



A Safe Place to Learn in Haiti



Following a disaster, immediate needs are clear: food, water, shelter, emergency care. But many other needs emerge in the longer term, and one of the most critical is the need for children to return to school.

Every new school year brings with it expenses for tuition, uniforms, bags,

and books. The school year had just begun when Hurricane Matthew struck Haiti in October of 2016. With newly purchased uniforms and books destroyed, and with schools severely damaged, many students dropped out of school. Some were sent to live with friends or relatives in less affected areas. When this happens, it increases the risk of child domestic servitude. When children live with families other than their own, they may be exploited and used for household chores. In many cases, they are denied the right to education, get little rest, and may suffer from physical, verbal, or sexual abuse.

Working closely with our partner Church World Service, Week of Compassion approaches the reconstruction of schools not only as a response to disaster, but also as a way to prevent exploitation of children and to protect students and teachers against the impact of future disasters. Following Hurricane Matthew, CWS contacted the Ministry of Education to identify schools that needed repairs or reconstruction. One of the schools identified as a priority was the public school of Mentor, Grand Anse.

Initial rebuilding work began shortly after the storm in 2016. The school consisted of three classrooms, which CWS repaired early on. Then the mayor of Pestel (a community in the Grand Anse department of Haiti), requested the construction of three additional classrooms as, according to Ministry of Education regulations, each school should have at least six classrooms. Thanks to additional funds --including support from Week of Compassion-- CWS was able to honor this request, and construction on three new

classrooms began in 2018.

The community and CWS leadership faced significant hardship in the process of rebuilding, including the discovery of hard rock on the building site that nearly brought the whole project to a halt. But they persisted in completing the project, finding ways to overcome barriers and ultimately providing a safe space for students to learn, grow, and flourish.

With this newly upgraded facility, many things are possible. Because of the additional classroom space, more students are now enrolled and classes are not overcrowded. The school also serves as a community center where other gatherings and programs take place, and the improved facility serves as a hurricane shelter for the entire community.

Students and teachers alike express that with the new classrooms, they are no longer afraid of natural disasters. And improved construction practices acquired during the build will mean better, safer facilities throughout the whole community for years to come. With your support, and through the work of our partners, Disciples are 'investing in futures' in places like Haiti--where a safe place to learn, gather, and grow means a better future for all.

Photo Credit: CWS

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