

## Haitians begin to carry Buckets of Hope home

By Barbara Denman

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (BP)--At garbage dump on the northern outskirts of Port-au-Prince, gaunt and weary-looking Haitians formed two lines to wait in the searing sun June 20 for Buckets of Hope to be unloaded from a truck near Eglise Baptiste Canaan.

The church, named for the Promised Land, ironically is planted at the garbage dump where a makeshift city of displaced Haitians has sprung up after the Jan. 12 earthquake.

The Buckets of Hope were among the thousands that had been languishing in the capital city's port for two months before Haitian customs officials, overwhelmed by the processing of other shipments of supplies since the earthquake, would release the shipping containers transporting the buckets. Five containers filled with 6,750 buckets have been released by government officials as of June 25.

Another 13 containers remain at the port, while Florida Baptist Convention staff work through government bureaucratic channels for their release. For the disaster relief team on the ground in Haiti, which includes Southern Baptist volunteers and Florida Baptist Convention staff, each day brings additional meetings and the processing of paperwork to satisfy government officials. Each day the team wonders if more containers will be accessed so more Haitians will have food that night.

At the garbage dump, Moreno Robert, pastor of Eglise Baptiste Canaan, coordinated the food distribution to the tent city.

"Normally we don't ask strangers to give food to our families," he said through a translator. "But since Jan. 12 there is little work so there is little food. We are obliged."

The vivid blue-tarped structures dotting the mounds of refuse became a place of refuge after the earthquake left them fearful for their safety. Living in wide, open spaces away from concrete debris falling off city buildings is surely safer, they reasoned.

Like many Haitians, they have repeated a similar phrase -- "my home has become my enemy."



Families at Eglise Baptiste Bethanien in Port-au-Prince wait for their names to be called to receive Buckets of Hope filled with food items from Southern Baptists. *Photo by Ken Touchton*



These Haitian brothers in Port-au-Prince and their family will be fed for a week or more by food items in their Bucket of Hope, labeled in yellow with a Gospel message from Southern Baptists. *Photo by Ken Touchton*



Fritz Wilson (left), Florida Baptist disaster relief director

Robert started the church in the dump after an evangelistic crusade resulted in new Christian believers. Sweeping his hand across to the sea of blue tents along the mountain ridge, the pastor said, "What you see here was not here before the earthquake."

As the buckets were handed to those first in line, each recipient quickly departed, unwilling to chance losing their bucket to someone else.

Despite having to stand in line for the promise of food, the crowd waited for their turn, never becoming unruly or disorderly.

That same day, nearly 250 people crowded inside Eglise Baptiste Bethanien in Port-au-Prince as others stood outside waiting for the Buckets of Hope distribution at the end of the service. As pastor Louis Joseph called each name, some families sent their children to the front of the church to receive their bucket.

The buckets were given to church members as well as others in the community who attended the nearly two-hour worship service and heard the Gospel message proclaimed.

An air of solemn excitement filled the congregation while the 150 buckets were distributed. Guarding their newly acquired prize, families raced to their homes to open the five-gallon buckets.

The contents of each Bucket of Hope include flour, rice, beans, oil, pasta, peanut butter and other items that will feed a family for at least a week, depending on the size of their extended family.

Not only will the family consume the food but the buckets themselves will be used to carry water from wells and in numerous other ways as Haitians survive in abject poverty.

In all, Southern Baptists packed just over 155,000 buckets for the Haitian people after the earthquake. Other containers of buckets remain in Florida until the ones currently in Haiti can be systematically worked through customs.

Jean Phito Francois, a Baptist director of missions in Port-au-Prince, said he had been telling his churches that the buckets were coming.

"Many people asked, 'When did the U.S. people get time to do this?'" Francois said.

"This is a great blessing unto God," he added. "See the buckets -- the people are so happy to receive [them]. Especially for me, it has touched my heart."

Francois reported that even though the containers were delayed in customs, everything was "extraordinarily in

Baptist disaster relief director who conceived the Buckets of Hope idea for Haiti disaster relief, joins in stacking the containers at the front of the Eglise Baptiste Bethanien before the food supplies from Southern Baptists were distributed to the community in Port-au-Prince. *Photo by Ken Touchton*



Standing in two lines, displaced Haitians wait for a Bucket of Hope at a garbage dump where they have settled north of Port-Au Prince. Each bucket contains food items from Southern Baptists to feed a family for a week or more. *Photo by Barbara Denman*



A Haitian woman, displaced by the Jan. 12 earthquake and now living at a garbage dump north of Port-au-Prince, carries a Bucket of Hope filled with food products packed by Southern Baptists. *Photo by Barbara Denman*

good shape" once the buckets were opened.

The concept for the Buckets of Hope originated with Fritz Wilson, director of Florida Baptists' disaster relief, during his first trip to Haiti after the quake.

Wilson, who also is serving as the Haiti disaster relief incident commander for the North American Mission Board, determined the buckets' ingredients after consultation with the Haitian kitchen workers at the Florida Baptist Mission House. He and his family assembled the first bucket when he returned to the States.

"As I watched a family in Haiti open their bucket, I thought about my family going up and down the aisle of a Walmart putting the very first bucket together. We knew that the food bucket would be a blessing to a family but could not really comprehend the enormity of it all," Wilson said.

While the challenge of working the containers through Haitian customs has been frustrating, Wilson looks at the challenges as a "God-thing."

"The need for the buckets continues to be great, even as Haiti is recovering," he said.

The rainy season in the tropical Haitian climate is in full force. Wilson constantly tracks the weather via the Internet to determine if any hurricanes or tropical storms are threatening the island of Hispaniola which Haiti shares with the Dominican Republic.

The need for food could become increasingly critical during the next few months, he said.

"I have said it often, God in His perfect timing will release the containers at the perfect juncture. Our job is to wait on Him," Wilson said.

Wilson equated seeing the first bucket distributed to "the first water station in a marathon. It was a welcome site. It was refreshing and re-energizing but there are still many miles to go."

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