A “God Thing” in Haiti
A report to Haiti Medical Project donors, Dec., 2014

Haiti suffers from a heavy weight of poverty—it is by far the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Already suffering from poor nutrition and sanitation and related high infant/child mortality, Haiti suffered a series of devastating natural disasters—hurricanes/floods in 2008 and a crushing earthquake in 2010. Perhaps half a million persons were displaced. Brethren responded to the natural disasters in a major way and perhaps almost unintentionally have been part of forming and nurturing a growing church in Haiti—beginning from a single congregation in 2003 and growing to 20 congregations currently, serving perhaps 2,000 persons! The miraculous development of this church and its vision for serving its communities has certainly been a “God thing.” How else can we explain it?

A part of the God thing has been the desire of Haitian leaders to see a life giving health care response developed in partnership with these new congregations. Proposed as a response to the 2010 earthquakes and a health response piloted by Brethren Disaster Ministries, an idea for a new pattern of mobile clinics developed—but there were no official denominational funds available to put it in motion. With the blessing of the Global Mission and Service arm of the Church of the Brethren a new response—based on grass roots initiative and special over and above giving by congregations and individuals—was started. The Haiti Medical Project has touched a nerve and resulted in a generous, fruitful and rapidly growing response since 2012.

Mobile Clinics. The initial vision for a health care response was the development of mobile clinics staffed entirely by Haitian doctors, nurses and helpers. Geographically these clinics cover Haiti from near the southern coast to Haiti’s northern coast, and even across a sea crossing to the island of La Tortue. They are located in communities that have new Brethren congregations and are part of these congregations’ local outreach. The clinics address many types of infectious disease, often related to inadequate sanitation and nutrition. The clinics have been effective in raising the awareness of infectious disease and basic sanitation. They have been eagerly affirmed by the National Committee of Eglise des Freres Haitien (the Haitian Church of the Brethren) and by the local congregations and are observed with growing interest by other members of the development community in Haiti. They have also been influential in building interest in longer term possibilities for addressing health issues.

From 12 clinics in 2012, the project has grown to 24 in 2013 and 48 in 2014—estimated to reach at least 7,000 patients! In 2015 the preliminary plan calls for serving 16 communities with recurring mobile clinics, including several remote and difficult to reach villages.

Mobile Clinic Coordinating Committee. From left, medical team physicians Solon and Emmerson; Paul Ullom-Minnich, convener; Ilexene Alphonse, on-site .staff; and Eglise des Freres Haitiens representatives Rev. Yves Jean and Jean Altenor.
Community Health. From the start it has been the objective of Haiti Medical Project leaders to find ways to address some of the long-range issues that stand in the way of healthy communities. The majority of our related communities do not have access to pure drinking water and untreated water is a carrier of many diseases. The great majority of births in our related communities are attended at home by family members or other persons with no medical training. Infant mortality stands at about 57 infants lost per 1,000 births and mortality of children before their fifth birthday is 7.6%! These communities also experience an elevated number of mothers lost while giving birth. There are sanitation problems that could be helped by greater access to latrines. Basic education in sanitation and nutrition are needed basic building blocks. There is so much to do.

2014 has been a year of intentionally exploring possibilities to begin new work in community health, addressing long-range health issues. Leaders have been given several rounds of community development training. A delegation was sent to Honduras to visit successful community health programs there and came back with access to very helpful materials and professional support. Potential water projects were explored. A new pattern of giving staff focus to these issues was developed. A nurse from one of our congregations was given special training in leading short courses to untrained persons attending home births.

Beginning in 2015 Community Health will be a second major thrust of the Haiti Medical Project alongside the Mobile Clinics. A Community Development Team has been named, led by Jean Bily Telfort, former president of the national church (center below) and including Vildor Archange (left) and Adias Docteur (right.) A plan to partner with the Global Food Crisis Fund in projects of nutrition and economic development has begun. Vildor, a Haitian and former development worker in the Dominican Republic will give leadership in community health ministries.

Community Health Committees will be established in a growing number of our related communities, fostering community awareness of health issues and local initiative in addressing them. A program of “Matron Training” will be piloted to more adequately prepare persons attending home births. A program of initiating circles of pregnant women and nursing mothers to receive education in maternal care, sanitation and nutrition will be launched, led by our staff and contracted nurses. A small number of pure water projects will be developed and used as demonstration projects to encourage others. Partnership with related communities will be sought all along the way. Please pray for our staff as they launch new work, build new relationships and develop new insights. And help save lives.

Thank you for your support of Haiti Medical Project. Please continue your partnership--joining with other Brethren and your brothers and sisters in Haiti in an exciting God thing!

If you are led to make a gift, send it to Mission and Ministry Board, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 and designate for Haiti Medical Project, specifying either for Immediate Need or Endowment.