder Wilford W. Anderson of the Seventy in his April 2010



general conference address. “Like the early pioneers in 1846, their hearts are broken, but their spirits are strong. They too are teaching us that hope and happiness and joy are not products of circumstance but of faith in the Lord.”

A demonstration of such obedience and faith was found when, immediately following the earthquake, Church meetings proceeded without interruption.

Regardless of the destruction of their country, members in Haiti arrived at church clothed in their Sunday best, wearing smiles on their faces. The gospel was the lifeline many relied on to pull them from their sorrow and despair.

“Despite losing their homes, jobs, and family members, the people are so loving, trusting, and good-natured. They have amazing faith,” Brother Peterson said.

Today, the Church continues to flourish in Haiti. Attendance in sacrament meeting has increased, President Colin said, and the people in Haiti continue to work to rebuild their communities.

“The members are doing well to serve others,” he said. “They visit them; they are looking for job opportunities for themselves and for the others.”

Berthony Theodor, a native Haitian and the director of welfare in Haiti, says he and other current and future leaders of the Church in Haiti gained valuable experience as a result of the disaster.

“We have the opportunity to serve others, showing them once again how much we love them,” he said. “We have come to learn once again that we are not alone in the world, that we are members of the people of the Lord.”

Brother Theodor said the earthquake—or any other disaster—couldn’t take away the peace or joy of members in Haiti.

“It’s my testimony that the Lord never forgets his children,” he said. “He knows where I am, my situation. He won’t ever leave me alone.” ■



Church Aid

Immediately after the January 2010 quake, the Church sent relief supplies to Haiti. Teams of medical personnel soon followed, setting up clinics in meetinghouses and working with local hospitals to help perform needed surgeries.

But as some semblance of stability returned to Haiti, the Church began transitioning its aid from relief to recovery, providing resources to help reestablish self-reliance and get the people back on their feet.

These resources included establishing small food facilities similar to bishops’ storehouses and sending materials for 600 transitional shelters—put together by members in Haiti—to provide shelter to the homeless during the hurricane season.

The Church also developed a medical referral program staffed by local Haitian doctors to help members receive aid and resources. LDS Family Services was also involved in training Haitians to provide emotional counseling to those struggling to cope with their situation.

The Church strengthened its employment program in Haiti, making employment specialists available to help members find jobs and microbusiness opportunities.

“We are thankful for all the support the Church brought for the members in Haiti,” said Bishop Yves Pierre-Louis. ■