

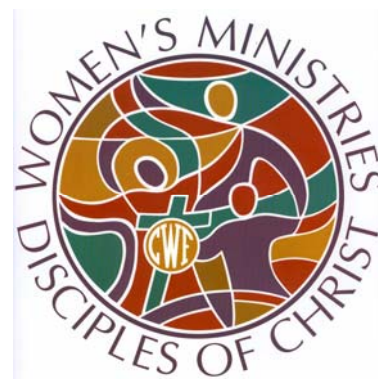
Study, Service and Worship Material for Disciples Women's Groups

Haitian Refugees and Immigrants



Refugee and Immigration Ministries

A Resource for Disciples
Women from DHM's
Refugee and Immigration
Ministries Program



Study

The History of Haitian Immigration to the United States

Until the late 1950s, only about five hundred Haitians permanently immigrated to the United States each year, while another 3,000 came temporarily as tourists, students, or business people. With passage of the 1965 Immigration Act that permitted family members to bring close relatives, those numbers increased to 7,000 permanent immigrants and 20,000 temporary visas each year. Virtually all of them arrived legally via airplane.

On December 12, 1972, the first boatload of Haitian refugees arrived on the shores of south Florida. They arrived on the Saint Saveur, fleeing the brutal Duvalier dictatorship whose family had run Haiti for 30 years with the financial and military assistance of the United States. Ever since then, Haitians coming by boat have been treated not as political refugees fleeing persecution, but as undocumented persons from a poor country seeking employment in the United States. As a result, if they have been caught entering the country, they have been immediately deported or, if they asked for the protection of the U.S. government (applied for asylum), they were usually put in immigration detention centers pending the outcome of their asylum case.

In May of 1979, a U.S. State Department study team visited Haiti to interview 60 of the 86 persons deported that year and reported no evidence of persecution. The findings and methods of investigation of that study were questioned by Haitian advocates.

In March of 1980, a total of 1,400 Haitians arrived by boat to Miami. By mid-April, another thousand came ashore. From May through October, arriving Haitians were given

“entrant status,” the same status as the Cubans entering in the same period through the “Mariel” boat lift. This is the one period of history when Haitians were treated similar to Cubans.

By May 20, 1981, President Reagan began the detention and deportation of Haitians once again. On September 28, 1981, President Reagan issued an executive order that the U.S. Coast Guard would “interdict” Haitian boat people as they leave Haiti. Those interdicted were given less than five minutes to answer a narrow set of questions through an interpreter to determine if they wanted to apply for asylum in the United States. The interviews were conducted without any privacy, and most of the Haitians were returned to Haiti.

In October of 1986, Congress passed an immigration reform bill with a section that allowed undocumented persons in the United States since before January 1, 1982, to adjust their status to Permanent Resident. Many Haitians were able to take advantage of that law.

In January of 1991, the Immigration and Naturalization Service reformed its interdiction procedures and allowed interviews to be extended to 20 minutes and conducted privately. Notes were taken in order to create official records, and there was an expanded list of questions, said to be designed to persuade nervous refugees to speak freely. After the reforms, a handful more Haitians were allowed to pursue their asylum claims in the United States.



A very full boat of Haitians is intercepted by the Coast Guard. (Photos: courtesy of CWS)



Haitians are detained if they reach the shore. (Photo: courtesy of CWS)



On February 7, 1991, Aristide became President of Haiti. Statistics showed that the numbers of Haitians leaving Haiti and stopped by the Coast Guard dropped to their lowest rate. Advocates for Haitians said this proved that people had been fleeing for political, rather than economic, reasons.

Of the 24,000 Haitians intercepted in international waters by the U.S. Coast Guard from 1981 until Aristide came to office, only eleven were granted asylum. The rest were shipped back. In comparison, 75,000 Cubans were picked up in that same period and all 75,000 were granted immediate asylum.

In July of 1991, a boat was interdicted carrying 161 Haitians and two Cuban rafters that were picked up by the Haitians along the way. This was the first time Cubans and Haitians were interdicted on the same boat. The Coast Guard allowed the Cubans to come to the United States, while the cutter headed back to Haiti with the Haitians.

On September 20, 1991, a coup forced Aristide to leave the country, leading to a sharp increase in the numbers of Haitians leaving Haiti. For the seven months of President Aristide's tenure, there were no Haitians applying for political asylum in the United States. After he was removed from power, the asylum applications immediately skyrocketed.

On November 19, 1991, a federal judge in Miami issued a temporary restraining order to prevent the further forced return of Haitians picked up by the Coast Guard, followed by the first of 34,000 Haitians being disembarked at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. On January 31, 1992, the Supreme Court decided to allow forced repatriation of Haitian refugees, which allowed those Haitians on Guantanamo to be returned to Haiti.

Also in January of 1992, the State Department announced that the U.S. embassy in Haiti would begin taking applications from Haitians seeking to be admitted to the United States as official refugees. After that process was in place, President Bush issued an Executive Order authorizing the return, without screening for refugee status, of Haitian boat people interdicted by the Coast Guard and announced the intention to close down Guantanamo. The last U.S. flight of Haitians from Guantanamo arrived on July 10, 1992. The Supreme Court upheld President Bush's right to enforce such an Executive Order in August, and President Clinton announced that he would continue to uphold the Executive Order just before his inauguration in January of 1993.

On May 8, 1994, due to political pressure, President Clinton announced his intention to change the policy of returning Haitians interdicted by the Coast Guard without screening them for refugee status. So many Haitians were fleeing Haiti that on July 5, 1994, the Clinton Administration announced that "safe haven" would be provided for Haitians in Guantanamo once again, but refugee status would no longer be granted unless the Haitians applied in Haiti.

(See story on following page of a visit to the Guantanamo “safe haven.”) By May of 1995, all the Haitians on Guantanamo had been returned to Haiti, even a few unaccompanied children who had relatives or sponsors in the United States. Some of those children ended up living on the streets of Haiti and fending for themselves.

In May of 1995, a “wet foot, dry foot” policy was announced for Cuban refugees whereby Cubans who stepped on dry land would be allowed to stay in the United States, but those that did not make it to shore would be returned to Cuba. At times that policy was applied to Haitians that had a “dry foot,” but the Haitians were allowed to stay only for the purpose of applying for asylum. If they were not granted asylum, they were deported.

Aristide came back to power in 1994 and was elected for the second time in 2000. During those years the number of people leaving Haiti substantially declined. The U.S.-backed armed uprising against the Aristide government in 2004 once again caused increased numbers to attempt to reach the United States. In the midst of the crisis, a representative of the UNHCR (the UN agency for refugees) recommended “a suspension on any forced returns to Haiti, including those who have been rejected for asylum or picked up at sea.” But the Bush Administration continued to send all refugees back to Haiti.

Current Haitian Immigration

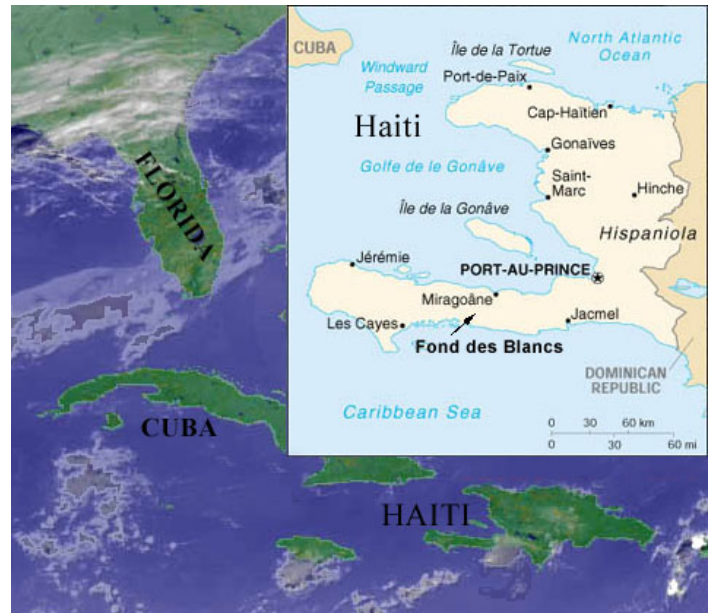
The numbers of Haitians actually making it to U.S. shores have hit an all time low in the last few years as the Coast Guard has more successfully intercepted boats and denied opportunities for Haitians to apply for asylum. It is no longer common for boatloads of Haitians to make it all the way to U.S. shores.

The 2000 U.S. Census found approximately 750,000 Haitians in the United States. This figure, however, probably reflects an undercount of as much as 50 percent in some neighborhoods.

Florida, with 268,000 Haitians, has more than one-third of the nation’s total. After Florida, the greatest numbers are in New York (180,000), followed by Massachusetts (Boston 50,000), New Jersey, and Connecticut.

Although Miami is the closest U.S. city to Haiti and its climate is similar, many Haitians have settled in the northeastern United States and French Canada. This was due both to the fact that immigration authorities seldom pursued undocumented Haitians in the north and to the hospitality of northern communities which were less racist than the racism that Haitians experienced in Florida. A notable exception to that fact was the 1997 attack and sexual assault of Abner Louima in a New York City police precinct. Louima was a member of a Disciples congregation in Brooklyn, New York – Evangelical Crusade of Fishers of Men. The senior pastor of that Haitian congregation, Rev. Philius Nicolas, was also Louima’s uncle.

The treatment of Haitian refugees represents a continuing bias in U.S. policy toward Haitian refugees, especially in contrast to the way their Cuban counterparts are treated. The Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste, a pioneer of Haitian refugee activism in Miami and former Haitian political



prisoner, has said that there is not a "wet foot" and "dry foot" policy as Washington has claimed, but a "black foot" and "white foot" one. The Coast Guard has attempted to intercept boats before they left Haitian waters. A disproportionate number of Haitians who made it to U.S. shores have been incarcerated. Requests for political asylum have been met with the highest rejection rate of any national group.

Many other nationalities of immigrants in situations less severe than that of Haitians have been granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS), a status that allows persons from countries suffering natural disasters or political violence to remain in the United States for renewable 12 to 18 month periods. Haitians are more than qualified for TPS due to the political violence of recent years and natural disasters (such as Tropical Storm Jeanne that killed over 2,000 people in 2004). Nevertheless, Haitians have never received TPS. By contrast, Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador, all more prosperous and stable, have received TPS following natural disasters since 1999. In 2007, a bill was introduced into Congress to grant TPS to an estimated 20,000 Haitians facing deportation from the United States, but it went nowhere.

The Difference in Treatment of Haitians and Cubans – Example # 1

Racism plays a major role both in how Haitians are treated on their way to the United States and once they arrive in the United States. In January of 1995, I (*Jennifer Riggs, Director of Refugee and Immigration Ministries*) was part of a Church World Service (CWS) delegation that visited Guantanamo to observe the treatment of both Cuban and Haitian refugees being held there in what the government was calling "Operation Safe Haven." The difference in their



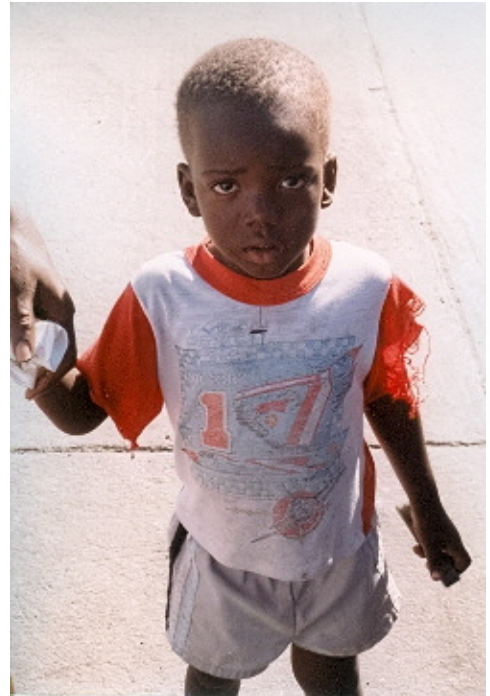
Haitians were held behind barbed wire at Guantanamo. (Photo: J. Riggs)

treatment was hard to understand. Both had fled the political situation and the economic conditions in their countries. Both had been picked up by the Coast Guard and taken to Guantanamo. But that is where the similarities stopped.

We were allowed to walk freely throughout the area where tents were set up for the Cuban refugees. The Cubans were free to go anywhere in that area of Guantanamo Bay. Games were available for the children. Various activities were planned to keep the Cubans occupied. Showers and other opportunities for personal hygiene were available around the clock. We spent about two hours walking among the Cubans and talking with them about their situation. There were complaints that they had been brought to Guantanamo, instead of the United States, but they all had hope that before long they would be allowed to join relatives and friends in Miami.

The Haitians, however, were sectioned off in a separate area with fences and barbed wire around them. Tents were placed up against each other, and there was little sign of anything to keep even the children occupied. We were not allowed in to talk with the Haitians. Two of our group were allowed to enter the fenced area for a brief conversation with a handful of Haitians who had seen us and gathered at the fence, but that was the extent of our connection. During that brief encounter we learned from the Haitians that they were not even being provided the necessary soap, shampoo, and other hygiene items needed for personal care. They knew that they would not be allowed into the United States and wished that the U.S. government would just send them back and bring their poor treatment to an end. Eventually their wish was granted, and they were returned to Haiti.

We had been advised before our trip that there was a Cuban woman in Guantanamo who needed to sign some papers so that her children in Cuba, who had just been accepted for resettlement in the United States, could go to join relatives in the United States. We got her signature knowing that it wouldn't be long before both she and her children could be reunited in Florida. This family reunification was celebrated as she signed the papers. On the other hand, there were 330 unaccompanied Haitian children in Guantanamo. They had hoped to join their families in the United States, but they were deported back to Haiti with all the other Haitians in Guantanamo. The emphasis on family reunification did not apply to Haitians.



Unaccompanied Child at Guantanamo

(Photo: J. Riggs)

Example # 2

An eighty-one-year-old Haitian Baptist pastor, Joseph Dantica, held a valid multiple-entry visa to the United States, allowing him to come to the United States to visit several of his family members who lived there. On a Sunday morning in 2004, a gang member entered Pastor Dantica's church in Port au Prince, Haiti, while fleeing United Nations troops and Haitian police. Once the gang member left the church, the UN troops and Haitian police killed him and entered the church to use it as a vantage point to kill 14 other members of the gang in the streets around the church. Later, gang members came back to the church demanding that Pastor Dantica pay for the burial of the 15 killed or be beheaded. After going into hiding for several days, Pastor

Dantica learned that his church had been ransacked and burned by the gang. He decided to leave Haiti and used his visa to get on a flight to the United States. As he passed through immigration at the Miami airport, his visa was approved and stamped for entry. Following that, the immigration official asked him how long he intended to stay in the United States. He told the truth about his situation saying that he planned to ask for political asylum, fearing that he would be killed if he returned to Haiti. He was immediately detained.

U.S. law permitted his entrance into the United States on his tourist visa. U.S. law also permitted him to ask for asylum in the United States. But, as a Haitian, once he asked for asylum the policy was to detain him. Haitians are detained until they can prove they have the right to asylum, based on their particular political situation.

When Joseph was detained by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the authorities took away his medications (he had had throat cancer) and sent him to the Krome Detention Center near Miami. Within five days he was dead. To this day there is no explanation of his death, but his family claims it was due to lack of medication and mistreatment.

If Joseph had been Cuban, he would not have been detained. Under the 1995 “wet foot, dry foot” policy, Cubans are automatically eligible for asylum if they set foot on U.S. territory. *(Details of what happened in the last two week’s of Joseph’s life can be found at <http://www.nchr.org/irp/Timeline.htm>. Additionally, Joseph’s niece (Edwidge Danticat) has just written a book about his experiences, called “Brother, I’m Dying,” available in local bookstores.)*

What Causes People to Leave Haiti

The island of Hispaniola, of which Haiti now occupies the western half, has its own long history before being divided in two by European powers. It was there that Christopher Columbus traveled after first setting ashore in the Bahamas in 1492. There, the native peoples, the Arawak, discovered Columbus on their beach as he claimed the land in the name of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain.

In 1510, the first slaves were brought to Hispaniola by the Portuguese. They came mostly from West Africa. It was not long after that that the first French settlers came to the island, and in 1697 Spain recognized France’s claim to the western part of the island – the part that became Haiti. In the early 1700s the cultivation of sugar on a massive scale began changing the island’s economic role in the French empire, followed a few years later by coffee production.

In 1795 Spain and France signed a treaty giving France the Spanish part of the island. In 1804 Haiti declared its independence from France and became the world’s first free black republic, the second free



*Poor Haitians sell what they have on the streets to earn a living.
(Photo: J Fountain Woman to Woman Participant)*

nation in the Western Hemisphere. Its independence was recognized by France in 1825. In 1862 the United States recognized the independence of Haiti.

Despite becoming independent, the conquest of Haiti continued. The United States intervened militarily in Haiti 24 times in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In July of 1915, the United States sent thousands of Marines to Haiti to “protect American and foreign” interests. That military occupation lasted 19 years, and bombings were conducted to overcome the resistance forces. During the U.S. occupation, a new Haitian police force and army were established to oversee corporate interests in the country, and U.S. capitalists seized control of Haiti’s banks. Every economic intervention by the United States was accompanied by political repression in collusion with the Haitian elite and big land owners. The poor and illiterate were kept under political control in order to maintain the millions in profits for the wealthy.

In 1981, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank instituted a new “structural adjustment program” for Haiti. It was designed to uproot one third of the rural population growing food for local consumption and force the peasants off their land. Lands which families had cultivated for hundreds of years were turned over to agribusiness conglomerates producing export crops, forcing the migration of the rural population to urban areas. As a result, the economy of Haiti is the worst economy in the Western Hemisphere, and it would be even worse if it wasn’t for the money sent back to Haiti from Haitians working in the United States. Money from Haitians in the United States makes up about one third of Haiti’s economy. Additionally, almost one million of the seven million people in Haiti are fed by private aid agencies.

The distinction made by the U.S. government between political and economic refugees in the case of Haiti is a way of hiding the consequences of the U.S.’s own economic policies in Haiti. Haitians have been fleeing both political persecution and economic despair. U.S.



Haitians dig through trash to earn a living. (Photo: courtesy of CWS)

immigration and refugee laws have presumed that the individual Haitian's motivations can be separated. However, the reasons Haitians left Haiti have mattered little to U.S. policy makers determined to deter Haitian people from coming to Florida.

By 1990, southern Florida had the largest foreign-born population of any major metropolitan area in the United States and the largest concentration of Cubans outside Havana. Given the number of immigrants in South Florida, it is not surprising that many people in Florida resisted the arrival of Haitians. Nevertheless, the nature and intensity of their resistance reveals a racism not seen in other places where Haitians have settled and not experienced by other immigrants who have come to Miami, like the 100,000 Nicaraguans now living there.

Disciples Response to the Haitian Refugee Situation

Since the early 1970s, DHM's Refugee and Immigration Ministries (RIM) program has worked denominationally, as well as ecumenically through Church World Service (CWS), to meet the needs of Haitian refugees who have successfully made it to the United States. The early efforts of CWS and its member denominations resulted in the establishment of the Haitian Refugee Center in Miami, which continues to provide social services to Haitians and also provides a forum for Haitians to become their own advocates on immigration issues.

In the early 1980s, the dramatic increase in the number of both Cubans and Haitians arriving by boat made it possible for CWS to enter into a contract with the Department of State



*Haitian family resettled in Miami in 1980.
(Photo: courtesy of CWS)*



*Haitians demonstrate in front of INS (now DHS).
(Photo: courtesy of CWS)*

to resettle thousands of Cubans and hundreds of Haitians all over the United States. However, the majority of the Cubans eventually returned to Miami.

In 1990, the greatest need was for CWS to arrange the resettlement of Haitians released from the Krome detention Center in Miami on less than a day's notice. CWS agreed to resettle 275 people that year, but when that figure was reached by May, CWS took an additional 200 persons. Those free to be resettled anywhere, because they

did not have friends or relatives already in the United States, were resettled in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia.

Following the 1991 coup against Aristide, Haitians intercepted at sea were taken to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The Haitians released from Guantanamo were paroled into the United States and had to apply for political asylum within twelve months. The Disciples and other denominations, working through CWS, set up the Miami Haitian Legal Project to assist the Haitians with the needed legal services once they got to Florida. Those with no relatives in Miami were resettled in Connecticut, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Texas, where the local CWS resettlement offices helped them find pro bono legal services.

Of tremendous concern to CWS were the 267 Haitians that continued to be held at Guantanamo in 1992 and 1993 awaiting the status of their requests for parole into the United States. Of them, 216 had tested positive for HIV, and the rest were their relatives. A formal protest against the living conditions of these Haitians culminated in a lawsuit and the eventual court decision that allowed for their resettlement. CWS resettled 53 of these persons.



Haitians allowed into the country from Guantanamo wait to be interviewed by CWS before being reunited with family members. (Photo: J. Riggs)

In 1994, most Haitians intercepted at sea were sent back to Haiti following the return of President Aristide. The rest were taken to Guantanamo. Haitian unaccompanied minors, some with close relatives in the United States, as well as additional Haitians with HIV were granted Humanitarian Parole from Guantanamo and resettled in the United States. The Disciples RIM program helped in the resettlement of several of these persons.

From 2002 to 2004, CWS operated an interstate secondary resettlement program to resettle persons in Jacksonville, Florida. The program successfully resettled many Haitians into situations that were better for them than would have been possible in Miami. In 2006, CWS

opened a Boynton Beach office to provide services to Haitians who resided in Palm Beach County. Domestic violence and child abuse prevention and education services were the main services provided through that office. Today the CWS Refugee Microenterprise Program, begun



*Refugee with Contemporary Member
(Photo: R. Frankford, Pastor)*

by the CWS Miami office in 2000, helps refugees become self-sufficient through self-employment. It has assisted 108 Haitians to start or expand businesses, provided training to 688 persons, and provided \$335,426 in financing to new refugee entrepreneurs. The refugees have a loan default rate of lower than six percent. *(See Haitian bakery photo on page 14.)*

Working with CWS over the years, the Disciples have been one of the denominations resettling Haitian refugees. During that time RIM has resettled a couple thousand Haitians. Sponsors (including several Disciples congregations) have been found for the Haitians, and those without official refugee status have also been given legal assistance to apply for asylum. Contemporary Christian Church in Houston Texas, was one of the first Disciples congregations to resettle Haitian refugees in 1982.

Week of Compassion, through CWS, has funded several projects in New York and Florida which over the years have tried to meet the legal and social needs of the Haitian refugees. In addition, with funds from Week of Compassion, grants have been given by RIM to Disciples' Haitian congregations to assist them in their ministries to the refugees in their communities. Evangelical Crusade of Fishers of Men Christian Church has received assistance for many years to help them respond to the legal assistance and social services needs of persons in their community who have immigration problems.

Through CWS, Disciples are also involved in providing assistance to Haitians who remain in Haiti. Food, blankets, health kits, and medicines are some of the items that have been distributed to the poorest areas of Haiti, making it possible for people to stay in Haiti.

The RIM program has also participated in advocacy efforts on behalf of Haitians. These efforts have sometimes resulted in some improvement of the treatment of Haitians in the past. But there is a lot yet to be accomplished in getting at least the same treatment for Haitians as many other nationalities receive at the hands of the U.S. government. Working in cooperation with the full-time CWS advocacy staff person in Washington, DC, RIM continues to advocate on behalf of the rights of Haitians seeking asylum in the United States.

With funding from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, CWS recently did a small sample study of what happens to those Haitians currently being deported back to Haiti from the United States. Because Haitians are very leery of Americans asking them questions about their deportation from the United States, CWS used Brazilian and Canadian staff, plus trusted Haitian leaders for the interviews.



*Distributing CWS Emergency Supplies in Haiti
(Photo: C. Herlinger/CWS)*

The results showed that most Haitian refugees intercepted at sea were not allowed to come to the United States and that only a handful were allowed to apply for asylum once they were on board the Coast Guard cutters. In order to get the opportunity to apply for asylum, they had to pass a “shout test.” If they didn’t take the initiative to clearly say the exact words (“I have a well-founded fear of persecution.”) to the appropriate person on the cutter, they were not interviewed. Those not allowed to apply for asylum were often taken to the Bahamas, where they were placed in jail until there was enough for a boat load to be sent back to Haiti.

Three out of sixty people said that they fled for political reasons. These three each said that no one asked them why they left, and, therefore, they were not able to claim asylum. The rest said they fled for economic reasons or as a result of the devastation left by hurricanes and flooding. The U.S. government claims that only one percent flee for political reasons, but this study found that seven percent flee for those reasons.

Of those picked up by the Coast Guard and sent back to Haiti, 51 percent were headed to the Bahamas, and 49 percent were headed to Miami. It is easier and cheaper to reach the Bahamas. Of those interviewed, 56 percent had made only one attempt, 28 percent had made two to five attempts, and six percent had made five or more attempts to leave Haiti. People paid the equivalent of \$500 to \$1,500 to try to leave, often with borrowed funds. They expected to repay the loan with money earned in their new country.

CWS has used the information gathered in this study to advocate for a better system that allows Haitians a fair chance of asking for asylum on board Coast Guard cutters and for better understanding of what motivates people to leave Haiti. CWS is hoping to find funding to do a similar study involving more Haitians throughout Haiti.

Immigrant Haitian Disciples Congregations

Haitians are devout Christians, and religious communities in the United States provide a social support system for fellow immigrants. Surveys have shown that nearly 75 percent of recent immigrants to South Florida attend church at least once a week. In a striking departure from the denominational makeup of Haiti, where some 80 to 85 percent are Catholic, nearly 40 percent of Haitian Americans are Protestant.

In the late 1970s, Rev. Philius Nicolas of the Evangelical Crusade of Fishers of Men church in Brooklyn, New York, was looking for a Protestant denomination with which to affiliate his growing congregation. He went to the public library and read about U.S. denominations and decided that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was the denomination he wanted his congregation to join. Communications between Rev. Nicolas, DOM’s Latin America and the Caribbean office, and the Northeast Region resulted in the congregation becoming a Disciples congregation. For many years Rev. Nicolas’ congregation was the only Disciples Haitian congregation. Over time

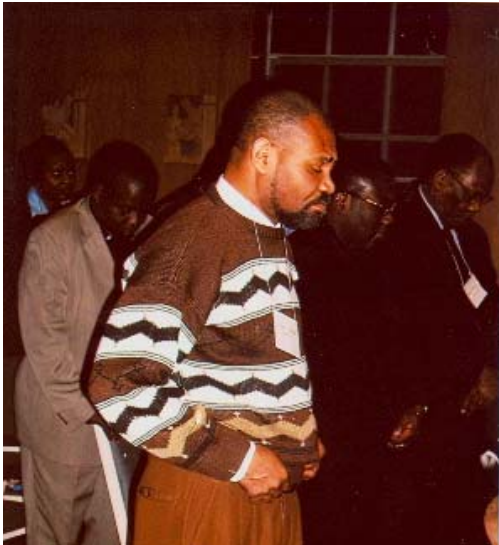


Rev. Nicolas visits with NYC Mayor Bloomberg before the Mayor speaks to the congregation. (Photo: K. Artz)

Rev. Nicolas helped other Haitian congregations form and establish ties to the Disciples and grew his own congregation to over 2000 members.

With the 2020 Vision emphasis on the establishment of 1000 new congregations by the year 2020, the New Church Ministry program facilitated the formation and affiliation of additional Haitian Disciples congregations. Today (2007) there are 104 congregations within the Disciples Haitian community in the United States and Canada. This growth has taken place mostly between 2001 and 2007. Haitian churches now represent two percent of Disciples congregations.

These congregations mirror the Haitian community in general. The majority of Haitians live in south Florida as well as Brooklyn, New York and Boston, Massachusetts. As these communities have become saturated, new immigrants move to communities where housing and living expenses are more reasonable. The Disciples have a Haitian witness as far west as Las Vegas, Portland and Phoenix. There are also several Disciples Haitian churches in French speaking Montreal, Quebec.



Worship Service at 2004 Haitian Summit of the Northeast United States and Canada where 30 Haitian church leaders were given training on Disciples history and beliefs. (Photo: M. Carlson)

When Enoch Milien, a member of Evangelical Crusade of Fishers of Men Christian Church in Brooklyn, moved to southern Florida, he began helping New Church Ministry and the Florida Region attract Haitian congregations to the Disciples. Over the last seven years about 30 Disciples Haitian congregations have been established in southern Florida. Now Enoch has also become a pastor and has served on the Florida regional staff for one year helping them with their ministry to Haitians in the region.

Rev. Milien discovered Good Shepherd Missionary church in North Miami Beach and made a connection between them and New Church Ministry. The congregation had been an independent church meeting in three 20' by 40' storage facility units that were placed end to end. They had placed theater seats in the units and had one aisle. The pastor of that congregation was Rev. Jacques Nicolas. Rev. Nicolas came to the United States from Cap-Haitien, the second largest city in Haiti, about eight years ago. Now he has completed his MDiv and DMin degrees and is a U.S. citizen. Today (2007) that congregation has over 1000 members and is affiliated with the Disciples. They have also started two additional congregations – one in Fort Myers and one in Orlando. Rev. Nicolas is now serving as the Disciples representative on the advisory committee of the Church World Service Miami office as it strives to continue meeting the needs of arriving Haitian refugees.

Service

The official Disciples Women's service project for this year is striving to provide education for the children of Hispaniola (both Haiti and the Dominican Republic). To learn more about this project and how your group can help, see the Disciples Women's Web site at <http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/Women/womantowomanHaiti.htm>.

In addition, RIM offers the following ways for Disciples Women's groups to provide for the needs of Haitian Refugees who are on their way to or already in the United States.

The Service of Prayer

The situation of Haitian refugees and their treatment by the U.S. government has long been a mockery of true justice. Of all the situations of refugees seeking protection and an opportunity for new life in the United States, the Haitians have been treated the most unfairly for the longest time. Pray that:

- Conditions in Haiti will improve so Haitians do not have to flee their country;
- Haitians floating on the high seas will safely reach a shore;
- The U.S. Coast Guard will treat Haitians intercepted at sea humanely and offer them opportunities to apply for asylum;
- U.S. immigration authorities will recognize the political motivations of why people leave Haiti, not just the economic motivations; and
- Disciples' Haitian congregations will find a hospitable welcome in our denomination.

The Service of Advocacy

Join your voices with the Haitian Community and with Church World Service in advocating for just, humane, and compassionate treatment of Haitian refugees as they are intercepted by the Coast Guard or as they are detained upon arrival on the shores of Florida and in advocating for a resolution to the conditions that cause Haitians to flee their homeland. Contact your Congresspersons to express your concern about how Haitian



Haitians advocate for the same treatment as other refugees receive.

(Photo: courtesy of CWS)

refugees are treated by the United States. Even if there are not bills pending in Congress that would provide relief to Haitians, your Congresspersons need to hear that Haitians are not forgotten by the American public. Sign up to receive Rapid Response Action Alerts on the RIM Web site at <http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/rim/Advocate.htm>. Some Action Alerts are

on immigration issues and will focus on Haitian refugees, if legislation on Haitians is introduced into Congress.

The Service of Giving

Join with both RIM and CWS to provide a welcome to those Haitians who are able to make it to U.S. shores. Through your financial support, Haitian refugees can be helped in the following ways:

- \$25 will pay for a CWS orientation to life in Miami;
- \$25 will buy school supplies for a child in Brooklyn or Miami;
- \$40 will buy a monthly bus pass or a gas voucher in Miami;
- \$50 will buy the first week's groceries in Miami or Brooklyn;
- \$76 will buy a monthly bus and subway pass in Brooklyn;
- \$300 will start a new small-scale business in Miami;
- \$300 will fund the assistance of a CWS lawyer in filing for asylum in Miami; and
- \$500 will subsidize the first month's rent in Brooklyn or Miami.



*New Miami Business (Bakery)
(Photo: G. Lindor/CWS)*

If you would like to help support Haitian refugees in any of these ways, please make out your check to "Disciples Home Missions" and send it to RIM at the address on the last page. Note that it is for "Haitian Refugees" on the memo line. RIM will forward your contribution to either the CWS Miami office or the Evangelical Crusade of Fishers of Men Christian Church in Brooklyn.

Worship



*Choir of Evangelical Crusade of Fishers of Men
Christian Church in Brooklyn, New York (Photo: K. Artz)*

Worship Center

Ideas of things to place on your worship center include: a Bible opened to John 21:1-19, a globe of the world (with Haiti facing those gathered), a picture or replica of a fishing boat, a picture or replica of fish, a skillet (for frying fish), a candle, and your offering basket.

Call to Worship

Leader: We enter into this time of worship to let our faith in God strengthen what we have learned and motivate us into service.

People: We enter into this time of worship to touch the reality of God's love for all people.

Leader: Let us remember our bonds with all the people of God's earth, and especially this day with the people of Haiti.

People: Let us remember the gospel call to welcome the stranger and to share what we have together.

Scripture Reading

John 21:1-19



Reflection on Scripture

Some or all of the following thoughts could be shared as a reflection on the scripture reading.

The disciples labored all night but caught nothing. At Jesus' instructions, however, they cast their nets on the opposite side of the boat and brought in 153 fish. Those fish did not spend the whole night swimming on just one side of the boat. So why weren't the disciples able to catch the fish until they had heard what Jesus had to say about where to place their nets? Our ordinary labors will also be in vain, no matter how productive we think we are, unless we too hear the voice of Jesus giving us guidance about where to cast our nets. What kind of guidance does Jesus give us today?

Jesus models the kind of action that is required. Jesus built a charcoal fire and prepared fish and bread for the disciples' breakfast. Where is that old dichotomy between Mary and Martha where the one cooking is looked down upon? Here was the resurrected Christ, the Savior of the world, and what was he doing? He wasn't giving a sermon by the sea, or building a place in which he could be worshiped and adored, or calling attention to himself (saying: "Look at me; I've overcome death!"). He was simply meeting the very human needs of the disciples by cooking for them. And after breakfast he called upon Peter to also meet human needs – to feed sheep.

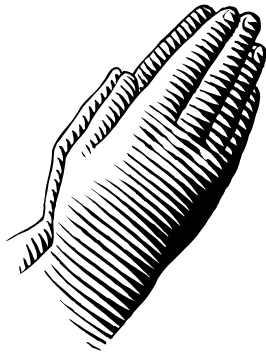
Where are sheep hungry for food and for justice? Where is human need the greatest? Where do people face issues of life and death on a daily basis? Haiti is the prime example in the Western Hemisphere of a place where human need abounds. If we are willing to listen to the guidance Jesus gives us, better understanding the needs of Haitian refugees can help us get our priorities straight. They can help us fulfill Christ's call to be servants to one another – to feed sheep.



Prayer

God, as we join with Disciples women across the country who are praying for Haitian refugees, we realize that we are, in fact, asking for changes in ourselves and in our society.

We pray for ourselves, that you will enable us to become servants willing to cook a big breakfast to welcome Haitians arriving on the shore after years of struggle to survive with scarce fish and scarcer human rights. Send us the insight of eyes that have been opened to see in a new way the reality of life for these persons.



We pray for politicians, that they may be willing to share the prosperity of our country with all people, regardless of race or country of nationality. Send them someone who will give a name and a human face to the problems of Haitian refugees and thus show them the inhumanity of current legislation.

We pray for journalists and others who work in the media and thus influence public opinion. Send into their experience opportunities that will invite them to use their capacities to generate a friendlier atmosphere toward Haitian refugees.

We pray for the Coast Guard and immigration officers who exercise power over the lives of people, often without a real knowledge of their situation. Send into their lives people who are able to help them understand the true suffering of Haitian asylum seekers.

God, have mercy on us; we, who are acting as if freedom, peace and the well-being of our country were meant for our benefit alone. Help us to change our attitudes, as well as our legislation, so that Haitian refugees might find a more hospitable welcome. Amen.

Offering

As the offering is received, invite the women to visualize themselves cooking fish over a campfire to feed hungry Haitians who have just arrived on the shores of Florida. Then invite them to visualize immigration agents rounding up the Haitians, handcuffing them, and taking them off to detention, before they are able to eat that breakfast. Invite them to offer up to God their feelings about such an imaginary scene, knowing that, in reality, the plenty of our nation is denied Haitians every day.



Offering Prayer

Through the giving of our offerings this day, O God, help us to become the servants of your people around the world. Empower our offerings to cook a generous breakfast that can feed the hungry masses seeking bread and justice. Motivate our spirits to become agents of change to speak out against the forces of this world that oppress people and prevent people from accessing basic human resources. This we pray in the name of the one who modeled for us all the importance of serving others, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

How to Contact RIM

Please feel free to contact us for any further information you may need, or look us up on the Internet at <http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/RIM/>. You will find a lot of material about various refugee and immigration issues on our Web site.

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Jennifer Riggs, Director

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