

Eglise Methodiste d'Haiti's All Partners Conference and the 200 anniversary celebrations February 2017

The All Partners Consultation meeting began after the 2010 earthquake as a way of coordinating the support offered by international partners of the *Eglise Methodiste d'Haiti* (EMH). Among the partners present this year were The United Church of Canada, a number of United Methodist Church Conferences, the General Board of Global Ministries, UMCOR and the Methodist Missionary Society in Ireland.

The topics that were covered were the areas of the church's work which had the most partnership support from overseas, namely in the areas of health, agriculture, education and credit unions. The other issue was as to whether the price of the guest houses ought to increase to support income generation for the church (every manse in Haiti is also a guest house for VIM teams and other visitors). Those UMC conferences who send a large number of Volunteer in Mission Teams to work in Haiti expressed that this could be an issue as the costs of VIM teams going to Haiti would consequently increase. It was decided however that for the financial health of the church the price of the guest houses should increase.

It was good to have MMSI represented for the first time at the Conference by Revd. Laurence Graham, and in discussion with him we concluded that it would be a better use of all our resources if we joined forces to alternate our attendance to enable only one of us to represent MMSI and MCB in Haiti.

During the conference there was a minute of silence for the late Lauren James (UMCOR Haiti Liaison). Feelings around her death are still very raw and her work and life in Haiti were celebrated and remembered. I had the chance to meet Jean-Claude Luis, the Haitian who is continuing her work for EMH and UMCOR. He will be a good contact for us in terms of helping us source photos and has agreed to help us in this in the conversations we had.

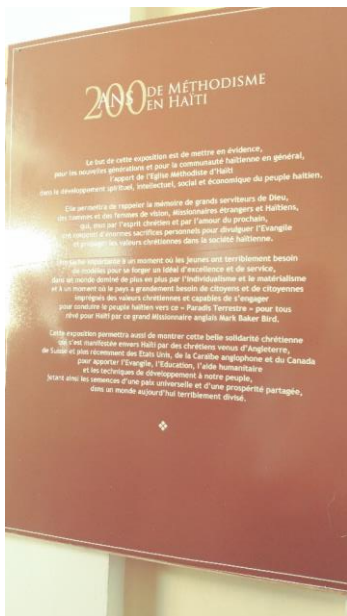
Although Bishop Gesner Paul was busy with arrangement for the celebrations, we did get a chance to speak about the remaining money in the Haiti Hurricane Matthew Appeal. The church would like to use it for the following areas of need:



- 1) to set up additional mobile clinics to teach areas that have not yet received medical attention
- 2) to purchase food to accompany the seedling that will be handed out to communities in need so that they can have a level of food security while they tend to their crops and while they wait to harvest them
- 3) a school feeding programme for the children in the affected areas as food security continues to be a great

issue for these communities.

The church will soon be sending me a budget paper on how the funds will be distributed over these three key areas of need.



THE 200 YEAR ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

Eglise Methodiste D'Haiti was the first protestant church in Haiti, established by request of Haitian president Alexander Pétion, in 1815. He wrote to the Methodist missionary society in London and requested Methodist missionaries to go to Haiti and help develop education in the country. After a period of persecution by the Roman Catholic Church, expulsion of the missionaries from Haiti and peaceful resistance of Haitian Methodists during this difficult time, freedom of religion was enshrined in the 1983 constitution. The church currently has approximately 70,000 members and is growing. It has 120 schools and 11 clinics across the country. The Methodist church in Britain has enjoyed a long partnership with EMH and one of MCB's celebrated minister, red Lord Leslie Griffiths and his wife Margaret Griffiths served in Haiti for 10 years in the 70s. They were present at the celebrations and were indeed a part of them as rev Leslie launched his book 'Methodism in Haiti' in French. We have a signed copy of the book in English in the WCR library. The

Methodist Missionary Society in Ireland also has strong links with Haiti. Revd. Ormond McConnell was a minister there, arriving in 1935 and pioneering literacy in Haitian Kreyol across the country, when previously it had been said that Kreyol could not be written. Anne McConnell, granddaughter of Ormond McConnell and who was also born in Haiti, was present throughout the celebrations and was clearly moved by seeing her grandfather and her father (also a minister in Haiti) in the displays of the exhibition on Methodism in Haiti that was commissioned by EMH. The exhibition charted the entire history of Methodism in the country and highlighted both Haitian and overseas missionaries that had been instrumental in the development of the movement across the country. Anne was also in Haiti to lay the groundwork for the youth group visit taking place in July where 8 young people from the Methodist church in Britain will be visiting Haiti to learn, to listen and to give as they share their skills and talents with Haitian youth. She spent time making a risk assessment of the future group visit which is an important exercise given that Haiti is prone to natural disasters.



Revd. Laurence Graham of the Methodist church in Ireland was also a mission partner in Haiti some 20 years ago, and he spent time before the celebrations began visiting the hurricane affected areas and spending time with local Haitian Methodists discussion the theme for his presidential year as a way of enabling world church input to shape the work he will be doing during that time.

The celebrations also included a wonderful exhibition on the history of Methodism, curated in the New College Bird Methodist School in Port-au-Prince. There was also a gala held with 600 invited guests from every church circuit, and Haitian politics. It was a fine affair with brilliant church choirs, orchestral music and presentations by prominent Haitian Methodists. There was also a presentation of plaques specially made to honor the overseas partners who have partnered with Haiti over many years. The plaque presented to the Methodist church in Britain is in our office if you would like to see it! We also presented the church with a specially commissioned plaque to mark our long partnership with the church.

There were two further major events during the celebrations. There was a wonderful graduation ceremony of over 150 local preachers who had passed their local preacher's training. There was such a sense of pride in their achievements and gratitude to God for the opportunity to formally study the local preacher's course which was organized by the United Methodist Church's Michigan Conference and Sharon Harbottle, who did an incredible amount of work to make it happen on the ground. Some local preachers had already been preaching for over 40



years, so to have their service to God recognized in that way was special. Our own Sharon Harbottle received her certificate of recognition after 40 years of being a local preacher and it was such a joy to see her receive this in Haiti along with the other local preachers.



The final grand celebration I attended was the celebration service on Sunday 7 February. It was a four and a half hour service, but did not feel quite as long as we joined in with over 1000 people at New College Bird Methodist Church and others who would have been watching the service on TV in Haiti and on the radio. We praised God together for all He had done in Haiti through hymns in French and Kreyol. I have never heard hymns so powerfully and meaningfully sung as I have in Haiti. The wall of sound and praise to God that hit me was incredible! We listened to an impassioned preaching by Bishop Gesner Paul, exhorting Methodists and the wider Haitian community to support the incoming government of Jovenel Moise and to play a positive part in reconstructing Haiti. We heard greetings from a variety of people such as the president of the protestant federation in Haiti and representatives from the new government, as well as special messages from all the overseas partners present. It was a truly wonderful celebration of all that God has done in the country and a demonstration of the hope and trust that Haitian Methodists continue to place in God despite the incredible challenges facing the country.

Sandra Lopez, Partnership Coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean, 22.02.17





Rev. Griffiths presenting the EMH with a gift-a bust of John Wesley.



The church choir