

Visit Report – Haiti

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Eglise Methodiste Haiti (EMH) Partnership Conference

September 6 – 11, 2014

Journeying Together – Marche Ensemble

Towards sustainability!



Aims:

1. To take part in the 2014 EMH Partnership Conference and network with other churches and development agencies involved with EMH
2. To represent All We Can (AWC) at the above conference
3. To carry out a partnership visit to John and Sharon Harbottle – MCB Mission Partners in Haiti
4. To gain a greater understanding of the work of EMH and the Methodist Church of the Caribbean and Central America (MCCA)

Introduction:

“Jesus loves you!” said the young Haitian women at JFK airport as I awoke from a short nap as we waited for the boarding gate to open. How should I respond? “Thank you”? That rather closes down conversation. Maybe “and you”? That didn’t sound right inside my head. So instead I asked in my best schoolboy French “Quelle eglise?” She did tell me but I was none the wiser! Then she asked me and smiled when I said “Eglise Methodiste.”

It set me thinking. How often do I tell a complete stranger that Jesus loves them? Have I ever? I don’t think so!

Walking to the minibus in the Port au Prince airport car park, a couple of 4x4s catch my eye. One has a sun strip across the top of the windscreen, not with ‘Daren & Tracey’ on it but ‘I ♥ Jesus’. The other has so many stickers of the Virgin Mary and crucifixes on the windscreen there is no way the driver can see where he is going! (I later found out that whilst driving around Port au Prince this is an obvious advantage!) Faith and church are not just very much in the public domain in Haiti, they are part of life itself for so many people. And yet every shop, house, tin shack or piece of fenced land is securely barred, bolted or covered in razor wire. Many shops have armed security guards on the doors and the blue berets of the UN forces (still armed) can be seen on street corners, roof tops and in the occasional armoured vehicle.



Personalised Number Plate – Haitian Style



Talk to Haitians about the earthquake and you begin to notice the hidden trauma. The fear of a repeat quake is deep seated. With estimates of between 180,000 and 350,000 killed in the 2010 earthquake and damage to so many properties and livelihoods, all were affected in some way or other. A large number of buildings have been either rebuilt or repaired. Most of the damaged buildings that were beyond repair have been demolished – the main exception being the iconic Catholic Cathedral which now stands alone as a symbol of the devastation in the same way as the old Coventry Cathedral serves as a poignant reminder of conflicts past.

Despite some empty sites there are plenty of new buildings and concrete structures part way through completion. In the historic centre there does appear to be a plan for regeneration. The former palace is completely demolished and the new treasury building is reaching up to the skies. Most other rebuilds seem to have kept to the 'keep it low' principle and have not gone above the second storey.

After any disaster people move on and get on with life, and in many ways that is the case in Haiti. However it will be two or more generations before the scars begin to fade from the memories of those who have lived through the ordeal. The EMH is a part of the story and part of the rebuilding of lives, emotions, faith and the physical infrastructure of schools, clinics and places of worship.

Itinerary:

4 th Sept	Depart UK
5 th Sept	Arrive Port Au Prince, Haiti. Transfer to hotel and meet John and Sharon Harbottle
6 th Sept	Visit to Vialet, Petit-Goave & Mellier
7 th Sept	Worship at Port au Prince (New College Bird)
8 th – 11 th Sept	Conference session
11 th Sept	Depart Haiti
12 th Sept	Arrive UK

Visits:



Brakeman School, Petit-Goave

This school had recently completed a second storey extension for classrooms, offices and a dedicated computer room complete with about a dozen older looking laptops. Another classroom block was under construction next to the sports pitch. Classrooms were in good condition and had bench-desks for the children, including some very new ones again funded by United Methodist Volunteer in Mission (UMVIM) team participants.

Saturday morning started at 07.30 with a drive to Brakeman School in Petit-Goave. School term has not yet started for the new school year. It should be starting this week but until there is sufficient Government money to pay the teachers in the government schools, the church schools cannot open either - even though the churches are responsible for paying the teachers at the church schools! Like all the places visited on Saturday, both the funding and much of the work had come from UMC churches in the States.

This school had recently completed a



Sharon in a new classroom at Brakeman school



Operating theatre at Siloa Eye Clinic

Next stop was a specialist eye clinic at Siloa run by the EMH. This clinic is funded almost completely by a single church in the States. This too has had a very smart additional building erected recently. There is good equipment and an operating theatre. Patients are charged, but at a minimal and affordable cost. Operations for cataracts and glaucoma can be done here and the specialist eye surgeon comes up from Port au Prince a couple of times a week.

The visit continued to the rural training centre at Violet. This centre has obviously been very active in the past but due to internal church politics some years ago it was not seen as a priority and was allowed to become run down and cease operation. There is now a move to get the place up and running to teach agriculture including propagation of tree saplings and planting through community involvement. The former piggery, poultry unit, generator, tractor maintenance workshop, dormitories and office are all in need of serious renovation – all requiring a large input of cash to renovate buildings and a strategy for resourcing courses, staff or students if it is to reopen.



The Piggery at Violet



Inside the new church at Mellier

The final stop, as a group, was to the new church at Mellier. A cathedral like structure in size with full balconies was very near completion with just some tiling required on the floor of the main sanctuary. Again this had been built by UVMIM teams. The building is also used as a school during the week which would seem to be effective use of such a large property that would otherwise get little mid-week use. Despite this, there are plans to build a separate school next door so they did not need to use the church!

Travelling with John and Sharon (and Daniel the first year UK medical student in Haiti for a month) we drove up to the EMH centre at Feres with the offices, guesthouse and annexe, school, kindergarten and staff housing – including John and Sharon's house. It was good to spend time in conversation with them to hear about their work, their experiences, their colleagues and some of their hopes for the future.

Sunday morning was given over to church at the Church of the Resurrection in Port au Prince. This church also was a large building erected some years ago to replace the old church next door, which is now used as the church hall. (The old church survived the earthquake intact whilst the current church lost its tower but apart from that remained standing.) The service was just over three hours long and in French with the very occasional Creole song. Being 7th September meant that we were celebrating the first Sunday of the Connexional year so it was also Eucharist. It was difficult to tell how many people were present (my guess, about 600) as all the visitors were sat on the front few rows making it difficult to turn round and see everyone. Most of the singing was to the organ though the "12 Apostles" choir were supported by a keyboard and bass guitar. This Sunday also happened to be Revd Marco Depestre's (District Secretary) last Sunday in Haiti before he left for Jamaica for further study. This resulted in plenty of 'good-byes' happening after the service.



After the service at the Church of the Resurrection



The memorial to those killed at the hotel during the earthquake

John and Sharon had already planned to take me up to the Montana Hotel for lunch and to see the views over Port au Prince. The hotel was badly damaged in the earthquake and two of the UMCOR staff staying there at the time were killed in the collapsed buildings. This is the site of the memorial garden that was shown in the first MCB 'Haiti Update'.

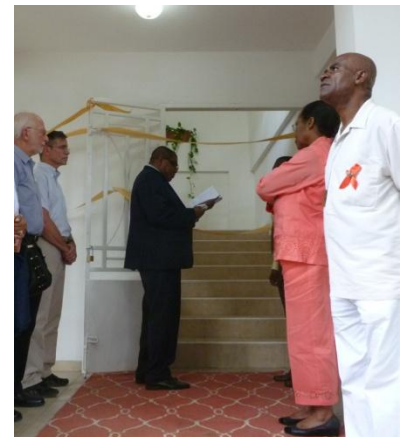
The afternoon was focussed around two openings of new builds. Firstly the dedication of the extended guest house at the Church's headquarters. This new annexe has been added to ensure enough space is available when the VIM teams come to Haiti and also to allow EMH to generate more income from en-suite rooms. The annexe itself has been funded and built by VIM teams.



Second Floor extension at the Kindergarten, Ferres

The second dedication was that of the newly built first floor classrooms for the kindergarten next to the secondary school at Ferres. These rooms, due to be used for the first time the following morning, were well equipped with little tables and chairs, toys and letter and number charts around the walls. The kindergarten is becoming

more popular as parents wish to have their young children educated / cared for close to the same venue as where their older children are going to school. This extension and the increased number of children should in theory also generate income for the Church.



Cutting the Ribbon at the Guest House Annexe Opening Ceremony

The opening and dedication of the new school block of New College Bird took place on Tuesday 9th. The new building replaces one that was erected after a fire some years ago, which was then destroyed completely in the earthquake. Thankfully there was no loss of life at the school. The new block consists of classrooms, staff room, toilets, offices, library and computer room. It is built round a pleasant quadrangle which contains the only tree on the site to survive the earthquake. The new build has been designed to utilise the big metal security doors from the old building – again linking the pre and post disaster schools. There were plenty of speeches from officials to school children interspersed with hymns and prayers – the whole proceedings being recorded by the local television and radio companies.



Outside New College Bird

Partners Conference Programme:

The programme for the Partners Conference took place from 8th Sept through to lunchtime on 11th Sept at The Plaza Hotel in Port au Prince. The official theme of the gathering was 'Journeying Together – Marche Ensemble. Towards Sustainability!'

The programme was designed to showcase the work that EMH is currently involved in and how that can be developed to become self sustainable in the future. Overseas partners were then to be given an opportunity to present how their relationship impacted on the life of the Church.

The brief for the presentations was:-

that each partner come prepared to offer a definition of what “sustainability” means to that partner. Additionally, each partner should be prepared to suggest how both EMH and Partners can better contribute to sustainability of 1) EMH in its mission and ministry and 2) the EMH and Partner relationships.

Over the few days of the conference, different partners gave their presentations and developed discussions around the tables of delegates. These included reports on schools education, agriculture, micro finance, Christian education and health – all key areas of the Church’s work.

When comparing the progress of the work of EMH to the previous year’s consultation it was clear that some departments had been able to make more progress than others. Health, Christian education and agriculture were all showing small but positive developments.

However it was clear from the school education report that EMH is a long way off self sustainability within both primary and secondary schools. There are arrears in the payments of teachers’ salaries that need to be met and some questions about the viability of some of the 120 plus schools that EMH is running.

Most of the partners were from the United States (MCB and the United Church in Canada being the only exceptions). The American partners were a mix of representatives from different Conferences, individual churches and GBGM/UMCOR. Some individual churches and Conferences send significant amounts of funding Sadly there was little or no communication between these partners who on the whole seemed to ‘adopt’ an area of work (eg a secondary school or clinic) and use this as a sole point of focus for their funding, interest and personnel support. Naturally with this type of relationship there a small number of institutions in EMH that are funded well and are performing well. However there at some other places in Haiti that do not receive this support and currently have no sustainable income of their own. This creates difficulties for the EMH as it tries to develop the work in line with its own priorities rather than those who are funding specific pieces of work.

The World Mission Fund is a relatively small funder to Haiti and our relationship is valued through our personnel commitment (Mission Partners and NMAs) more than our cash. I was able to give a short presentation on how MCB can continue to engage in much the same way as we currently do, whilst John gave a presentation on behalf of AWC outlining their additional planned support over the coming years. Being amongst other partners where even single churches are regularly funding to the US\$1 million level, much of the debate / argument (which was very useful to hear) informed but did not directly affect our current relationship. However the issues that these discussions raised are key to both WCR and to AWC as it increases its funding through EMH.



John Harbottle presenting the work of
All we Can

Mission Partners:

It was a joy to spend time with Sharon and John Harbottle. I have known the Harbottles for the last 25 years but this was the first time that I have seen them in ‘action’ outside the UK. They are both fulfilling key roles within the church and have been fully welcomed into the church community.



Sharon at the Organ!

John’s work is clearly paying dividends as the organisational structure and strategy for health work are developed. The appointment of Dr Benjamin has increased capacity and with the American missionary at the clinic on Gonave an effective team is being built. John is trying to work with the medical volunteers and VIM teams in an effort to obtain better reporting about the volunteers’ work and the patients they treat. Currently this is not fully reported making follow up treatment, coordination and monitoring very difficult. Sharon is working within the Christian Education Department producing material for trainee preachers, Sunday School teachers, ministers and youth workers. Her work role seems to

continue to widen and she is an active local preacher and organist. Her background as a teacher gives inspiration to those she works with and is invaluable as the team roll out the training material across the circuits. (See the Harbottle's latest newsletter for more details)



John and Sharon Harbottle, MCB Mission Partners, Haiti

D Friswell
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