



Father Reiser's friends step up to help his mission in Haiti

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by [Eric Hagen](#)
Staff writer

The people of Haiti need food, fresh water, shelter and sanitation.

The needs are overwhelming, but a local priest and a team of dedicated volunteers have done back-breaking labor and ambitious fund-raising to help as much as they can.

Hundreds of Rev. Bernard Reiser's friends recognized the work he and his team have done and have yet to do and chipped in more money at an April 28 event fittingly called "Keep the Wheel Turning."

This second annual event, which was held at the Courtyards of Andover, raised \$66,000. The first-ever event in 2008 at The Church of the Epiphany in Coon Rapids raised \$30,000.

While guests dined on sweets, cheese and crackers and drank punch and wine, Reiser said the people of Haiti cannot even envision this.

"Everywhere you go, people are talking about the tough economy," Reiser said.

"How would you like to live in a land where people are talking about starvation, where they have no clean water for their kids?"

Improving lives

The most essential thing people need is fresh water. Reiser Relief, Inc. has provided this to Cite Soleil since August 2005. For six days a week, a 3,500-gallon truck delivers water four times a day. A 2,500-gallon truck brings water to Jeremy Whark, a slum outside of Port au Prince built on top of a garbage dump.

Reiser Relief, Inc. in 2008 delivered 413,342 meals to the people of Haiti.

With their thirst quenched and stomachs a little more full, an educated mind can be the key to a brighter future.

Reiser helped found the Terre Promise Primary School in Cite Soleil. It provides education and food for 400 children.

In the mountains of Lespinasse/Donte there is no electricity or water. It was there that Reiser founded Reiser Heights, a school for preschool through sixth grade students.

Another ambitious project is already in the works.

Grace Village will break ground this year in Titanyen and be a place for orphans and senior citizens to stay and for children to be fed and educated. Reiser Relief purchased 16 acres of land for this project in 2008.

Witnessing poverty

As the founding and retired pastor of Church of the Epiphany, Reiser has seen tough conditions on missions trips.



Rev. Bernard Reiser started Reiser Relief, Inc. after visiting Haiti in 1996. When he saw the slums of Cite Soleil, he was heart-broken and has devoted his life to helping the children who are growing up in poverty. Photo by Eric Hagen

He had visited Korea and Venezuela.

Nothing prepared him for what he would see in Haiti when he first went there in 1996.

He saw children walking over heaps of garbage looking for something to eat or sell. Some garbage heaps in front of homes were eight to 10 feet tall. There was no clean water, no electricity. Sewage ran in the streets in front of rickety shack homes.

Inside the shacks, people are sleeping on the ground, something Reiser thinks about every night he goes to sleep in his warm bed.

Children in the school Reiser visited only got one scoop of rice, some black bean sauce and a carton of milk. The day after a rainy night, ankle-deep mud was in some of the classrooms.

“When you see that, it just rips your heart, and you walk away and say, ‘I need to do something,’” Reiser said, choking up.

Reiser did more than tell his hundreds of friends about the troubles of Haiti, he showed them a slideshow to illustrate it.

Doris Schulte chairs the Reiser Relief Committee and is technically the organization's vice president, she said.

Schulte has never been to Haiti, but she said she does not need to because she sees Haiti through Reiser's eyes.

“Someone once said the accident of longitude and latitude should not determine whether you live or die,” said Jeff Gacek, who with his wife Alyn are directors of the Reiser Relief, Inc. programs in Haiti.

“But you know what? When it comes to Haiti, it does. One in eight children will die before the age of five from curable and treatable diseases. Now how can we live with that?”

Kevin McClellan coordinates the water project. He is the person who makes sure the water truck keeps running.

“I can't say anything more about Father Reiser, but all he keeps telling me is, ‘Get it done,’” McClellan said.

A memorable man

Rev. Peter Yakubu has known Reiser for over three years ever since Yakubu became the chaplain at Mercy Hospital.

Yakubu said whenever he tells Reiser about a person at the hospital who could use a visit, he often does not have to tell Reiser who that person is, only their room number.

Reiser never forgets people because he communicates directly with them, Yakubu said.

Many people who meet Reiser do not forget him either.

He is a friend, a father a grandfather and in some cases a great-grandfather. Schulte said he cannot even begin to say how much impact Reiser has had on not only her life, but the lives of her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Even if the call for help comes in the middle of the night, he would be there, Schulte said.

Elizabeth Silbernagel of Blaine has known Reiser for 25 years. She said it is amazing to see how he interacts with people. She said it is almost like the Holy Spirit is resonating from him.

“He believes in what he's doing,” Silbernagel said. “He eats, walks and talks what he believes.”

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