

Church Reconstruction in Haiti: 2010-2015 ***A Journey of Solidarity***

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Subcommittee for the Church in Latin America

The January 12, 2010, earthquake caused extensive casualties and destruction in Haiti. The Catholic Church was not spared. There were many deaths and injuries among the clergy, religious and lay leaders and approximately 250 buildings across seventy sites – churches, rectories, schools, houses of formation – were significantly damaged or destroyed. The estimated cost of the impact on church infrastructure is thought to be nearly \$200 million. The damage to the Church is very significant as the Catholic Church in Haiti is more than just a religious institution – it is a symbol of unity that has shaped the country's history and its community life. Rebuilding the Church in Haiti after the earthquake remains an important priority to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

The USCCB has a long history of solidarity with the Church in Haiti. This solidarity has been demonstrated through an array of partnerships with individual dioceses, support for pastoral projects from the Collection for the Church in Latin America, and addressing humanitarian issues through the official relief organization of the US Bishops, Catholic Relief Services (CRS).

Following the earthquake, the USCCB held a special collection for Haiti that raised nearly \$100 million from the U.S. faithful. Sixty percent of this special collection was given to CRS for immediate emergency and humanitarian response and forty percent was set aside for the reconstruction of Church infrastructure in Haiti and placed under the management of the USCCB Subcommittee on the Church in Latin America.

In September 2010, in Miami, Florida, the USCCB joined the Church in Haiti, sister churches and other donors to seek a coordinated response to the earthquake. There, the Partnership for the Reconstruction of the Catholic Church in Haiti (PROCHE) was created. PROCHE consists of an operating arm – known as the Operational Construction Unit– established within the Episcopal Conference of Haiti and is governed by a Joint Steering Committee composed of representatives of Haitian and international church leadership. A staff-level Executive Committee performs day-to-day governance for the Joint Steering Committee. PROCHE provides the Church and its donor partners a management and oversight instrument that is capable of executing the core mission of the reconstruction effort: ensuring quality construction of quake and hurricane resistant buildings and accurate and transparent accounting of funds.

PROCHE began operations in November 2011 with nearly thirty projects already submitted for funding. Since then, almost fifty projects have moved forward and eight have been completed. Of the projects active under PROCHE 21% are in the planning stage, 47% are in design, and 32%

are in construction or have been completed. The USCCB has granted over two-thirds of its share of the special collection –\$22 million – and has \$11 million left to allocate to remaining construction projects. It is expected that these funds will be granted by June of 2016 and be disbursed and spent by the end of 2018.

A completed project, the St. Francis of Assisi Church in Grand Goave, has provided Catholic Haitians in this hard-hit town with the ability to return to a place of worship and community life. The church, located about an hour outside of the capital of Port-au-Prince, was rebuilt to be hurricane and earthquake-resistant.

In the town of Jacmel, a new multi-use hall will soon be finished. Many community events in Jacmel were typically held at the Cathedral of St-Philippe and St-Jacques, a place now unsafe for worship due to severe cracks and structural damage. The design for the restoration and seismic strengthening of the Cathedral of Jacmel was funded by the USCCB and has recently been completed, but the restoration work will take longer to complete, leaving the faithful of Jacmel nowhere to worship or congregate. The multi-use hall will be a much-needed community space both for liturgical events as well as for meetings, cultural events, graduations, funerals, and conferences.

The preceding two projects are but examples of an array of projects that are either in design, construction or finished. A longer list of all of those projects is available upon request.

The solidarity of the Church in the United States with the Church in Haiti has been long-lasting and deep, developing even more after the devastating 2010 earthquake. The reconstruction of the Church infrastructure in Haiti, as modest as it may seem, has made significant progress. Time has been taken to make sure that the funds donated so generously by U.S. parishioners are used for projects that will produce safe and secure structures for the future and best serve the needs of the Haitian Catholic communities.

For more information on the USCCB's work in Haiti, visit www.usccb.org and search "Church in Haiti."