

Spring 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Grace and peace to you. On January 12, 2010, a powerful earthquake struck Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the world, leaving nearly 300,000 dead, over one million people displaced, and devastating what little infrastructure Haiti had. The year of 2010 continued to be unmerciful to the people of Haiti with a Cholera epidemic, Hurricane Tomas, a governmental election, and promised rebuilding funds from foreign entities not given. How can we respond?

I was in Haiti, along with my husband, Ben, and his cousin Jonathan, on January 12 when the earth moved. The building in which we were staying collapsed on all three of us. Jon and I lived; Ben died.

Being a victim of the earthquake myself, along with my husband Ben, I feel deeply called to continued advocacy and conversation with and for the Haitian people. So many have asked me, "How can I help? There are so many obstacles Haiti faces. It is hard to know where to start."

In response to the need of human beings to reach out to those who are suffering, there will be an opportunity to gather together at Holden Village, June 18-25, 2011, for listening and sharing, remembering and learning, empowering and rebuilding for the future of Haiti one and a half years after the earthquake. Teaching faculty from Haiti, the US, and from around the world will work in partnership with guests and staff in the Village, exploring various topics related to Haiti, including: history of Haiti; Haitian culture, including art, dance, and religion; international development; Global Mission and Accompaniment; Theology of the Cross and suffering; creative writing; multi-sensory story telling; Bible study inspired by the lyrics of Ben Splichal Larson; and global music.

The Haiti Focus Week, in memory of Ben Splichal Larson and in honor of the Haitian people, will also include collaborative and creative visioning for the future, with the goal of empowerment for the people of Haiti in their rebuilding and a deepened awareness for the people of the United States, in order that we might better accompany one another on the journey.

How can you participate?

1. **Pray:**  
Please pray for this gathering of international leaders at Holden and for all those who join them.
2. **Come:**  
Register on the Holden Village web site ([www.holdenvillage.org](http://www.holdenvillage.org)) for the week of June 18-25, 2011.
3. **Donate:**  
To make a contribution to help cover the cost of gathering people for this event, you can make a tax deductible donation to the Dubuque Community Foundation "Haiti Focus Week at Holden Village: in memory of Ben Splichal Larson and in honor of the Haitian People." Gifts can be made online at [www.dbqfoundation.org](http://www.dbqfoundation.org), or by mailing your donation to CFGD, 700 Locust St., Suite 195, Dubuque, IA, 52001. If donations given

exceed funds needed for this project, all remaining funds will be directed to the ongoing support and empowerment of the people of Haiti.

We are so grateful to have the privilege of having such gifted presenters come together for the Haiti Focus Week. Traditionally, teaching faculty cover their own cost of travel and donate their time once in the village; however, since it is important to have so many international teaching faculty, there has been a fund established to help subsidize their cost of travel to and from the village. It is our hope to raise enough funds to ease the burden of travel expenses for many of the teaching faculty from Haiti.

It is time to open our ears and hearts to listen to the Haitian people and to one another so that we might best respond to the dear ones of Haiti. It is not only the buildings of Haiti that are in need of rebuilding, but also trusted relationships with the outside world. I have yet to meet a person who has truly engaged with Haiti, its culture, or its people, who has not gained a deeper awareness of the sacredness of life and our connection as human beings to one another. There are still people living in tent camps, there is still rubble to be cleared, and there are even people still buried in the rubble.

After the earthquake, sifting through some of Ben's things, I found a piece of paper in the handwriting of Ben's grandmother, Aleta. This is what it said:

*"The earthquake was not an 'act of God'; the 'act of God' is the courage of the people to rebuild their lives after the earthquake."*

One of the many things I have learned through this tragedy is that real power is not in the form of billions of dollars, big building equipment, or even an army; but rather, real power is in the steady transformational work of God in and through people who care, who join their various gifts together for the sake of the other and the world. As long as he lived, Ben sang to God and witnessed to the love of God in Jesus Christ for the world. Buried under the rubble, Ben sang even in his dying. His last song witnesses to something that is greater than this earthquake's overwhelming death and destruction:

*"O Lamb of God, you bear the sin of all the world away; eternal peace with God you made, God's peace to us we pray."*

Thank you to all who continue to engage in mission together, for it is in community in which we are able to mutually encourage one another and have a positive impact in the world. Thanks be to God for you.

With you on the journey,

Rev. Renee Splichal Larson  
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