



From the desk of John Sullivan, Executive Director-Treasurer  
Florida Baptist Convention  
Jacksonville, FL

Subject: Our Commitment to Haiti

We do a lot of things at the Florida Baptist Convention, but I believe our response to the January 12 earthquake in Haiti will be one of our finest moments. This is who we are as Florida Baptists. The Southern Baptist Convention's Disaster Relief organization has asked us to take the lead in the Convention-wide response. Let me tell you why.

We have a structure in existence in Haiti that does not exist in the Southern Baptist Convention. The International Mission Board does not have a missionary living in Haiti. Florida Baptists have a 15-year partnership and seven national missionaries that are paid by the Florida Baptist Convention. These missionaries—and a staff of 15 who serve at the Baptist mission house in Port-au-Prince—are supported by the Florida Baptist Convention.

Since the day after the earthquake, these indigenous missionaries have been assessing damage and ministering to their people—as we have taught them to respond in the aftermath of previous disasters. In less than a week, they were distributing food and providing medical care in numerous locations—something they are doing continuously.

Our partnership with Haiti is supported by Florida Baptists' gifts to the Maguire State Mission Offering through an annual \$120,000 offering allocation. In 2009, the offering fell short of its goal, resulting in a \$67,000 deficit in funding for the Haiti Partnership. In action taken by the State Board of Missions on Feb. 5, the \$67,000 shortfall was relieved by an outright grant from the Convention's New Work/Church Loan Fund.

To date, the Florida Baptist Convention has received \$1.77 million for the Earthquake Relief in Haiti. We want it to be made clear. No money from the relief fund will be used for administrative purposes. No relief money will be used to repair the mission house. No relief money will be used to pay the salaries of our missionaries or mission house employees.

All of the money received for the Haiti earthquake relief will be used to meet physical and spiritual needs of the Haitian people struggling to persevere in the aftermath of the earthquake. Our long-term commitment is three-fold. To provide food until the people can become self-sufficient. Secondly, to help our Haitian Baptist churches repair and rebuild their facilities and thirdly, to help rebuild homes.

We are asking Southern Baptists to assemble "Buckets of Hope." These will be a tremendous asset to our ministry when our Haitian Baptist churches distribute these buckets to families in their villages. Each bucket is to include rice, beans, cooking oil, flour, sugar and peanut butter and is expected to feed a Haitian family for a month. Yet as important as the food is, the bucket itself is invaluable to that Haitian family. It can be used for water, food, washing and storage. The buckets are to be assembled, packed and sent to a drop-off location in each association by March 15. The buckets will be labeled with a gospel message. Haiti will know our Christian testimony by our buckets.

We are buying tons of rice and beans and shipping them in containers to the port in Saint-Marc, Haiti. The port in St. Marc was not destroyed and is two hours driving time from Port-au-Prince. From there, the food will be delivered to our Haitian Baptist churches that will handle distribution.

Let me share with you a story of God's providence. Three years ago our son decided to move to Stuttgart. Ark. On our first visit, he introduced me to the Riceland Corporation whose world-wide corporate offices are in Stuttgart. This company distributes rice around the world. Much of the rice is grown in Stuttgart and the surrounding area.

The moment the earthquake struck Haiti, I was on the phone to Danny Kennedy, my son's brother-in-law and president of Riceland Corporation. We bought 84,000 pounds (42 tons) of rice and it is now on its way to Haiti.

When First Baptist Church of Stuttgart learned we had purchased rice, their missions committee bought 40 tons of rice and paid for the cost of getting it to a Florida port for shipping.

I believe that is evidence of God's providence.

We already have several partners working with us in our efforts. Alabama Baptists have sent us \$213,000 for Haiti relief. Other state conventions have committed to support the relief efforts led by Florida Baptists.

Leaders of First Baptist Church of Covington, La., called me and asked to be a collection center for "Buckets of Hope." Even their schools want to get involved, they said, because people in the school system remember the gold-shirts that said "Southern Baptist Disaster Relief" in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. That is God's providence.

I have been to Haiti many times. I love the Haitian people. I make this commitment to you, Florida Baptists. We are going to stay in Haiti for the long run. We will continue to work through our Haitian pastors and churches to benefit their on-going ministry to the Haitian people. We invite you to join us on our journey.

For more information on our efforts in the Haiti Earthquake Relief go to the following page on the Convention's website: <http://www.flbaptist.org/tabid/825/Default.aspx>

