

African-American Baptist groups pledge \$50 million for Haiti

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CHICAGO (ABP) — America's five largest historically African-American Baptist organizations are cooperating to raise \$50 million to help rebuild Haiti and provide aid to victims of a Jan. 12 earthquake that devastated the area surrounding the capital of Port-au-Prince.

Called the African-American Baptist Mission Collaboration, the joint effort marks the first time the groups representing 40,000 church congregations and 10 million Christians nationwide have worked together on such a large scale.

"The images coming from Haiti are devastating," T. DeWitt Smith, Jr., president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, said at a March 2 press conference announcing the initiative in Chicago. "Our vision for Haiti, however, is not limited to the images we've seen. We will work with Haitian partners to rebuild strong homes, churches, schools and clinics."

Smith was joined at the press conference by Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention; National Baptist Convention, USA; National Missionary Baptist Convention of America; and National Baptist Convention of America.

"African-American Baptists know what it means to support one another through devastation," said David Emmanuel Goatley, executive secretary-treasurer of Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention and the coordinator for the African American Baptist Mission Collaboration. "We know what it means to care for children through extended families. We are

committed to work on behalf of those who are most vulnerable in the aftermath of this tragedy and to labor to help children know safety, security, and nurturing care."

Funds raised for the collaboration — mostly from local churches — will provide assistance for plans including five health care clinics to provide restorative health services and wellness, 50 schools with enhanced learning environments, 500 reconstructed churches to serve as center points for community empowerment and 5,000 homes to house victims left homeless following the earthquake.

The coalition is already working together on weekly deployment of medical professionals to provide critical medical services and care and daily feeding programs in Port-au-Prince and Saint-Marc that provide hundreds of meals a day.

Other components include providing water, energy supplies, cash grants and groceries to families and individuals in need. In February, 1,000 families who lost homes in Legoane (near the earthquake's epicenter) and communities to the west of Port-au-Prince received a total of \$30,000 in cash and grocery grants.

"Providing immediate response to immediate needs has been critical," said Stephen John Thurston, president of the National Baptist Convention of America and senior pastor of the New Covenant Baptist Church. "Having existing working relationships with established churches in the country enabled us to move swiftly to provide food, water, temporary shelter and pastoral care. This is reminiscent of the immediate support that churches gave to people in our own country in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina in 2005."

In addition to the announcement by the five denominational leaders, American Baptist Churches USA announced March 3 that an additional

\$21,600 in One Great Hour of Sharing funds has been sent to an International Ministries' partner in Haiti. The amount is in addition to the \$105,000 already provided to IM's various Christian partners in Haiti.

The latest support is designated specifically to the Convention of Baptists in Haiti for its Feeding the Hungry project, which will provide food to families who have lost a loved one as a result of the earthquake. The project is slated to help these families with daily food provisions for the next three months.

Many children have become orphans, and many widowed women are now single parents. A number of men who did survive have no means of providing food for their families since there are no available employment opportunities.

Among CBH churches, 30 members lost their lives to the earthquake, 306 were severely injured and another 107 people were wounded. Structural damage among the homes of congregational members included the total destruction of 438 houses and the partial destruction of 673.

"This type of assistance is critical for families who are already struggling because of the loss of family members or homes. Said José Norat Rodríguez, IM area director of Iberoamerica and the Caribbean. "We join the leaders and members of CBH in giving thanks to God for this tangible demonstration of love, which is but one expression of our important partnership."

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