



AAMA/ LARK NEWS



Spring Edition

March 2010

God is at Work in Haiti

by Al Taylor

On January 12, 2010, as news of the massive earthquake in Haiti was broadcast, I began praying that God would reveal how I was called to help. A few days later, I was on a plane with three other New Yorkers—an actor, a banker, and another pastor—headed to the Dominican Republic, where we purchased medical supplies, water, and food, before driving into Haiti.



Al Taylor, pastor of Infinity Mennonite Church (Harlem, NY), with 12-year-old Emily, who sat for nine days with a broken femur before getting the medical attention she needed. "She was incredible—she had a constant smile and a spirit of gratitude that was truly inspirational," says Rev. Taylor.

We traveled under the banner of "One Life Missions" Disaster Relief Team, serving as first responders in "forgotten" areas that had not yet been visited by any rescue or relief workers. Our primary tasks: assessing injuries and providing basic first aid, and transporting the most seriously wounded to tent hospitals. This, of course, meant that there was opportunity for close interaction with many individuals. We prayed with everyone whose wounds we treated and who we transported in our pickup to tent "hospitals."

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If God Loves Oxford Circle Mennonite Church, How Would the Community Know?

by Kenyetta Twine

This article was written from an interview with Leonard Dow, Pastor of Oxford Circle Mennonite Church in Philadelphia, PA and president of the Oxford Circle Christian Community Development Association Board of Directors. The web sites, www.ocmcp Philly.org and www.occcda.org, were also sources.



About ten years ago, Oxford Circle Mennonite Church (OCMC) started discerning how to be more intentional about meeting people where they are. They asked themselves questions such as: "If God loves the city, how would the city know? If God loves Oxford Circle Mennonite Church, how would the community know? What does the community need and what are its assets?" The congregation did prayer walks through the community; prayer was a big part of their discernment. The congregation developed a desire to be agents of change and part of Kingdom work; there was a shift from the congregation viewing this as a role for the leadership to the congregation as a whole wanting to be a part of God's work.

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"We Are the Church"

Celebrating the Diverse Races & Cultures of Mennonite Church USA

- Mennonite Church USA Convention 2011

The Mennonite Church USA Intercultural Relations Reference Committee, which includes representatives from AAMA, proposed a day at the 2011 convention in Pittsburgh for the whole Church to celebrate the gifts and cultures of racial/ethnic members and congregations. We are excited and hope you will plan to attend **Pittsburgh Convention 2011 on July 4-9, 2011**. AAMA will not hold its assembly this year but instead will hold it as part of Pittsburgh 2011. More information will be available at the end of this year. Please email any speaker or seminar topic suggestions to aama_org@yahoo.com.

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God is at Work in Haiti continued . . .

We were tremendously blessed and encouraged by those times of prayer, and by the spontaneous expressions of worship we witnessed. Even in the midst of chaos and confusion, people were thanking and praising God! In fact, we did not experience anything close to the level of desperation and near rioting that was reported in the media during the time that we were in Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas. Our experience was exactly the opposite: Everywhere we went, there were survivors with tremendous patience and an almost unimaginable capacity for gratitude.

In one Red Cross facility, we distributed apples to people who had been injured a week prior, and were lying on mats on the ground. This little bit of food was accepted with tremendous appreciation. One young girl gave a big smile and said "This is the best apple I've ever had!" And over and over again, everywhere we went, we witnessed people worshipping God. Sometimes it was individuals or small clusters of people; sometimes large groups gathered in public places. Early one morning we were awakened by the sound of praise songs. Dozens of people filled the street, singing and glorifying God. They had lost all material things, but they still had Jesus!

That attitude is something we can learn from—and one of the biggest reasons I came home knowing that while we must stand by the people of Haiti and help them rebuild, we don't need to cry for them. Instead, we need to look at ourselves, at our own communities and churches, and do what we need to do to make ourselves stronger, more energized, more grateful. So don't cry for Haiti. Pray for Haiti. And also pray that *we* would be infused with the spirit of worship and trust that is visible in Haiti.

Rev. Al Taylor, pastor of Infinity Mennonite Church, Harlem, New York, is the New York City Chief of Staff for New York State Assemblyman Herman D. Farrell. Following the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, he served as a first responder with the first "One Life Missions" Disaster Relief Team to go to Haiti (from January 17-29). The first two teams (a total of eight people) delivered over two tons of goods – made possible by the financial contributions and prayers of many people. A third team departed New York City on February 15, 2010. Al anticipates returning to Haiti with a "One Life" team this spring. Photos, video clips, and additional information are available at infinitymennonite.org; updates regarding Rev. Taylor's next trip to Haiti will be posted when plans are finalized and while he is away.

If God Loves Oxford Circle continued . . .

OCMC began to have an annual community festival. Faith based organizations, social service agencies and various employers provide resources onsite during the festivals. Food, children's games, a petting zoo, face painting, fire trucks, a prayer tent, pony rides, and contemporary Christian music also are part of the festival all at no charge to the attendees. The church does it because they love the community.

OCMC also began partnering with Oxford Village, a public housing site, to provide a summer program with a faith based understanding which offers art, music, and reading. The program is based on peace and reconciliation which is needed with crisis such as the high number of African-American males dying by gun violence. OCMC didn't stop there. The congregation saw a need to walk with the summer program children throughout the year. An afterschool program therefore was launched. This program offers conflict resolution, music, art, photography, and homework assistance. Through a partnership with Temple University a Social Work intern also works with them.

As OCMC responded to the needs of the community they started to outgrow their facility. They formed Oxford Circle Christian Community Development Association (OCCDA) as a nonprofit tax exempt organization. OCCDA "desires to be a place where: children and youth are provided positive out of school activities, families can be reconciled, individuals are taught job skills and trained for small business development, community members who have conflicts are able to walk through mediation, and where churches can partner as ambassadors to a community in need. [OCCDA] desires both their church and community to continue to be places of spiritual growth, hope and development." (www.occcda.org)

A building across the street from OCMC went on sell as they prayed for direction on whether to move the church due to the growth and community needs. OCCDA bought the building for less than the asking price and is leasing space to a variety of tenants including the church. (OCMC sold their former church building.) OCCDA has an executive director on staff. They are serving as a resource to the community and putting money back into the community. The Oxford Circle area of Philadelphia knows God loves them and God loves OCMC through OCCDA's work in youth development, family enrichment and support, and economic and community development. They have plans to implement additional programs this fall and in 2011 as they seek to continue to show God's love to their surrounding community.

Visit www.aamamcusa.org to read issues of the AAMA/Lark Newsletter and for other news and information.