

## CROWN COLLEGE ALUMNUS VISITS HAITI

*How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people! How is she become as a widow!*

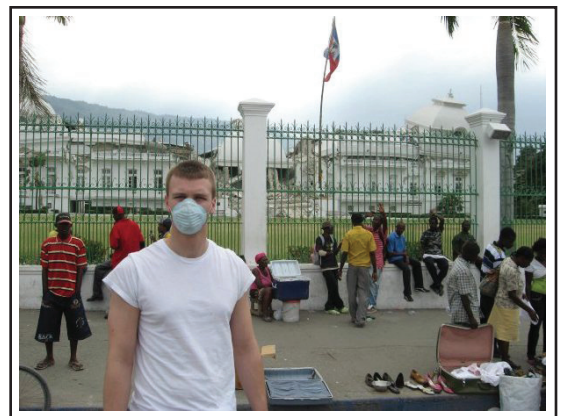
Lamentations 1:1

I thought of these words over and over again as I traveled through the streets of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. I arrived there just eleven days after the devastating 7.0 magnitude earthquake that reduced the capital city to a wasteland. It was not in my plans to go, but it was God's timing and guidance that made a way for me and my companion to get to Haiti.

My companion was Balmir St. Cyr, a Haitian man at Unity Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina where I am the associate pastor and youth director. Balmir moved to the United States in 2009 with his wife Maggie, who is an American. Before coming to Greenville, they both served the Lord at the Fondation Bousol Timoun, a Christian orphanage that Balmir's family operates in Port-au-Prince. The orphanage is run by Balmir's sister and her husband, Julie and Franceli Joseph. After the earthquake, we held our breath and prayed that we would receive word from his family that they were safe. A few days after the January 12th disaster, we got word from Haiti that his entire family and all thirty-one orphans were safe. We were all grateful to God for their safety, yet the situation remained desperate. They had to abandon the orphanage because of the structural damage it suffered during the earthquake, and the subsequent aftershocks made it uninhabitable. Matters were made worse by the lack of food, water, medicine, and electricity in the capital.

This was the situation when Balmir and Maggie approached me about traveling to Port-au-Prince to try and bring some relief and comfort to Balmir's family and the orphans. After praying for wisdom and receiving the whole-hearted support of our pastor, J. Earl Green, we believed that God would make a way for us to fulfill this mission. We were able to watch the Lord Jesus provide in a miraculous way as we prepared for our trip. I cannot overstate this: God met our every need in less than a week's time as we primed for our journey to Haiti.

On Saturday, January 23rd Balmir and I left the United States and flew to Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti. Our plan was to make the long drive west to the border and cross into Haiti. We were able to do this with the help of Balmir's brother, Michel St. Cyr, and his fluency in English, Spanish, and French Creole. The three of us arrived in Port-au-Prince on Sunday the 24th of January. The initial entrance into the city is something I will never forget. It is one thing to view a foreign crisis on the news from your comfortable living room in America; it is another matter entirely to go there and see the bodies in the streets and smell the stench of death. As we rode through the streets in Franceli's vehicle, we donned our surgical masks for the first of many times.



*Zach on the street in Port-au-Prince*

When we came to where the family and orphans were staying very near to the orphanage, we received a warm welcome from all the children. They were very grateful that God had brought us their way, along with five suitcases of clothing, medicine, and food. Julie, the executive director, asked me if I could try to explain the earthquake to the children. With Balmir translating my English into Creole, I told them that we know from the Bible that God created the heaven and the earth. We also know that God created the earth in such a way that we are on top of many, many plates that fit together under the earth's surface. I used some coloring books stacked on top of each other to illustrate that sometimes God allows the plates to move and it makes things shake where we are living on the top of the earth. No matter what happens though, God loves us and He knows right where we are and what we need. What an encouragement to know this- that Jesus will never leave us nor forsake us!



*Balmir and Zach at the Orphanage*

In the days that we were in Port-au-Prince we saw many heartrending things. The National Palace that once glimmered as a symbol of Haitian pride was reduced to rubble. People who had homes now lived in tents made of bed sheets. Broken concrete and twisted rebar were everywhere. Yet there were blessings in the midst of all the anguish. We were able to speak with a unit from the US Army's 82nd Airborne Division everyday. They were exemplary in helping the people and showing kindness. We did our best to encourage our soldiers by thanking them and praying with them. Balmir took me to his old church and introduced me to the pastor- he was still trying to care for his people despite his own needs. We were able to play with the orphans and give them some cheer and comfort from God's Word.

We left Haiti and traveled back to the Dominican Republic, where we flew to Miami on Thursday, January 28th. As I consider what God allowed us to see, many thoughts come to mind. I do not know how long it will take to rebuild Port-au-Prince. But the greatest need is not for food, water, electricity, or infrastructure. The greatest need in Haiti is still what it was the day before the earthquake- for people to hear that Jesus Christ died on the cross, was buried, and rose from the grave to bring salvation to sinners. There is no greater time than the present to pray that God would send laborers into this distressed part of the world so that precious souls might come to know Christ as Savior. Just as Lamentations 1:1 is reminiscent of the situation in Haiti, so is Lamentations 3:32- But though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies."

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*Zach and Amanda Heaberlin are members of Unity Baptist Church in Greenville SC, where Zach serves as associate pastor and youth director.*