

UPDATE ON HAITI

Pat Hansen

We made our fifth trip of the year to Haiti in July for a teacher-training program and to celebrate the anniversary of Bethanie Lutheran Church in Sarthe. Travelers this time included three ladies from Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Venice: Ms. Truda Bianco, Beverly Granger and Kathy Winemiller. Kathy's son, Pastor Steve Winemiller from Faith Lutheran in Sarasota came with us as well.

Although we all tried to take pictures inside Bethanie Church during the celebration, it was too crowded and too dark. But, the congregation was joyful and filled with exuberance because the first floor of their sanctuary had been safely built with funds from Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Venice. Representatives from Pastor Mony Vilbrun's other four churches in Haiti were present and a telephone call from a parishioner in the United States was broadcast live to the congregation. Charcoal smoke from the tiny kitchen area in the back of the sanctuary began to float across the entire church until a young man hoisted himself up on the concrete block wall and removed the temporary roof over the cooking area. Women of the congregation were preparing rice, beans, pickles (pick-tees: a hot relish) cabbage/carrot salad and goat for the feast that was to follow the worship services.

The women of Emmanuel Lutheran Church gave a wonderful altar cross and candlesticks to the church and contributed \$100 for the food. Pastor Steve Winemiller and Beverly Granger addressed the congregation assuring them of the friendship their Lutheran counterparts in Florida had for Haitian Lutherans. There had been reports of a possible disruption by members of the Church of God located very near Bethanie Lutheran, but all was quiet except for the enthusiastic and jubilant singing by the Bethanie Lutheran congregation and special groups from the other visiting Lutheran congregations.

We were able to visit two other FELD'HA churches-- one in Delmas (Port-au-Prince) and the other in Des Chapelles where Pastor Mony may have to close the school because he cannot pay the teachers who should be earning from \$250 to \$300 a month for their work. We also visited the Lazarus Project, Village of Hope, which has a model school for Haitian children in the Croix-des-Bouquets area. We are praying to find funding so that our Lutheran schools can someday be so well supported.

Teacher training was conducted for five days at a retreat center in Carrefour, Haiti. Pastor Steve gave a presentation on the meaning of Luther's Crest and the certificates the teachers received at the end of the training session included a seal with the Crest. Every morning there was a time for guided meditation and singing.

Over thirty participants from thirteen schools (coming from Jean-Rabel in the north to Poste-Droit in the southeast) were actively involved in learning about and preparing lessons according to Piaget's framework for teaching children. The teachers worked as well on mathematical problems and tried to determine how to teach children without using paper, pencils and books. The four Haitian teacher-trainers who worked with the teachers are professionals with a subsidiary of Beyond Borders called Limye Lavi. You can learn more about Beyond Borders through their website at www.Beyondborders.net. We contract for their services because although American teachers are well trained they do not totally understand the problems, culture, language and needs of Haitian teachers.

We had a long meeting with the five Lutheran pastors of FELD'HA trying to determine priorities for the next year. I will be preparing a report on that meeting to send to members of the Florida-Bahamas Haiti Committee and members of the Global Mission Committee. On a very sad note we learned that one of the pastors is now homeless and living temporarily with relatives who are unhappy with the situation. This is because he has not been able to get the \$2,000 he needs for rent. Landlords will not rent on a month-to-month basis. They lease only on a 12 month basis. None of the pastors are paid and exist on funds derived from other sources. Pastor Alfred Eniel, for example, teaches part-time at three different schools. The homes of the pastors are very spartan concrete block structures without reliable electricity or on-site running water. We pray that God will be with them and us as we continue to develop the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Haiti.