



Ohio churches, relief agencies focusing on Haiti

By **Lisa Cornwell**
The Associated Press

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CINCINNATI — Churches and relief agencies were working feverishly Wednesday, checking on the safety of their missions and teams in Haiti and collecting supplies and donations to help the earthquake-devastated country.

Sharonville United Methodist Church members in suburban Cincinnati prayed Tuesday night for their mission team constructing buildings at an orphanage in Petionville in suburban Port-au-Prince.

The 11-member team was serving dinner to 20 girls at the H.O.P.E. Center for Orphaned Girls when the magnitude-7 earthquake struck, said Landon Bell, the Sharonville church's youth director.

Bell's wife Betsy is on the team, and he said he was nervous and scared when he heard about the quake because he knew where the quake was centered.

"Our team wasn't too far from there, so there was a lot of fear."

Bell said he finally heard from his wife and other team members about four hours later through e-mail saying they and the orphans got outside safely, but there was no food or water.

The orphans slept inside a medical center Tuesday night with some team members, while other members slept outside or in a truck.

"They were pretty shaken up, as well as they heard a lot of screaming from the areas around them — a lot of people in need," he said.

Matthew 25 Ministries, based in another Cincinnati suburb, was receiving 10 times the normal amount of phone calls Wednesday from people wanting to help.

The international nonprofit relief agency in Blue Ash that collects and reuses items from corporations, hospitals and individuals throughout the United States recently sent a shipment of medical and other supplies to Haiti, said Tim Mettey, its vice president.

"We are praying that it was not destroyed," Mettey said.

The group is seeking nonperishable food items, personal care items, cleaning and first-aid supplies and money to help with shipping the items.

The national staff of the 1.1 million-member Cleveland-based United Church of Christ prayed for quake victims at a service Wednesday and appealed to its 5,300 congregations for donations.

Church spokesman Rev. J. Bennett Guess said gifts earmarked for Haiti have been pouring in through the church's online disaster relief fund.

Kurt Bishop, president of Mission Possible in Findlay in northwest Ohio, said its volunteers who arrived in Haiti before the earthquake to work at ministry-operated Christian schools were safe and already helping victims.

Wilson Cohoon, director of the Caribbean ministry of the Centerville-based Children of Promise International near Dayton, said he was amazed that he reached the Emmanuel Christian Mission's director in Leogane, Haiti, on Tuesday night.

When Cohoon asked Pastor Joel Beaucejour how he was, the answer was: "We're alive."

Children of Promise, an interdenominational Christian organization that provides food, education and other assistance to orphans and needy children, sponsors the Haiti mission that includes a church, school and orphanages.

"We are praying that the buildings are still up and that the kids are still OK," he said Wednesday. "I haven't been able to get through to him since."

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