

Evangelist Joey Kelly

1208 Focis Street, Metairie LA 70005, USA
504-239-6550 www.joeykelly.net

My Haitian missionary work

In the summer of 1993, while I was doing homeless/street ministry with a group in downtown Atlanta GA, an evangelist friend of mine (Mark Johnson) went for his second trip to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and he asked me to pray for him during the week. Somewhere in the middle of that week God spoke to me and said to go with him the next time he went, which ended up being that December. He introduced me to a few pastors, and we preached in their churches and on a small radio station during the week we were there. The radio station was run by Pastor Joseph Simon, a Nazarene.

I was invited to return that next January, as a church planter (Samuel Aurelus) was holding his yearly convention, and the offer was for me to be the guest speaker. I spent two weeks in and around Port-au-Prince, again preaching in several churches, in addition to a couple of services at the conference.

My first two trips there were during the dictatorial period and there was much unrest in the country. Papa and Baby Doc Duvalier's old "Tonton Machoute" group of thugs, though rebranded, were terrorizing the people. Gunfire was heard every night, as the thugs practiced their terror in the dead of night. Mark and I were followed in the city by the secret police, with an agent "guiding" us around and even showing up at our hotel in Petionville, on the pretext of visiting a friend. We witnessed a strafing event in Citi Soleil (a slum and political football near the harbor), having to duck around the corner of a building to escape the bullets as a pickup truck with machine guns in the back drove toward us, firing into houses, and about half an hour later on another street we ended up saving a man's life... a band of thugs with automatic weapons was coming up the street while conducting a house-to-house search for a certain dissident, but they broke it off when they saw Americans with cameras. I don't think they thought we were journalists, but they didn't want to risk being caught on camera executing a man in the street.

Mark and I had been making plans for a third trip, but Bill Clinton's "intervasion" to liberate Haiti from a dictatorial triumvirate occurred at that time, forcing us to cancel our plans. Not long after that I decided to move back to Baton Rouge, thus ending my work with Mark Johnson.

After some time I moved to New Orleans and stumbled upon a few Haitian congregations on the Westbank, preaching a number of times in these diaspora congregations. Pastor Gabriel Wilcinot, a Haitian refugee and the former pastor of First Haitian Baptist Church in Harvey LA, was especially kind to me. I helped him when he started a new work across town, but more importantly he invited me to travel with him on two occasions to preach his conventions in Jeremie, Haiti, even taking my wife with me on one of the trips. Conventions are a common thing in Haiti. Here in the states most pastors will lead one church at a time, but in Haiti it is quite common for a pastor to start multiple works in different towns. Pastor Gabriel and his congregation ran three or four churches down there, while Pastor Samuel had planted around 30 churches in his lifetime, mostly in the mountains outside of Port-Au-Prince, all of which he continues to oversee.

I attended Harvest Time Fellowship in Harvey for about 7 years. Pastor Jerry Steele and his church supported a planter in Haiti by the name of Lucian Almanord. In the

late 2000s I made my fifth and (up to this point) my last trip to Haiti. I went to attempt to reconnect with the ministers I had previously worked with, intending as well to visit Pastor Lucian if possible. Lucian took me to visit a couple of his churches on the day I joined him and preached in another that evening. He was unable to take me home that night because of a large and violent political demonstration on Route Delmas that blocked our path back to my hotel in Petionville. Instead, we stayed at his house that night, and in the morning he showed me his compound where he houses, feeds and schools 65 orphans (orphanages are another common thing that Haitian pastors build... the need is very great due to the poverty and other horrible conditions that unfortunately define that nation. Lucian dropped me off at my hotel later that morning, as the demonstration didn't carry over to the next day. Upon returning to the states I visited Harvest Time Fellowship and reported on the work that Lucian was doing, happily explaining that the money they had been sending for numerous years had been well-invested for the Kingdom of God, having planted 25 churches in his tenure of ministry.

About an hour and a half from the airport in Jeremie there is a road that leads to Montagnac. Though passable with a 4-wheel drive, we have to park our vehicle and walk about an hour up the mountain to reach our compound. Pastor Gabriel has a second church there, on the other side of a gorge, in a village called Lagonbri, a dangerous journey of about another hour. On my second trip with Gabriel (my 4th overall), after a week of ministry in the mountains, we missed the return flight to Port-au-Prince by 5 minutes and were forced to stay overnight at a local hotel. With nothing to do that afternoon, the pastor took me and my wife to tour the town. We made it to the outdoor market and began to pass out tracts, soon drawing a large crowd. When we ran out of tracts, I asked for him to translate for me and I gave a short evangelistic message which was well-received. During this outing the Lord impressed upon me that Jeremie was a perfect place for an extended campaign, since it's the only town of any size on that end of the island, and everyone eventually makes it in to town for supplies, doctor visits and such like. It is my fervent desire to return to that area to conduct a 6-month tent revival, working with local pastors. In six months we could evangelize that entire area, winning many souls and planting new churches in the jungle.