

To: Clergy and Laity of the West Ohio Conference

The Lord is near to the broken hearted  
and saves the crushed in spirit.

Psalms 34:18

The people of Haiti are devastated. They are broken in heart and body. Port au Prince and surrounding communities lie in ruins. Tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of people are dead, with hunger, thirst and disease yet to take their toll. In an instant, the earthquake inflicted unimaginable suffering that will persist for years. We are sickened and baffled by the enormity and severity of the destruction. The people of Haiti, and we, are crushed in spirit.

Among those who have died are Rev. Sam Dixon, top executive of our own United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and Rev. Clint Rabb, head of our denomination's Volunteers in Mission (VIM) program. Their families, the General Board of Global Ministries, and we, are crushed in spirit.

In the midst of all that seems hopeless, all that is uncertain, all that is destroyed, I rejoice that God's loving, redemptive presence prevails. The prophet Isaiah's strong voice is a source of comfort:

The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand forever.

Isaiah 40:8

I encourage all of us to hold fast to this eternal absolute.

In the midst of the unfathomable destruction in Haiti, I rejoice in the response of the people called United Methodist in West Ohio and around the globe. Your prayers for the people of Haiti and those laboring to rescue and bring relief have been steadfast. Your financial gifts have been generous. Your preparations for the long-term recovery are already underway. Your response is a testimony to God's unwavering love and mercy. And, our response will need to be sustained.

The devastation in Haiti is also a powerful lesson for us. The images on TV, the internet and in the newspapers convey the undeniable fact that poverty is a scourge every bit as urgent, threatening and evil as violent terrorists. On January 14, David Brooks wrote in The New York Times: “This is not a natural disaster story. This is a poverty story. It’s a story about poorly constructed buildings, bad infrastructure and terrible public services. (We are) going to have to use this tragedy as an occasion to rethink our approach to global poverty.” Even as we respond to the extreme suffering in Haiti, I pray that we in West Ohio will join our voices to call for a dramatic and honest examination of what does and what doesn’t work to reduce the world-wide pandemic of poverty.

Human tragedy of the magnitude we see in Haiti often reminds those who share the Christian faith about our true identity, and hope of what we can and cannot count upon. We can count on God’s abiding grace. We can count on the reality of our own resurrection. But, we cannot count on being here tomorrow to do the things we have been called to do. Don’t hesitate, don’t postpone, and don’t neglect your calling. This tragedy will require multiple waves of prayer and financial investment in Haiti’s future.

Above all, we can count on the word of God standing forever. This is our hope. This is the hope of the people of Haiti. This is the hope of the world.

Bishop Bruce R. Ough  
West Ohio Conference  
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