Taking the Long View in Haiti and Elsewhere

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE for the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee lately? I don’t mean the big donation you just sent in response to the Haiti earthquake. That was GREAT! Our church members are extremely generous in a crisis.

No, I mean the run-of-the-mill dollars that you drop in the offering plate or give through CRWRC’s gift-giving catalog for the regular development work it does so well around the world.

As I write this, government and relief personnel are pouring into Port-au-Prince and promptly getting bottlenecked at the airport, trying to manage logistics in a city with a now-nonexistent infrastructure, while survivors of the Jan. 12 quake grow more desperate.

What you aren’t seeing on your news is that CRWRC already has people who live there, who know the area, who know the local folks, who know the back roads around the city and between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. They are already getting food, water, medical help, and shelter to those in dire need. (For full Haiti coverage, see pp. 10–15.)

That’s because CRWRC has been working in Haiti for 35 years, doing the day-to-day work of helping farmers with agricultural education, helping urban entrepreneurs set up small businesses, and more. That work contributes to the leadership skills of Haitian citizens to, in the words of CRWRC-Canada Director Ida Kastra-Mutoigo, “achieve the vision they believe God has for their communities.”

CRWRC partners with many organizations, including Back to God Ministries International and Christian Reformed World Missions.

Oh, sure, it isn’t “sexy” work that catches media attention. (I know—I’m as guilty as the next editor about following the “If it bleeds, it leads” maxim.) But this long-term work means that the Christian Reformed Church already has people, networks, and expertise in place to address the disaster and to follow up afterward.

After Bill O’Reilly, Anderson Cooper, and Peter Mansbridge move on to the world’s next hot spot, Haiti’s recovery will require re-establishing the capacity of the Haitian people to sustain their own economy and produce enough food to feed themselves—while trying to offset the centuries of violence, dictatorship, poverty, and dependency that have plagued their small country.

That’s exactly what CRWRC was doing in Haiti before the earthquake and will keep doing afterward, there and in many other places.

CRWRC is great at disaster relief, at home and abroad. When high-profile disasters happen, the Disaster Response Team kicks into high gear, donations pour in, and The Banner tells readers all about it.

But it’s the long-term work in so many countries that leaves us so well-placed when the crises do come. The irony is that some of that work was recently scaled back because of a drop in donations. The budget for development work in Haiti was just reduced by 13 percent (see February 2010 news, p. 13).

So for that gift you sent in for Haiti—thank you! But don’t forget the long view when you plan your regular giving, so we can continue to contribute toward long-term development work around the globe.

We don’t know which country might be the site of the next big disaster, but when that happens, let’s already have feet on the ground, attached to hands and hearts ready to help. ■

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