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Haiti tragedy reaches LU

April 12, 2010 | by Johnnie Moore

Three Liberty University students witnessed the devastation of their homeland when a horrific earthquake beset Haiti this January. Like their nation, their lives will never be the same. Thankfully, all three survived. Sadly, some of their loved ones did not. For these students, Jan. 12, 2010 is their day of infamy.

Fewer than 900 Haitian students are studying on student visas in the United States — 3 percent of those are getting their degrees from Liberty University. All of them were directly affected by the 7.0 earthquake that shattered their nation. Several lost loved ones, others their family businesses and all of them were deeply traumatized by the apocalyptic scenes. Wislaine Dormay is a Haitian graduate student with an undergraduate degree from Liberty. During the first earthquake, her family lost their business. In a 6.1 aftershock she lost her aunt. Melinda Zosh, a writer for the Liberty Champion, LU's student newspaper, asked Dormay about the tragedy.



“I knew the Lord [had] a reason. I had to trust him no matter what,” she said.

Within hours of the tragedy, Liberty began exhaustive efforts to locate the Haitian community within the student body to better understand how we could care for those students affected by the recent events. The university responded with more than \$30,000 of unbudgeted emergency aid, excused small balances from the previous semester and provided commuters with meal points

that could be used in the Sodexo dining facilities. Liberty also donated a tractor-trailer load of bedding to an aid organization in Haiti and the university's Campus Church underwrote a year's worth of expenses for 15 Haitian orphans.

The first convocation of the spring semester began with a time of corporate intercession for the Haitian people and a call to make generous donations to faith-based, disaster recovery organizations, like Samaritan's Purse and WorldHelp. Later this year, the university's Center for Global Ministries will adopt a particular project and put a team of faculty, staff and students on the ground to make a difference.

Liberty University has a long history in Haiti. In its earliest years, each student was required to spend at least one week a semester in missionary service. Many students traveled to Haiti on a twin-engine Convair aircraft that had been graciously donated to LU. Students would travel from Lynchburg on the 35-seat plane and spend a week building schools and churches.

When a severe famine crippled Haiti in the late 1970s, Liberty sent a 200-foot grain ship to the nation. Fifty students waited in Port-au-Prince to receive and unload it. The food was gifted to local Haitian pastors who used it to help their communities. After the earthquake in January the only surviving hospital in Haiti was one built by LU students during that time.

Most recently, in the spring of 2007, I led a team of women's ministry majors in a project to assist an orphanage and mission hospital in the area. I remember interacting with many joyful people who, unfortunately, were already fighting against poverty and disease.

Liberty University has long cared for the people of Haiti and it will not orphan her in her time of greatest need. Of course, the university cannot rebuild the nation, but it has decided to help rebuild many broken lives.

Johnnie Moore is campus pastor and vice president for Executive Projects and Media Relations at Liberty.