

## SON-BEAM is Hard at Work in Haiti

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April 9, 2009 – In early April, members of a Christian Reformed Church in Haiti congregation began hauling 150-pound rocks that they dumped in a heap outside the doors of the small building they used as a church.

They did this so that a group from the United States could help them build a new church, using the rocks as a foundation. When they heard that SON-BEAM International, the U.S. ministry, preferred pulverized rocks rather than boulders, they got out their hammers and laboriously broke the rocks into gravel.

Learning about this back-breaking effort only solidified for Christian Reformed World Missions missionary Zachary King the respect he already had for SON-BEAM and the influence it is having on CRC congregations in Haiti.



“With SON-BEAM’s help, church congregations are working together for a common purpose and vision in a way that is almost unheard of in Haiti. This sense of purpose and determination continues in outreach, charity, teaching and the other ministries of the church as well,” says King.

SON-BEAM International is a non-denominational ministry that was founded after a group of people helped to build a CRC church building in Jamestown, Mich. At first, they thought of using their skills in the building trades to help construct churches in third-world countries. But they veered from that focus and now essentially serve as fund-raisers and consultants for construction projects.

During the same week that the church members in Haiti were breaking up rocks in Haiti, Rev. Stan Drenth, a member of SON-BEAM's board and pastor of the church in Jamestown out of which many of the ministry's members come from, stood in front of a gathering of interested people at his church and spoke about working with Christian Reformed World Missions to build durable, hurricane-resistant churches across Haiti.

“In Haiti, one church talks to another. The missionaries tell us we have brought encouragement to Haiti,” says Drenth. “We want to make it clear, though, that we’re not helping churches that don’t show initiative.”

Working together with CRWM, and in some instances with Christian Reformed World Relief Committee personnel, SON-BEAM has played a role in the construction of two new churches, with two more in the final stages of completion, in Haiti. It has also helped with building churches in Honduras and has started work in Nicaragua.

Although it was founded out of Drenth’s church, Searchlight Ministries CRC, SON-BEAM is a separate, non-profit and non-denominational entity. The group formed after Van Drie and other members of Searchlight Ministries had built the church. “At first we thought we would want to go somewhere and build something,” says Van Drie.

They spoke with Luis Pellecer, CRWM's regional director for Latin America. His assessment was that Haiti had the greatest need, but that it was important to involve the local congregation in the project. He invited Van Drie and others to travel along with him and judge for themselves.

SON-BEAM first helped to develop plans and provide materials for construction of a church building in Thomassique, Haiti. In the process, they had to hire a man to dig a well that now serves as a community water source and is located just outside the new church.

With the help of SON-BEAM, volunteers built the cement block church at a cost of \$8,312 and the church was dedicated in November 2007. Church members use the old, wooden church building for classes.

"We try to do something a little different," Van Drie tells the 60 or so people who came to the church that night to hear more about and watch a Power Point presentation of the ministry. "We travel to these places at our own expense. We help design the new church and help find the money for projects, but we encourage people to do the work themselves. This is not a hand-out. We stand alongside them."

So far, SON-BEAM'S approach is working, says King, who is stationed in Haiti with his wife, Sharon. "The work we have done with SON-BEAM has created a sense of hope and resilience among the Haitians we serve," he said in an email interview.

CRWM has provided expertise and manpower on the ground, helping to identify churches that could use the boost and coordinated with community leaders and others to get the work done. It hasn't always been easy.

"Many communities would have believed it was impossible to find volunteers to help build a church because of the daily hardships of life in Haiti," says King.

Joel Hogan, international ministries director for CRWM, says he supports the work that SON-BEAM is doing, in part because it reflects a shift in how missions work can occur.

Van Drie says he and others in the ministry have worked for many years in the building trades. Using their experience, they have come up with relatively inexpensive ways to re-enforce church structures to make them stand up better in storms.

"What we have is expertise that we can offer these groups," he says. "We get the design done and provide money in payments. We work with the missionaries on the field to make sure the church is reputable. If you are an outreaching church, we want to help."

The second church they built in Haiti was in Belledere. It took more than 100 people from the community to help pour the roof. Re-enforcing beams hold the roof in place.

The average Haitian church might have \$50 in income per week—to pay its pastor, run its ministries, etc. It is impossible for these churches to construct permanent facilities that can allow them to grow, especially since building materials in Haiti are more expensive than in the US and Canada, says Zach King.

SON-BEAM has also been involved in helping to build a church in Choluteca, Honduras, and is helping to build two more churches in Honduras, including in San Pedro Sula and another in Choluteca.

Meanwhile, a group of SON-BEAM representatives recently returned from Nicaragua, where they will be working through the Nehemiah Center, which is supported by the CRC, to build several churches. It also has on its to-do list construction of an orphanage in India.

SON-BEAM International is continuing to partner with Christian Reformed World Missions and others, sowing hope in Haiti and elsewhere. Learn more about SON-BEAM by calling Van Drie at 616-875-7255 or visit: <http://www.son-beam.com/>.