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Pastors describe destruction caused by earthquakes

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Sometimes it is only in the face of tragedy that some people can come face to face with God.

That was the message from two Caribbean pastors who spoke in Clinton last week as part of the Linking for Ministry event.

Herve Pierre of Haiti and Moise Sam of the Dominican Republic spoke last Tuesday to three mealtime audiences at the Harmony House about the devastation wrecked on their countries by January's earthquake and how their churches and churches in the United States have responded to the disaster.



The earthquake killed hundreds of thousands of people in Haiti and left as many as a million Haitians homeless.

"There is not one person who wasn't affected," Pierre said. "I had lots of my friends die in the earthquake."

Pierre and Sam were brought to the United States by Mission Possible, an Ohio-based missionary organization that organizes and supports mission trips for American churches to countries like theirs.

The two men visited Clinton as part of the Linking for Ministry event at the Thornwell Home for Children, a mission event organized by the Greater Laurens County Cluster of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Sixteen small Presbyterian churches in the cluster area joined together to host the seminar on cooperative ministry and mission work.

Pierre and Sam spoke about the need for cross-cultural partnering in international missions between American and indigenous church leaders. But most of the pastors' talk Tuesday focused on the devastating earthquake and the help they received from America.

The Haitian Pierre spoke about the impact the natural disaster had on his congregation. "There was a girl in our congregation I knew since she was in pre-school," he said. "She was going to college in (the capital) Port-au-Prince, the congregation all helped pay for her to go to college, and then the earthquake came and she died."

Pierre recounted how he and fellow pastors gathered together in a field with more than a hundred people who either lost their homes or were too afraid of aftershocks to stay indoors. As an act of faith and because of the lack of food, the clergymen and their congregants fasted for three days after the disaster.

"After three days, 96 people accepted Jesus," Pierre said.

Across the border in the Dominican Republic, Haiti's neighbor on the island of Hispaniola, the

damage was not as severe, but Dominicans like Sam were still affected by the reaction of the republic's sizable Haitian population and the influx of new Haitian refugees after the disaster -- at least 200,000 legal migrants according to Sam, and untold numbers of illegal border-crossers.

"We reached out to them," Sam said. "In the Dominican Republic, the government ordered all schools to take Haitian students."

Sam wiped his eyes as he told the story of a mother fleeing her house with two small children when the quake hit, throwing her children out in the street as the house collapsed on top of her.

In the face of such tragedy, the support of American churches for the people of the island has been invaluable, he said.

"Every penny you gave has made a big difference," Sam said. "Even though you're not in the field, you have been so great."

For a man who has seen so much devastation, Pierre put the most spiritual point on the events that befell his country.

"Sometimes a tragedy has to happen for people to realize the power of God."

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