

TBM volunteers see God's wisdom & God's intervention in Haiti

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[Texas Baptist Men](#) volunteers returned from a recent mission trip to Haiti offering testimonials to the power of prayer, the reality of divine intervention and the superiority of God's ways over human plans.



Roy Heifrin (left), a Texas Baptist Men volunteer from Lancaster, works on preliminary forms to expedite the work of future mission teams who will help construct a facility for Croix Hillaire Baptist Church and School near Petit Goave, Haiti.



As they clear rubble from the building site for Croix Hillaire Baptist Church and School near Petit Goave, Haiti, women balanced cinderblocks, rocks and chunks of concrete on their heads, the way they normally carry bundles or buckets. (PHOTO/Texas Baptist Men)

The 10-member team helped clear away rubble where an earthquake destroyed the facilities of Croix Hillaire Baptist Church and School near Petit Goave. Working alongside members of the church, the TBM volunteers prepared the site so future teams can help the Haitians rebuild.

When the volunteers arrived in Haiti, they encountered delays and challenges at every turn—particularly regarding anything mechanical or electrical.

"It seemed nothing worked right the first time," noted Ray Skrobarcek, a volunteer from River Oaks Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, near LaVernia. As a construction project manager, Skrobarcek acknowledged he arrived with his own preconceived ideas about how the job should be accomplished—ideas that had to be adjusted daily.

The team faced a major obstacle when the small front-end loader they had rented to clear rubble refused to work. But a 23-year-old Haitian, Charlie, who had "just showed up to help," offered wise works of counsel.

"On the second day, he said: 'You have many people here. God wants us to work together. Much can be accomplished if we work together,'" Skrobarcek recalled.



Ray Skrobarcek, a Texas Baptist Men volunteer from River Oaks Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, near LaVernia, works alongside Haitians to clear rubble to prepare a building site for Croix Hillaire Baptist Church and School near Petit Goave, Haiti. (PHOTO/Texas Baptist Men)

Heeding his advice, the TBM volunteers and local workers began clearing rubble by "antpiling—working like an army of ants moving little pieces one at a time," said Ernie Rice, mission team leader and a member of First Baptist Church in Stockdale.

"Our goal from the beginning was to build relationships with the church there and encourage the church as it reaches out to its community. The challenge was making those relationships click," said Rice said.

"When we starting working together, then it started to gel. That Bobcat we rented never functioned, but that made us all pitch in and work together. It got the whole church involved in antpiling."

The degree of Haitian involvement surprised the team members to some degree. Voluntarism is somewhat uncommon in the country—not because the people are unwilling to work, but because they spend their time working at a variety of jobs just to survive, Rice said.

Even so, more than 75 volunteers—men, women and children—became involved in clearing 100 yards of rubble from the site with three wheelbarrows. Women balanced cinderblocks, rocks and chunks of concrete on their heads, the way they normally carry bundles or buckets.



Mission team leader Ernie Rice, a Texas Baptist Men volunteer from First Baptist Church in Stockdale, tells an official how to maintain the newly installed water purification system at the national police headquarters in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. People who lost their homes to an earthquake live in a huge tent city immediately adjacent to the police compound.

(PHOTO/Texas Baptist Men)

In all, a job that would have taken two days with one piece of heavy machinery was accomplished manually in one day, Rice noted.

That experience taught the team "God's ways are higher than our ways," Skrobarcek said. "We went in with the idea of coming to the rescue of the church with a Bobcat. Instead, they came to our rescue."

The team learned another lesson as Tropical Storm Emily headed toward Haiti. Harold Patterson, a volunteer from Clearwater Baptist Church in Scroggins, recalled receiving regular reports from his wife, who was serving with a TBM mud-out team in Minot, N.D., and tracking the storm on her computer. She was not alone.

"We had all been tracking it. For two days, it was dead on target, headed right toward us," Rice recalled.

The anticipated wind and rain not only threatened progress on the mission project, but also posed risks to the team's safety and almost certainly meant their departure would be delayed.



Texas Baptist Men volunteers prepare the forms so that future mission teams can begin framing a new facility for Croix Hillaire Baptist Church and School near Petit Goave, Haiti. (PHOTO/Texas Baptist Men)

But Patterson noted people at his church in Northeast Texas prayed, asking God to intervene and protect the team from harm. Other TBM prayer partners around the state joined in interceding for the team's safety.

The storm uncharacteristically stalled and veered south until after the mission team made the 35-mile journey—a two- to three-hour trek on Haitian roads—to the airport in Port au-Prince.

"We learned that for a few men doing his work, God would hold back a storm," Rice said.

Texas Baptist Men seeks additional volunteers for upcoming trips to Haiti through early October. Individuals with construction expertise particularly are needed. All volunteers need to be physically able and willing to work 8-hour days in outdoor heat. For more information or to register as a volunteer, contact Ernie Rice at ernierice@yahoo.com or call (830) 534-1211. Financial contributions for the project should be sent to Texas Baptist Men, 5351 Catron Dr., Dallas, TX 75227 and labeled "Project Haiti."