



Haiti Struggles for Justice

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*Giving to the poor
is like making a
loan to the Lord.*

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Haiti and MCC: A Brief History

by Edwin Dening

Many claim that the north coast of Haiti was the first place Christopher Columbus landed in the Americas in 1492. France claimed Haiti and wiped out the indigenous people on the island within 50 years. Beginning in 1512 the colonialists brought slaves over from Africa who would work the land and make Haiti one of the richest French colonies by the late 1700s.

In 1791, partially inspired by the French revolution of 1789, the slaves in Haiti began to rebel. Numerous wars were waged over the next decade, resulting in the abolishment of slavery and the declaration of Haitian independence in 1804. France did not officially recognize Haiti as an independent country until 1825. Recognition by the United States came only in 1862, following the secession of southern slave states, which had opposed recognition. (Ironically, when the Americans were fighting the British for their independence, they had help from Haitians, who fought on the side of the American revolutionaries.)

The victory of the Haitians so dismayed the French imperial designs of Napoleon that he quickly sold the Louisiana Territory to the Americans, thus doubling the size of the United States. The Haitian revolution sent shock waves throughout the United States, precisely because it was a slave society. It gave a spur and a spark to the antislavery movement on U.S. shores.

Instability continued in Haiti, exemplified by the fact that between 1843 and 1915, 16 of the 20 heads of state of Haiti were overthrown violently.

By the late 1800s the United States was making attempts to establish a military and financial foothold in Haiti. Finally, under the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 asserting effective U.S. hegemony over the Western Hemisphere, U.S. Marines occupied Haiti from 1915–1934. The United States wrote a new Haitian constitution and reestablished the class of leaders, descendants of French colonialists and their slaves, who had ruled Haiti at independence. The period just after 1934 is often called the second independence, referring to the withdrawal of U.S. troops. The late 1930s also saw tense relations with the Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, culminating in the October 1937 massacre of 15,000 Haitians in the Dominican Republic.

There was a steady rise in tourism in the 1940s, and building a dam in the 1950s and 1960s put thousands of acres of land under irrigation and allowed reliable electric supply. Exports of coffee, cacao, and bananas increased during this period. By the early 1950s, economic failures as well as natural disasters like Hurricane Hazel (1955) led to a myriad of economic and political problems, setting the scene for another major change of power.

François Duvalier (“Papa Doc”) was elected in 1957 and remained in power until 1971. His son, Jean Claude Duvalier or “Baby Doc,” succeeded his father and was president through 1986. The Duvalier family regime in Haiti was fraught with brutality, haunting paramilitary brigades, and extreme suppression of any disagreement with the

Change and Peace for Haiti

What I have noticed is that Haiti needs to change. If Haiti does not change, it will not have the peace that everyone would like to see. In order to have a true change in our country,

1. All Haitians, both those who live in our country and those who are living abroad, must be aware of who they are and know that Haiti is for them. They need to work together to change it.
2. All Haitians must work together and rethink what is best for Haiti so that the next generation will not find itself in a worse state than we find ourselves in today.
3. We must stop what we call "political hypocrisy" or "politics behind a curtain." We must learn good politics and we must learn to see our country's needs before our personal needs. When that happens we can begin to see a better Haiti.
4. All Haitians must know that we are all brothers and sisters, even if we do not have the same mother and father, even if we do not have the same color, even if we do not have the same beliefs, whether we are rich or poor. We are all men and women created by one God. We were not made to have divisions between us; we must learn to support each other even if we do not share the same opinion and we must do this with respect for each other.

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government. Many people were exiled or fled during these years. As a sign of how bad the current situation is, there is an often-heard cry in Haiti for a return to the "stability" of the Duvalier dictatorship era.

MCC's Work in Haiti

In 1957 Orie Miller sent representatives to Haiti to develop a plan for MCC to begin programs. Some advised it was too dangerous to come here and MCC should wait; indeed, the phrase "It is too dangerous to come right now" has been heard in MCC circles every year since 1957.

Since MCC first came to Haiti, most of our programs have focused on agriculture and health development. We are just now phasing out of health work in Haiti and one of our main programs today is reforestation and environmental education in the Artibonite Valley.

MCC Haiti in the early 1990s began peace activities focused on conflict transformation and human rights. The overall goal has been to help those marginalized by society to gain and retain some dignity.

MCC Haiti has sponsored three people to attend the Summer Peacebuilding Institute at Eastern Mennonite University for training in conflict transformation. The struggle we face in trying to develop peace programs is illustrated by the fact that one Haitian returning from this training intervened on behalf of oppressed people in his home community and was forced to go into hiding when he was threatened for his activism. He was still in hiding two years later.

Another of our current programs is the support of conflict transformation training with community groups in partnership with the Christian Centre for Integrated Development (CCID), which also has trained staff available to help mediate conflicts. The CCID organized five seminars in basic conflict resolution with over 200 people participating in 2003.

An MCCer has also been seconded to another partner, the National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR), since June 1998. NCHR has credibility as a monitor and advocate for human rights and democracy in Haiti. The Coalition believes that advocating human rights at the local, regional, and international levels while monitoring human rights progress in Haiti will enhance the prospects for change.

NCHR focuses on three goals:

- Observation and analysis of the functioning of the police and their subsidiary bodies
- Observation and analysis of judicial procedures and the conduct of the judicial system
- Observation and analysis of the system of incarceration, including the national prison

In 2004 MCC also supported the NCHR with its victim assistance program, which helps victims of severe human rights abuses, especially as a result of the political turmoil in February 2004.

Recent Events

Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected president by an overwhelming majority in late 1990 and took office in February 1991. In September 1991 he was forced out by a coup d'état led by the Haitian military. A U.S.-led force, eventually reaching 20,000 troops, reinstated Aristide in October 1994. Aristide held office for little over a year until the next election saw his hand-picked successor René Préval take office.

The current political crisis has its roots in the contested legislative and municipal elections of May 2000 and the presidential elections in November 2000, won by Aristide. Since the February 2001 inauguration of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the human rights situation in Haiti has deteriorated at a steady pace. During 2003 and early 2004, however, this pace increased significantly, resulting in a violence even more systematic and institutionalized.

The intensity of the violence heightened during in the first week of February 2004, when armed opposition groups brutally took over towns throughout the country and attacked supporters of Aristide's Lavalas Party, local leaders, and police officers. Vicious retaliation followed, further raising the insecurity in various areas of the country.

A national rebel force, which united armed opposition groups with former military personnel, took over five of Haiti's nine geographic departments and promised to take Port-au-Prince unless Aristide resigned. After more than a week of increased violence, terror, and bloodshed in Port-au-Prince, as Lavalas supporters attempted to keep control, the crisis reached a climax when President Aristide resigned on February 29, 2004.

At that time MCCers heard many Haitians extol this national “rebel force” as freedom fighters. One woman called the leader of the “rebel force” her savior. It remains unknown who financed the rebels.

The tally of damages, losses, and victims from the first few months of 2004 is staggering. Thousands of individuals and families have been displaced from their homes; some were forced to leave and others saw no other option but to leave. Around 100 people lost their lives, and several hundred homes and businesses were pillaged or burned. The last period with this level of violence was the coup d'état years of 1991–1994.

Despite the resignation and exile of President Aristide, the violence continued as waves of revenge swept through communities. Lavalas, police, and local authorities were targets for retaliation. The Lavalas government had been distributing weapons among the population, and many Aristide supporters remain ready to use them against those who ousted Aristide.

On the same day Aristide left Haiti, U.S. military personnel were on Haitian soil. Shortly afterward Canadian, French, Brazilian, and Chilean forces were here as well.

Currently the United Nations has a mandate in Haiti to “keep the peace.” Although 6,700

troops are supposed to be on the ground, only half that number had arrived by November 2004. U.N. troops are very visible in some of the larger cities but not in the countryside. Many wonder whether they are here to help change Haiti or just to keep the population subdued. Many other Haitians welcome the U.N. presence to keep order.

The United Nations spends an enormous amount of money in Haiti to maintain the peacekeeping force, which appears unlikely to be a force for lasting change. It is clear once more that if Haiti is to change it will only be through the will of the Haitian people. Does foreign intervention help, hinder, or just delay what is truly the will of our Haitian neighbors?

Instability, insecurity, and uncertainty abound as the path for reconciliation and reconstruction is not yet clear. A crumbling national police force, a dysfunctional judiciary, a group of ex-Haitian military who vow to return to power, the extensive circulation of weapons, vivid memories of wrongs, and the current power vacuum are all factors contributing to the volatility of the situation.

Edwin Dening, originally from Edmonton, Alberta, is MCC co-representative for Haiti along with his wife, Sylvia.

Change and Peace for Haiti (continued)

5. We must know that Haiti will always have problems unless we put our heads together and take a good look at ourselves. We will always be divided on different points, which means all the countries who are friends of Haiti can help us find a real solution to the crisis we have been finding ourselves in since a very long time ago. Even though we have made a lot of effort to try different things, we have never found a solution to our country's problems because they are problems that come from within us. We are the ones who have to be made aware, we are the ones who have to have initiative to work together. With that we can start the process toward change and peace. We do not have to throw away our friends' ideas, but the first change and initiative must come from within us as Haitians.

6. We need to pray a lot for our country because with prayer there is nothing that is impossible. Even if time continues to move on, we need to continue to pray because peace only comes from God.

7. If Haitians do not believe that Haiti is our country, we will always be divided. I hope that all my fellow brother and sister Haitians would be united. It will only be by being united that we can begin the process of development, change, and peace that we have been talking about for a long time.

—Joseph Saingelus, Haitian staff member with MCC Haiti for 8 years; translated from Creole by Sylvia Dening

Seeds of Hope

by Pierre Esperance

Haiti is in a time of critical transition as it attempts to move forward from a period of significant instability and insecurity. In this time of rebuilding, it is essential that the principles of justice and law are respected and promoted. It is fundamental that past injustices are validated, that justice is sought, and that human rights are defended and protected.

Haiti's history is marked by a cycle of violence and political upheavals, where the victims of yesterday become the persecutors of tomorrow. During the coup d'état years, 1991–1994, thousands of Haitians supporting Aristide suffered various forms of brutality and violence at the hands of coup leaders. Extrajudicial executions, rape, and torture were commonplace, and bloody massacres were committed against Haitian citizens opposed to the coup—such as the

famous Raboteau Massacre of April 22, 1994. But when the tables were turned, opponents of the ruling Lavalas Party were persecuted during the last three years of the Aristide presidency.

Given this cycle, the National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR) is concerned about retaliation now being carried out against Lavalas supporters. Immediately following Aristide's departure, NCHR began receiving an increase in calls and visits from victimized Lavalas supporters.

One of the most horrific examples is that of five young men of La Saline who were brutally executed by Haitian police officers. The young men, known Lavalas militants 17–24 years old, were apprehended on March 20, 2004, to be found dead the next day in different areas of the capital. The officers

Student Council Elections

I am running for middle school chaplain in our school. There are a few other classmates running for other offices and we just started a week of campaigning. All of us are trying to influence our peers, making speeches, printing posters, and convincing people that we are the right person for the task.

What shocked me is that most of the candidates are also bribing classmates. One girl has been handing out candy to those who promise to vote for her. Another student has been promising cash for each vote he gets for the office of president of middle school.

The election in our grade 8 class for a class representative was a simple paper vote between two guys. The teacher told everyone to take out a blank sheet of paper and write the name of either "Bill" or "Alex." All went well until the papers were collected and the teacher realized that there were 35 votes cast but only 23 students in the class! Now what? Another vote was taken and only 32 votes came in. OK, we'll wait until tomorrow and try another method.

So if it is so hard to have a fair election in a small school with teenagers, how are we supposed to have any hope of a fair election in the country? Where do these kids, or anyone else in Haiti, get the idea of how to hold an election? The cycle of corruption must be broken!

—Leah Dening, a grade 8 student in Port-au-Prince, who has lived in Haiti with her family since her first birthday

implicated in the murders had previously been working for Jean-Claude Jean Baptiste, former Police Chief and one of Aristide's right-hand men.

NCHR became involved, providing assistance to the families including facilitating meetings with senior police officials. The five officers implicated in the murders have been suspended and are under investigation by the Haitian National Police.

With a reputation of being highly politicized, unprofessional, and the largest source of human rights violations, Haitian National Police officers have become targets of violence, revenge, and retaliation. NCHR is currently treating a gruesome dossier involving the violent murders of two police officers in Port-au-Prince. NCHR has assisted and accompanied the families of these officers in seeking justice for their lost loved ones.

NCHR's doors are open to all victims of abuse and violence related to the disrespect of basic human rights. As victims and/or their families speak out against their violators and seek NCHR's assistance, the organization will continue to do everything possible to see justice rendered and fundamental rights protected.

The Noose of Impunity

There is a fine line between forgetting the past and moving on, between forgiveness and seeking justice for victims. Reconciliation must be completely free of revenge and retaliation. But reconciliation is not mutually exclusive to the principles of justice and truth.

NCHR is focused on the question of impunity, which has been strangling this country for many years. Many savage crimes were committed during the past three years—crimes that must be dealt with in order for reconciliation to occur.

One can cite the Jean Dominique murder, the Brignol Lindor murder, the executions of Viola Robert's three sons, and the La Scierie Massacre. For every high-profile case like these, there is a plethora of cases that are well documented, yet not publicized. These crimes involved individuals from all levels—from government officials to Haitian judges, leaders of state companies, police officials and officers, and Lavalas Party affiliates.

Many wounds—emotional, psychological, and physical—have not yet healed. Victims and their families grieve, unable to find closure as justice has not been rendered. Many

questions are left unanswered. They must be answered and the hurt must be addressed. In order to build a society based on peace, there must be justice. In order for reconciliation to occur, past wrongs must be recognized. The truth must be exposed and dealt with in order for Haitian society to move forward.

To forget what has happened during the past three years is to repeat what has happened. This cycle of impunity must be broken. It can be broken, not by covering over, but by remembering and exposing, seeking and finding, judging and holding people accountable to build a future of peace and justice in Haiti.

NCHR has developed an anti-impunity campaign with the goal of establishing a culture of accountability and responsibility, free of impunity and corruption, wherein violators of human rights are held accountable. The year-long campaign will consist of field research and documentation, publication of a report, letter-writing campaigns, photo exhibits, and conference-debates reinforced by press coverage, radio announcements, posters, and flyers.

NCHR hopes the campaign will expose injustices, increase victims' access to the judicial system, and increase the level of justice while stimulating Haitian citizens to participate in the democratic process.

Setting Judicial Precedents

Since its beginning, NCHR has been striving for judicial reform, fighting for a system that provides justice for all Haitian citizens. There exists here a flagrant disequilibrium in the distribution of justice. Those with money and position can employ top-quality lawyers, who more than adequately represent them in a court of law. Often, victims are poor and have little or no access to a lawyer or to justice. Their rights are not defended and they become victims a second time as perpetrators go free.

Thus, with regard to the La Scierie Massacre, NCHR has urgently assisted these victims. This massacre, which began on February 11, 2004, is the largest and most horrific of the mass murders that took place during Aristide's presidency: several dozen dead or missing, around 60 homes destroyed, cases of rape, several vehicles destroyed.

NCHR provides material and financial assistance as well as legal assistance to the victims and/or their families. By providing legal assistance for the victims of La Scierie, NCHR

will be promoting judicial reform by advocating for a model trial—the way things are supposed to work in a functional judicial system.

NCHR is not part of the civil class action against the perpetrators, thus maintaining its neutrality. As a neutral party, NCHR works to defend the rights of both the victims and those who are accused of involvement in the massacre. To date, five individuals have been arrested, including members of the popular Lavalas organization, a former Lavalas Deputy, and a former government minister under Aristide. NCHR made initial visits to all of these men immediately following their arrests and continues with periodic visits.

Avoiding the Same Mistakes

Impunity comes in many forms. The current Haiti leadership must be careful not to commit the same injustices of the past regime by ignoring the actions of people with societal influence. This means arresting those who are known to be responsible for the Raboteau Massacre, as well as holding accountable those who were involved in the slaughter, torture, and persecution of Haitian citizens during the coup d'état years.

Similarly, actions of members of the resistance movement must also be examined, investigated, and dealt with appropriately. Prior to the La Scierie Massacre, several Lavalas supporters in the town of St. Marc were victimized by violent opposition sup-

porters as buildings were damaged and property destroyed. The perpetrators of these acts must be taken before the courts. Negligence to do so on the part of the state is to encourage impunity.

Likewise, the release of 3,500 prisoners from Haiti's 19 prisons in February 2004 does not exonerate them of the charges against them. Individuals who have been tried and convicted or were awaiting trial must be returned to their prisons so that the Haitian judiciary can treat their cases. Any releases should happen in a legal fashion.

Despite the call from numerous organizations, the current government has yet to demonstrate the political will to do this, and risks falling into the same abyss of impunity.

Renewed Hope

We live in a world of conflict and crisis, where death and despair abound. But it is also true that we live in a world filled with seeds of hope. I believe that these seeds exist in Haiti. As we strive to create a culture based on the supremacy of human rights and belief in the sacredness of humanity, NCHR continues to be a voice for the voiceless and a source of hope for the hopeless, and to pave the way for the establishment of the rule of law in Haiti.

Pierre Esperance is director of the National Coalition for Haitian Rights in Port-au-Prince, an MCC Haiti partner since 1998.

Sweet Potato Skins: A Haitian Fable

A Haitian farmer was despondent because he was so poor. All he had to eat day after day were the sweet potatoes that he grew in his own garden. He felt that his life was so awful that he didn't want to live. He tied a strong cord over a door so that he could hang himself. Then, he noticed three sweet potatoes that he had boiled that morning. He ate the potatoes and threw the skins out the window. He saw a poor man walking by pick up the potato skins and hide them in his pocket to eat later. The farmer realized that there were others with less than he, and he no longer wanted to kill himself.

When a person is grateful, everything is seen in a new light. One Haitian remarked, "So many people die as infants. If a person has life, it is a gift from God." Each day, each breath is a gift. With gratitude in your heart, you might begin to believe that you are precious.

—Provided by Edwin Denning,
source unknown

Weighing Day

by Joanne Krejsa

Wednesday is weighing day in Bwadlorens, a village in northeastern Haiti. Mothers hike, toting babies and leading toddlers to the clinic. An older sister strives to get the child on her hip into the weighing trousers, with their long strap so easily tangled in kicking legs. "Li gen lespri," the women laugh above the shrill screams of the struggling youngster—"He's got spirit."

I hope by the time the child is swinging from the scale, this spirit is subdued enough to get an accurate reading. But often a frightened child is far from still, clutching wildly at anybody within reach. To weigh such a child is a clumsy dance away from this wailing

pendulum, one eye sorting numbers on the scale and the other watching that the precious cargo does not fall.

Wednesdays of Fear

It did not take me long to fear Wednesdays at the clinic. My problem was that the people liked to crowd around the scale, and I did not like them to. Everyone seemed determined to take that little space from me, pressing closer and closer in hopes that their child would be the next one weighed. It made the process slower for the weighing and more dangerous for the child. But no amount of pleading in broken Creole for a little patience had any effect. I figured that

*A civil service job is
like daddy's horse;
every child who wants
to take a ride may do so.*

Peace: Not War, Tranquility

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (John 14:27 NRSV)

In the dictionary the definition of peace is the absence of war. Yet even though there are many organizations that work to minimize the threat of war, it continues to be a problem that many nations face.

What is this problem that we can not fix? In this reflection we see that peace sits on three words: love, sincerity, and integrity.

Love is the support of the people that are around you. Jesus says in the Bible, "Love your neighbor," because he knew that if you love the ones around you, you will have a good horizontal relationship and will be able to forgive and work together to solve any problems. First Corinthians 13:4-7 (NRSV) says, "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." If you have love it is easier to understand and forgive others.

Sincerity means being honest. The Bible says that out of the body comes both good and evil. If we walk toward that good, or the truth, then each day we will be victorious. Being honest and truthful are spiritual fruits that an individual can serve God with.

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I was just maladapted to the crowding that Haitians are comfortable with.

I found helpers able to read the scale and not let the children fall. I retreated and sat nearby, where people thrust at me their little squares of paper scribbled with weights. These I plotted on their "Road to Health" charts.

The Road to Health chart is a record of basic child health monitoring. It documents the child's weight by age and displays the growth of the child over time. The chart enables health workers to display healthy growth and to spot a child who falls behind due to disease or malnutrition by comparing her weight to a standard and to her growth trend.

This simple tool is used worldwide to help mothers and health workers understand when children are especially vulnerable. Haiti's Chemin à Santé chart has bright illustrations of children sitting, standing, or walking to remind mothers how they should develop. Instructions in Creole and in pictures explain how to make the oral rehydration solution that can save a child when diarrhea threatens. Since most of the Bwadlorens mothers do not read, these images can be very helpful. The metaphorical language describing a child following the growth curve is understood in this mountain culture, where climbing and descending hills is a daily reality.

I was both grateful for this tool and discouraged to see it misused in Bwadlorens. Experts stress that you should study a child's growth trend from serial measurements, not extrapolate from one instance. But the mothers came rarely for weighing. The nurse and visiting doctor did not check the chart at sick visits, routinely create a chart for new babies, or explain the chart to the mother. So the data recorded on the charts at Bwadlorens is sparse, containing one or two weights over a period of years instead of the monthly weights that form a curve describing the child's status.

The chart used in Haiti is designed so that the health worker could interpret even a single weight as indicative of normality or malnutrition. The worker does not need to look for a gradual flattening or a precipitous fall or a healthy increase parallel to standard lines. Instead, the chart is printed with colored areas and lines indicating normality or abnormality. Even a poorly trained health worker can quickly label a child in a colored "danger zone." This color-coded schema determines which children are "malnour-

ished," with no consideration of previous growth or relative size.

Since the chart encourages health workers to use one weight reading to identify vulnerable children, little attention is paid to decline or improvement. Sadly, since weight qualifies for food supplement programs, parents just want to know whether the weight falls below the "normal" level. Below normal, the child is in the program. At normal, the child does not qualify. No matter how cheerfully the worker tries to put it ("Your child is developing well, walking on the road to health, keep breastfeeding your baby"), the mother's face falls, for it means, to her, "My child does not get any food." She asks for clarification, shoulders sagging as she contemplates the walk back home where the other children are waiting, hungry. The good news is become bad news to her, and the Road to Health chart, an excellent tool for empowerment, has become merely a semaphore of the criteria for aid.

Before the crisis in Haiti's government in 2004, the food aid provided by the U.N. Programme Alimentaire Mondiale (PAM) was minimal in this region. When I first arrived in Bwadlorens, I was amazed that family members would walk hours in the tropical sun, and wait hours longer at the clinic, to receive a few kilograms of enriched corn flour. But this valued aid came irregularly and eventually the shipments stopped. For over a year, we didn't see any PAM food.

Then, in May 2004, the international focus on Haiti's troubles revived a faltering institution. Suddenly, enriched flour, dried beans, oil, iodized salt, and rice were arriving regularly. The international community and the Haitian Ministry of Public Health were responding to the needs of the most vulnerable—malnourished children and malnourished pregnant or nursing women. But the partnership was rather feeble, slow to respond, and poorly staffed.

Bwadlorens is crying out its need for relief. My neighbors talk of troubles on troubles: the soaring price of rice, the devaluation of the gourde, the loss of a harvest due to drought or to heavy rains eroding exposed hillsides. Old folks sick with no medical care, no way to raise school fees for the young. The litany goes on and on. I can hear it everywhere as I walk and visit in homes. It is loudest in the clinic, a lament spoken clearly in the bodies of children, weaned from the breast but thin from inadequate food. Their resistance brought low from poor nutrition, they suffer and die too easily from pneumonia and diarrhea.

We talk of worms and germs and clean water, but in reality parents are unable to get the staple foods their child needs. For me the lament becomes most piteous when it is a pregnant woman who sits on the exam table, too frail to carry her load, eyelids and nail beds pale with anemia, admitting it is hard to find food.

The need is clear. But any responsible relief agency must ask: Is the receiving country capable of accepting and distributing the aid, so that it reaches the intended people? Does the aid truly relieve suffering, or does it merely entrench dependencies and hamper development?

Since the PAM food program restarted, my dread of Wednesdays has returned tenfold. In the beginning of my term, I attributed my frustration to culture shock. Now, all that is bad about Haiti seems concentrated in the clinic on weighing days. Now, even my Haitian coworkers are frustrated by the crowds, hoarse at day's end by unheeded calls for order. Now, visitors see our Wednesday chaos and talk of a "culture of poverty" or scarcity.

Effects of Poverty

I am reminded every Wednesday that poverty is far from blessed, it is murderous and ugly. Abject poverty does not make saints, it makes monsters. The fear of not enough food turns peasants into an angry mob. Clinic workers are the police of a dehumanizing system. People become animals or obstacles. The crowding means we can not move from desk to scale, or from one room to another. To get any tasks done means ignoring the "special" case requests.

When Jesus was pressed by the crowd, he was still aware enough to help one woman who touched his hem. When I am pressed by the crowd, I shield my face so I don't have to look in the eyes of people I am ignoring. When the pleas become too loud for concentration, I yell at the people to stop talking to me. When they fill the doors and windows and overflow into the room so we can not work, I join in the pushing and shoving, removing women and children bodily. All I ask is a little space safe from the chaos—but to create this space gently is near impossible.

I am a declared pacifist—but once I found myself shocked at an instinctual image that came to me, that I should bite the next hand stuck in my face. So much for loving, compassionate service. A local friend said, "We are beautiful, but poverty makes us ugly." All of us.

Certainly the pushing mob lacks dignity. But even uglier is the corruption that has come to light in the program. The Haitian clinic director asked me to watch closely during her absences so that workers did not steal food or give it to their friends. But I did not have to watch closely to see graft, bribery, deception, partiality, and theft.

Every day friends, neighbors, and strangers stop me to ask a favor to family members, to give them food regardless of eligibility. Often these requests are accompanied by gifts (of flattery mostly, but sometimes of fruit).

The frequency and openness of these requests suggest that the rules had never been followed strictly. Disempowered, uneducated peasants—poor people—in Haiti have no expectation of fair treatment. The only way to get help is to have a close tie with those with power. To profit by these relationships is not considered immoral, but is a survival skill in a situation of scarcity. So the little old lady who offers me fruit, or honey, is surprised when I pay her in gourdes rather than accepting her relative into the PAM program.

It is harder to excuse the deceit by health workers. When the director is absent, we have only one paid worker at the clinic, a clerk. Volunteer workers help measure children and distribute food on Wednesdays. They work for the promise of gleaning the leftovers from food sacks. I discovered that they were paid not in leftovers, but in large rations. In addition, they use their position to assist their friends. They report incorrect weights and give small quantities of food to people not on the list.

The storage depot has been "broken into" twice. The third time, they did not pretend to break in; 44 sacks of rice were taken with the help of a key holder. There are no police in Bwadlorens now. The unofficial guard politely took my report of the thefts and suggested a volunteer brigade to patrol the area. It never came about; indeed, Bwadlorens leaders have been curiously silent as their only state-sponsored welfare system deteriorated.

Since rumor has it that neighborhood young men stole the food, I doubted the efficacy of this brigade plan. Moreover, I feared any after-dark effort. Vigilantes killed four suspected thieves in a nearby town recently. Here, a mob killed an alleged thief in broad daylight. Apparently those who steal from the mouths of children do not merit such judgment.

Peace: Not War, Tranquility (continued)

We look at a man like Job and say, "Yes, he had integrity." We might do 75 percent of the things we should do but because of discouragement and other factors we never seem to attain that other 25 percent. However, we should be just and righteous in all the work we do. Justice and righteousness are what gives us hope and strength to face the challenges in front of us. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10:31 (NRSV), "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God." If you have this kind of integrity, then all you do can be done to show the glory of God.

Why are there Christians all over the world and yet there is no peace? People never think about the peace God wants to give us. Where is the power and strength? We spiritual people are supposed to have the opportunity to change the world with our actions and words. As it says in Matthew 5:13 (NRSV), "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?" Christians become tasteless because we do what the world does; we should not let the world to be an example for us. Let our light shine on the earth! Let God invest in us and we can change and have an influence in the world around us.

—Guylene Clerger, Haitian staff member of MCC Haiti since 2000

The first step toward good is not to do harm.

Emergencies have called me out of the town the past few Wednesdays. I thought my absence would encourage the Haitian workers to take leadership. Instead, I returned to hear of even worse violence and disorder. The food is all gone, the depot empty. The crowds are dwindling as peasants give up on a system that ignores their plight. Maybe

they have decided that their day would better be spent working in the garden than waiting for a handout. The rains keep falling, the roads get worse, and I find myself hoping that the aid trucks will not get through at all.

Joanne Krejsa, a nurse with MCC, has been in rural Bwadlorens, Haiti, since 2002.

Rice and Justice

by James Price

Corruption Means Poverty

Haitians are often labeled, along with the country, as being the poorest in the Western Hemisphere. This is a debilitating label in itself and results in a general feeling of worthlessness, inferiority, and fatalism. However, the major economic and social indicators do represent a truth that needs to be dealt with.

There are many basic human rights that we take for granted in more “developed” countries that are lacking or nonexistent in Haiti. Lack of basic housing, right to a fair trial, basic infrastructure, health care, security, and many others need to be addressed before any semblance of justice will appear. Peace will not happen before justice starts to take root.

Justice for citizens needs to be preceded by a just government. According to the 2004 Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International, an anticorruption organization based in Germany, Haiti tied for 145th place out of 145 positions on the list. By comparison the United States was tied at 17th place and our nearest neighbor, the Dominican Republic, was tied at the 87th position. Corruption in the government has been pervasive and needs to be controlled before any progress can be made in Haiti. There is some hope that the current government can break this cycle of corruption.

—Edwin Dening

Twice a week, Tuesday and Friday, the town of Dezam hosts the regional market. Thousands of people from the surrounding countryside come to exchange goods and services. Today I have come to the market early, before the large crowds. I have come specifically to buy a bag of rice—and to find out the price difference between local rice and imported rice. Local rice has just been harvested and its price should be at an annual low.

I soon come across a woman selling both domestic and imported varieties. I make my purchase and start back home. Local rice is selling for 75 gourdes (US\$2.00) per *mamit* (3 pounds of rice) and imported rice for 65 gourdes (US\$1.75).

Rice is just one Haitian product being undersold by a cheaper import, but it takes on added importance since it is a major crop and a staple food. There are times when importing cheaper goods is in Haiti's best interest. This is not one of those times. Haiti has few natural resources and relies heavily on agriculture to generate wealth. Consequently, Haiti's economic growth will depend on the agricultural sector. From this perspective, the 10-gourde price difference is troubling.

With a cheaper alternative on the market Haitian farmers will have less incentive to grow rice. In fact, rice production in the Artibonite Valley has fallen since the 1980s (although other factors also play a part). The injustice is that this will cause increased economic dependency, decreased economic stability, and growing poverty.

It is important to understand where these imports come from and why they are so cheap. The vast majority of rice brought into Haiti comes through one company—the

Rice Corporation of Haiti (RCH). RCH is owned by Erly Inc., one of the largest agricultural conglomerates in the United States. Over the last 20 years RCH's market share has steadily increased—especially since 1996, when Haiti's import tariffs were changed from 35 percent to 3 percent as part of an International Monetary Fund structural adjustment program. Nearly 50 percent of the rice consumed in Haiti comes from RCH.

While it is tempting to blame agricultural subsidies and export credits, in this instance they play a small role. RCH claims it does not receive credits or loans from the U.S. government. Rice production in the United States apparently is so efficient that it is cheaper to grow, harvest, store, and transport rice to Haiti than it is to produce it in Haiti.

What will be the effects of all this? Any money spent on imported rice leaves the Haitian economy. It can no longer be used to purchase Haitian products or to invest in Haitian businesses. When farmers sell less rice they have less money to buy new equipment or fertilizer. What saves rice producers from losing even more revenue is that most people prefer the taste of domestic rice varieties.

At the macroeconomic level, the value of all the goods and services (including rice) imported into Haiti in 2002 was US\$870 million (\$674 million from the United States). The total goods and services exported from Haiti in 2002 was \$248 million. The difference, known as the balance of payments, is minus \$622 million. This means that Haiti lost \$622 million to imported products.

Chronic deficits in the balance of payments will stunt economic growth. To make up for the loss Haiti must receive loans or donations from other governments and international

banks. This money would ideally be invested in ways to decrease the balance of payments deficit, such as modernizing the agricultural sector, but in practice this is rarely done.

Expanding Haiti's rice and other food production would help to eliminate the deficit and generate wealth. Importantly, the beneficiaries would be small-farm owners. But

this is unlikely to happen. At its base this is an issue of disproportionate power between the U.S. economy and the Haitian economy. Haiti's best chance for establishing self-sufficiency depends on its ability to extract favorable trade criteria from the United States.

James Price is in the middle of a four-year MCC term in Dezam, Haiti.

Ode to a Passport

by Sylvia Dening

Fighting the crowds, I squeeze down a narrow hallway into the Immigration Building in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to renew our daughter's passport. The crowds have been waiting for some time.

This is not the first time I have frequented this building. After finally getting approval from the governing powers, I am here with my *fiche* (receipt) to pick up the precious passport.

I need to go to the far left corner of the room. I enter the room, pass the first security, inch my way to my destination, and hand the receipt to the lady behind the glass. She gives me a bored look and offers no information other than pointing me to the next booth. I am now confused as the people in that booth show no interest in my receipt.

I stand there and observe until I realize that there is a security guard collecting all the receipts like mine. "Oh, this is how it's done," I think to myself. I approach him and hand over my receipt. I discover that the people lined up around the room are waiting to turn in receipts to him. He takes mine anyway, for which I am grateful, and tells me to wait.

After over two hours of standing in a hot, crowded room, finally I hear my daughter's name. I step forward, excited finally to be done, only to find out that the passport is not yet ready. I take back the receipt and head back to the MCC office.

A Second Attempt

After ten days, I stem up enough courage to try again. This time I have a problem even getting into the building. A security guard is beating people away from the door with a

stick and the guy next to me is hit hard on the chest. I back away. The building is already overflowing, though I notice that a few people are getting in. There is no line and people are pushing and shoving. Is there rhyme or reason to how to get into the building? After assessing the situation, I decide to try another time.

On my way out, some guy follows me half-way down the block and says he can get me in the building. The hope of having that passport in my hands compels me to accept his offer. We go to the back door where he knows the security guard, who lets me through. I pay him my "service fee," enter the building, and hand in my receipt again. There is barely standing room and I am pressed into the wall, but I wait patiently for over two hours. But the passport is still not done. They tell me to come back in a week.

I observe many others, frustrated and angry with the system. Some come from far away, waiting long hours, days, only to be turned away again. One lady is crying.

People from every part of Haiti come to this one building to apply for, renew, pay for, or pick up a passport. Like most official business here, there is more than one way of obtaining a passport. If you know the right people, dress the right way, pay the right money, speak the right language, or are aggressive enough to push through the lines, the process will go faster. But I know that if my process goes faster, someone else's passport process is being slowed down.

My sense of fairness and justice is long gone when it comes to waiting in line in Haiti. It still bothers me the way the system works, but I no longer fight it. "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." This structure is unjust

Mr. Clouter Joseph, a Haitian teacher, presented conflict resolution training in 1998 with MCC help to 319 children at 13 primary schools. Here are excerpts of James Price's interview with him:

Q: Mr. Clouter, what was MCC's vision for this program?

A: We wanted to see the children have the capacity to solve their own conflicts—so that they could participate in making a peaceful society and so they would know how to resolve conflicts when they are older.

Q: What methods did you use to help realize this vision?

A: We taught the children songs, used puppets, and did role-playing.

Q: What usually causes conflict?

A: Adults usually fight over land or an animal, but with children it is about small things like a pen or teasing.

Q: What basic method did you teach to resolve conflicts?

A: We taught the students five steps: (1) find out what the problem is; (2) think about the problem from different perspectives; (3) attack the problem, not other people; (4) treat everyone with the respect they deserve; (5) accept responsibility for everything you do. Also, we tell students to use "I" messages and not "you" messages.

Q: What changes do you see in the children who participated in this program?

A: I think they are more respectful of each other and also of their parents and teachers. They have learned how to listen to other people. They also intervene as mediators when there is conflict.

The first mistake is not a mistake; every dog is entitled to one bite.

(Even legally in some jurisdictions in Haiti—Ed Dening)

and creates a violent atmosphere for the employees and those waiting to be served. The system is violent toward the very people it is supposed to serve!

I am just as guilty now, adding to the situation: I skipped the line, paid to get in the building, and in the end paid the service fee for someone else to pick up the passport because I could not bear to go down there one more time. I too am not willing to wait in the line-up knowing it could take me days of waiting.

I would have gladly stood in line, though, had I been confident that the line would move fairly and that I would get my turn in order. In Haiti trying to do something like this on my own is next to impossible. The structures are set up to treat people differently, making some people wait days while others do not wait, making some people pay one amount and the next person, something different.

The structures are set up that way so certain people have the power to charge an extra fee. These people are unlikely to change the system. They make oodles of money from

service fees and can get friends and family whatever is needed.

Hope for Justice

In Proverbs 29:4 we read, “By justice a king gives a country stability, but one who is greedy of bribes tears it down” (NIV). In order to have peace in Haiti, there needs to be justice. For justice to begin, some government structures need an overhaul. Unfortunately, I don’t see these changes happening anytime soon.

I hope for a Haiti in which all people will have equal access to services, a Haiti in which people can get their passports peacefully, without pushing and shoving, without harsh words, without waiting for days in the hot sun while others get in before you. I hope for a Haiti in which one can wait in line, confident that each person will be treated fairly. Then justice will reappear and peace will be possible.

Sylvia Dening is MCC co-representative for Haiti. Sylvia and Ed and their three daughters have lived in Haiti for almost 13 years. Youngest daughter Karli is the proud owner of the new passport referred to above.

Neighborhood Violence

by Selena McCoy Carpenter

It is better to give to an enemy than to borrow from friends.

It’s the second hour of what will probably be a four- or five-hour fight at my neighbor’s house. Because of how close we live to one another, these fights seem especially menacing. Usually they just escalate to loud yelling and screaming, often carried into the street for all to observe. All too frequently they become rock-throwing, bottle-breaking, spouse- or child-hitting affairs.

One expatriate remarked that these fights are not all that bad. They are just a good way to blow off steam, and by the next morning folks are all better, friends again. I am not so sure.

Perhaps it is my polite Southern upbringing, but it makes me cringe to witness these fights. Nor do I like my kids to hear them. My daughter is already well versed in Creole and knows how to “dress down” someone. No conflict resolution professional would approve. She is five.

Since our earliest days here, I have often felt an undercurrent of anger and violence.

I imagined standing by an active volcano—hot, shaky, with rumblings under the surface. Often it feels as if the smallest thing could set the whole place on fire.

I usually ask our cook, Tigrenn, what the fight was about. My Creole is not the best, but I can get the gist of it. It usually boils down to the equivalent of some North American high school kid saying, “Your mama!”

I am not poking fun at my neighbors’ anger. I am identifying an undercurrent of anger and violence that easily erupts. Contented people do not have these explosions for silly reasons. Something must be awfully wrong.

So what is wrong? One day I was complaining about my neighborhood to an experienced MCCer. I was telling her how it bugged me that grown people would walk by and for no obvious reason find a way to hurt our dog. She said, “Well, I know when I’m hungry, I’m usually grumpy.” Hmmm.

There is a lot to be mad about here in Haiti. Hunger, disease, overpopulation, raw

sewage, just to name a few. These are big issues that many of my neighbors cannot overcome. When I talk with a neighbor about one of these issues, she or he can usually see that it causes frustration; but I doubt she would recognize that it makes her or her husband strike out at others.

And maybe it is wrong for me to analyze what their reasons are. Somehow, though, I need to understand why.

I know when things are out of my control, that's when I'm most likely to be angry. Almost *nothing* is under my neighbors' control. They do not know where their next meal is coming from. They cannot afford to send their children to school. There are no jobs. The country's political situation goes from one chaotic leader to the next. Every basic need is out of reach, out of their control. Controlling those who are weaker is their only option. Unfortunately that control often shows itself as physical and verbal violence.

Haiti was founded on violence. People were torn from their homes and shipped halfway across the world to work under brutal oppressors. When the slaves finally had enough, they brutally fought back. They revolted and took their freedom, but with much bloodshed. The slave leader Jean-Jacques Dessalines said, "Blan bon lé li sans tèt." A white is good when his head is cut off.

For many Haitians not much has changed since the days of slavery. Babies still die too often. There is no reliable water source for

most of the country. Food is much too scarce. The political situation is still unstable. I would be angry too.

So what can I do to advocate peace? I know what to do in the United States for my neighbor whose husband beats her or her children. Here? There are no hotlines. There is no Department of Social Services. There is no safety plan for her to devise.

I have had to come up with new ways to help. The most difficult thing is to be non-violent myself. As a Mennonite that should come naturally. For me it has not. The violence and hopelessness surrounding me makes it a challenge.

I try to stay open to my neighbors, just to be a friend. I can sympathize with the other neighbors who are also affected and scared by the violence. I give food or even money when the situation seems especially desperate. I bake an extra loaf of bread. I always have *pain ak mamba* (bread with peanut butter) for the kids. My backyard remains a safe, nonviolent place for kids to play and just be kids.

Am I stopping the violence? No. But even our Savior did not do that. I am not sure we are expected to. I can only pray and cry and beg God to intervene. I wish I had more answers, but I know who does.

Selena McCoy Carpenter has been an MCC volunteer in Milot, Haiti, since 2001, along with her husband, Rand, and two children.

Books about Haiti

Edwidge Danticat, *The Farming of Bones* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998). A novel based on the relations between the Dominican Republic and Haiti in the early 1900s focusing on the massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic in the 1930s. I would recommend any of the other novels by Edwidge Danticat, all of which are related to Haiti!

Madison Smartt Bell, *All Souls' Rising* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995). A historical novel set in the time of Haiti's independence from France. Very graphic but realistic and fairly historically correct. Smartt Bell has several other novels about Haiti as well.

Diane Wolkstein, *The Magic Orange Tree and Other Haitian Folktales* (New York: Schocken Books, 1997). A compilation of folktales. A good read!

—Edwin Dening

Justice in Action

by Margaret De Jong

I have heard that there are complaints about the kind of people who come to this church," announces Pastor Luders Erase of First Baptist Church (FBC) in Les Cayes. "We have thieves, we have drunks, we have prostitutes. Well, let me remind you—Christ came for just such people! That's what the church is all about!"

Love everyone, and love to help them in every way. I have repeatedly received this message over the past two years as part of the 1,000-member congregation. The sermons verbalize this message, and the church's ministries proclaim it in action.

Les Cayes, population 125,000, is the capital of the South Department of Haiti. This

area of the country is better off than most—more paved roads, reliable electricity, less deforestation. The FBC building reflects this relative prosperity as well—two steeples, a large balcony, artificial chandeliers, and flush toilets.

Yet there are many physically and spiritually needy people in the Cayes region, and I continue to be impressed with the way folks at FBC try to demonstrate God's compassion to congregation members and to others in the community. FBC people are involved in sharing food, sharing medical skills and supplies, helping kids go to school, and teaching pertinent issues to the congregation.

Divine justice is as slow as an ox-cart.



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It has been exciting for me to participate in these social ministries. This is the first church I have known in Haiti that is so involved in meeting physical needs. I have helped in the food pantry, which is open most Sundays after the worship service. We give out rice, pasta, oil, and dried fish, and maybe a few spices.

I have also helped with the feeding of a thousand of the city's poorest people that takes place every Christmas and Easter season. Church leaders say this is a party, and we are to do it well. Church women begin food preparations the day before. We give out heaping plates of rice and beans with vegetables and meat, a bottle of juice, a piece of cake, and some candy. FBC tries to give each person a small amount of cash. It is difficult to control the crowd, but the ministry continues year after year.

Several times a year, physicians and nurses from the church run a medical clinic in Tibiwon, four hours away. We see 200–300 people in two days of clinics. Ordinarily foreigners staff such clinics, and it is encouraging to see Haitian church members engaged.

Like most churches here, FBC operates a grade school. Church members contribute to the costs of those unable to pay. Church leaders look beyond their own school and solicit money for a school in Tibiwon.

I am also impressed with the teaching at the church. When there were many revenge killings recently, Pastor Luders preached on Joseph using his position of authority to forgive his brothers. The church recently held a conference on agricultural issues, and is teaching about AIDS to the congregation. With an election planned for 2005, leaders are also preparing civic education seminars.

Stories of injustice abound in this country. It can be discouraging to see the violence and oppression in Haiti. But God is also here! I thank God for the hope he is bringing through First Baptist Church. As I move on, may I learn from the courage and love of my brothers and sisters, to never tire of finding practical ways to show God's mercy.

Margaret De Jong, a family nurse practitioner, completed 11 years with MCC in Haiti in September 2004.