

OFCB Ministries, Bayonnais, Haiti – A Brief History

In the summer of 1984, Helen Hunter of Charlotte, NC, traveled to Haiti to visit her daughter, Heather, who was volunteering at EbenEzer Mission near Gonaïves, Haiti. When Helen arrived in Haiti she had no inkling of what lay in store for her during the following years. After she returned to Charlotte, EbenEzer's founding minister came to visit the Hunters and Helen introduced him to her church's mission chairman. From that meeting a work group of 43 members went to EbenEzer in the summer of 1985 for a week of work on the mission. While they were there, an American missionary working at EbenEzer went to each member of the work group and asked if they would sponsor a child's education. Standing with the missionary was a young man and Helen asked if he had a sponsor. When told he did not, she said she would sponsor him. So from that time on, the Hunters sponsored Actionnel Fleurisma through his schooling, a year of accounting in Gonaïves, and 2 years of attending CPCC while living with them. It was during these two years (1990-1992) that Actionnel became a charter member of the newly-formed South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church (SMPC), along with the Hunters.

The School

One of the most treasured aspirations of the Haitian people is to obtain an education. Helen Hunter, who is a teacher, tells of her first time walking into a classroom there. Spontaneously every student rose!

After completing his studies, Actionnel returned to Haiti, married his sweetheart, and began a family. He also felt called to start a school and in late 1993, he together with Dimilsaint Mondelus, Firmin Saint-Louis, Lucner Saint-Louis and Saint-Victor Sejour in co-founded a school in their childhood neighborhood in the mountain region of Bayonnais. At first they had 105 students and 3 teachers. There was no building, so they used a vacant Roman Catholic building the first year. The second year found them in a makeshift school of banana leaf mats. Other classes were held under the beautiful mango trees. Each year the number of students grew by leaps and bounds. Searching for a way to build a school building, they found a Canadian organization in Port-au-Prince willing to fund a building. The organization gave half the money promised and the building was begun. After ascertaining that the money was being spent correctly they gave the other half and a five-classroom school building was born.

The Church

During the early days, Actionnel attended seminary in Limbé and was ordained as a minister. From left over school building materials, they built a small cinder block church. Many souls have been saved. One of those souls was Actionnel's own father.

A new and much larger church building was erected and completed in 2001-2003. Major support was provided by First Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, SMPC and First Baptist Church of Huntersville. It is also used for some education classes during the week and for community meetings. The smaller church building houses classes as well.

Continued Success

They still are using the small school and church buildings, but the mission continues to grow. The student body was 1,775 for the 2009-2010 school year (end of October), with 1,072 in three

kindergarten sections plus grades 1-6. High school enrollment was 668. A special "12th grade senior class to help those not passing the 12th grade national exam last summer has 35 students. In addition, the Professional Women's School has several adults enrolled and there is an Adult School with a number of people enrolled (for those who were unable to go to school as children). The K-13 school has over 50 teachers and another 10 of other school staff. Over the 1st 10 years SMPC started and maintained a sponsorship program, funded a multipurpose building with 4 bedrooms, two bathrooms, kitchen, dining area and a large classroom. The building is used for retreats, mission work groups, and a computer lab. The sponsoring program spread to two other churches.

Two churches in Gastonia and Boone provided a large electrical generator in 2002 since there was no power within miles of the Bayonnais Christian School and mission. Then funding allowed Engineers Without Borders to add a solar power system to keep electricity costs as low as possible. EWB also assisted OFCB and the community with building a bridge over a nearby river with financial help from a friend of OFCB. Internet via satellite was added in mid-2006. First Presbyterian - Charlotte helped renovate the old church into a 24 station language laboratory in late 2007. Seven new double-sized classrooms were finished in 2007 through support from several churches, and the 2nd floor was finished in 2009 with help from many churches.

Long range plan for a medical clinic

In 1999, OFCB dared to plan to bring medical treatment to Bayonnais. They sent a promising young man to medical school and bought a piece of land on which eventually to build a clinic. That long range plan will come to fruition in 2-3 years at the end of his medical education. Various planning meetings in Haiti and the U.S. and market research in Haiti for ideas have been completed since January, 2008. Designs and cost estimates for buildings and systems are proceeding with cooperation among two chapters of Engineers Without Borders, OFCB and the U.S. Committee for OFCB. In 2010 they hope to start construction of a clinic to give medical help which is now only available some 17 miles away across mountain terrain.

Results!

The quality of the school can be judged from the substantially above average performance of students in the mandatory national exams at the end of 6th, 9th, 12th and 13th grades. In 2003, all nine of the first graduating class were sent off to Haitian colleges. One of them will be the second doctor. Others will be agronomists, high school teachers and fill other vital functions.

In 2004, a local bank was started, and a small micro-credit business loan facility began to help capital-poor single person businesses to grow. These financial organizations have been very successful in helping people start or improve small business, thereby stimulating the economy.

Ten students from the 2005 high school graduating class joined those in college. A few others have started college since then, as support has been available. Career intentions of these people include teaching kindergarten, high school science subjects, language, dentistry, nursing, lab technician and minister. All of the college students are under written contract to return and work for OFCB (15 years for the doctors, 10 years for all others).

The college students began to graduate and return to OFCB in 2008. The first two were Amilor Fils-Aime, the 2nd pastor, and Jesula Sylvestre in business administration. Then Edith Saint-Louis and

Venette Merilus arrived, ready to revolutionize the preschool/kindergarten, the foundation of the whole school. Two agronomists and others recently finished their studies. The reinforcement of teaching, preaching and management, plus the return of two doctors, a dentist, five nurses and a medical lab technician over the next five years will bring great strength to OFCB's organization, church, school and planned medical clinic.

And so, the Lord's work continues at Bayonnais, giving children and their families hope through education, food for the nourishment of their physical bodies (one meal per school day when available), and preaching and teaching of God's Word.

The Future

The future can be a greatly enlarged version of the past, bringing hope in an area of 80,000 neglected people, This future would include reaching more children with education, expanding college enrollment, trade school courses, a clinic for real medical treatment for the people, a growing economy (up from a subsistence agrarian economy now) and a growing presence of the church in the valleys and mountains of Bayonnais.

To have this happen will require substantial support beyond what can be raised just by those who have helped so far. There are many opportunities: prayer support, financial support for the school and the college students, technical help (computer/Internet education, farming improvements), visitors to cheer them on and help with short term projects, founding of businesses that can use the increasing pool of educated young people and many other possibilities. Perhaps you can be involved and help!

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OFCB Latitude/Longitude: 19 24' 43.21"N 72 31' 00.68"W Haiti, independent from France in 1804, now has about 9 million people living in an area the size of Maryland, but with many mountains. **Economy:** Per capita GDP is \$1,800, average annual income is \$400 and in Bayonnais perhaps \$100-200, very, very poor!

BLOG & VIDEOS FROM BAYONNAIS (Peter B. Daniel) http://peterbdaniel.wordpress.com/
