

CBF begins partnership to aid Haitians_32204

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By Bob Perkins Jr.

CBF Communications

ATLANTA-The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship will begin a partnership in Haiti to address the needs of the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and one of the poorest in the world.

The initial \$16,000 donation will be made with World Vision, a Christian organization and formal partner of the Fellowship committed to holistic development.

To endow a social services program for women and children at the Port-Au-Prince prison, \$10,000 will be earmarked for pastoral care, legal fees and support for income-generating activities. The remaining amount will be used for cistern/well construction to serve several schools where children currently spend much of their days without access to water.

According to United Nations statistics, Haiti ranks 212th out of 238 countries on the human development chart and has among the lowest gross national product per capita figures in the world at \$250, compared to the United States at nearly \$27,000.

While there are some encouraging signs in the country, with 96 percent of

the population considered to be Christian, and some church-related activity ongoing in the country, the Fellowship's involvement is intended to initiate long-term transformational development among the population that has been seriously neglected by the government.

"There has been a lot of church planting activity in Haiti in the past, but the poverty issues seem to have been overlooked, including basic human need issues such as clean water, access to health care and education for children," said David Harding, the CBF's director of emergency response. "Our partnership with World Vision will bring a more holistic approach to meeting the needs of the Haitian people."

Suffering from challenging social-economic problems stemming from a history of governmental instability and abuse, the Haitian people face both a lack of resources and health issues such as malaria, tuberculosis, malnutrition and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

According to World Vision, only 46 percent of the Haitian population has access to safe water, and only 25 percent can afford appropriate sanitary facilities. Haiti has the highest Western Hemisphere mortality rate for children under five (125 per 1,000), and maternal mortality rate at delivery is estimated at 520 per 100,000 live births. Haiti has only 1.1 doctors, 1.2 nurses and 0.4 dentists per 10,000 inhabitants.

Compounding these infrastructure concerns is the highest national HIV/AIDS infection rate in Latin America and the Caribbean. Approximately 239,000 people are living with HIV, and each year, more than 4,000 newborns are infected by the virus. Nearly 155,000 children are orphaned by AIDS.

Harding said several Fellowship churches have been doing work in Haiti.

"There are churches with their own sense of missions work that are doing some wonderful things," Harding said. "We want to help connect others to

this joint effort and build a lasting CBF relationship with our Haitian friends."

The CBF and World Vision have developed a list of volunteer opportunities in agriculture, computer technology, education, healthcare, infrastructure and social work. These assignments can be as short as two to three days or as long as six months. For more information, contact the CBF volunteer office at (877) 856-9288.

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