

# A letter from Cindy Corell in Haiti

**FALL 2013**



Women participating in a meeting at Seguin, Haiti, listen to the conversation.

Sometimes there aren't enough chairs. So someone calls over to a neighbor's house and someone brings several more wooden chairs with woven seats. Maybe a rough, wooden bench. It doesn't matter, as long as there is a place for the visitors to sit.

Greetings from rural Haiti. If you were here, we'd find a chair for you. And we would ask you how you are, if you have eaten, if you are hungry. If you have been expected, someone would bring you a Coke—Americans like Coke, we know. It might be warm, but it was purchased cold for you. Americans like cold drinks, we know.

Such is the hospitality of one of the poorest countries in the world.

I am blessed to be here. It's been a whirlwind since I arrived on May 25. I have been welcomed and affirmed and loved. In the first month I made lifelong friends. In the second and third months I began the work of visiting partners across Haiti. And now, in my fourth month, I'm relishing being in the place I know God has had in mind for me since He first imagined my life.

My work as a companionship facilitator with Joining Hands is complicated. I'm only beginning to understand it. I work with an organization called FONDAMA, which is a collaborative of 11 peasant organizations across the country.

Some would argue (some do argue) that the word *peasant* should be replaced with the word *farmer*. *Peasant* has negative connotations, some say.

Others will tell you that the word *peasant* means more than a farmer who owns little more than the crops in the land he farms. *Peasant* also means someone who works with others to rise up against injustice.

And the concept of peasant organizations means just that—groups of rural men and women who combine their efforts to change their circumstances.

What is most confusing to me about the term peasant organization is that it is so much more than improving farming techniques and overcoming agricultural challenges. A peasant organization tackles every aspect of community life.

In August I made my first foray into visiting FONDAMA's organizations. I started with Mouvman Peyizan Papay, the Peasant Movement of Papaye. This is the oldest and largest of the organizations, and it also is the one I knew the most about. MPP celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a Kongre, or Congress, a gathering of all its members to go over current events and business. And at its 40<sup>th</sup> Kongre its leadership presented a comprehensive history as well as spelled out its continuing mission.

The mission is as simple as its heritage—to improve the way of life for rural farmers and their families. And because Haiti's government does not provide basic functions, MPP (and other rural organizations) fill in by meeting social, educational and health needs.

This surprised me, and it might surprise you as well.



Members of MOPEDES, one of the organizations affiliated with FONDAMA, the Joining Hands network in Haiti, gather at a rural school for an informational meeting.

As partners walking and working alongside our brothers and sisters here, Presbyterians are blessed with the opportunity not only to share our worship and understanding of our Lord and Savior, but also to help them create a safety net to improve their very lives.

What a blessing! And what an opportunity to feel our own faith grow as we go.

That has been my sometimes overwhelming experience. My blessings are many. My opportunities to see remote places in this beautiful country seem endless. My knowledge—of language, of the breadth and depth of the human spirit, of my own strength and my own limitations—grows infinitesimally.

But that moment when I most feel God's presence and the accompanying confidence in my own abilities is when I've arrived at a rural home or other meeting place, sitting on a chair that has been carried from a neighbor's house and sharing my life with men, women and children whose lives are so different from my own.

It happened again last week.

I was in the mountains above Marigot, a fishing village along the southern coast not far from the Dominican Republic border. The drive up the mountain road was rough. The truck rumbled along, bouncing across the rocks, then slowing to a crawl while Lucson, the driver, navigated across stretches of braided gullies—carefully keeping the wheels on narrow strips of high earth.

We all hold our breath a little during these stretches. If those wheels slip into the gully, well, it just wouldn't be pretty.

In meetings with organization leaders before heading off to the mountains, I learned the primary needs facing the residents of the most remote areas. Poor or non-existent roads, lack of clean water, erosion that washes away crops, and inaccessible health care.

All those needs seemed drastic to the American missionary headed off to hear from the people.

And all those needs took on a predominately scary reality as Lucson carefully maneuvered the truck along those poor roads and the truth hit again: lack of clean water and no health care.

**“What if the truck crashes, one of us (I'm thinking about me, here!!!) is injured, and we can't get to adequate health care soon enough?!!!”**

Yeah. That's when I know that the reason I'm here matters so much.

About two hours later I'm watching men and women running toward the lean-to school **"building" where the meeting will take place.** They're carrying benches, a chair and a table.

They are excited that I'm here. And I'm still reeling from the very truth in the realization that the bit of fear I felt sitting in the fine, air-conditioned truck about MY OWN safety is a smidgen of the fear they feel every day.

One heart attack. One difficult pregnancy. One bout of cholera or other life-threatening disease, and these men, women and children—these brothers and sisters of ours—are at a very real risk of dying.

That's not to mention the weariness of their everyday life when their health is OK.

They gather on the rough benches. Others stand outside the stick-built lean-to covered with a tin roof to hear me introduce myself. They look skeptical. But I see hope in their eyes, and as I talk and as Lucson translates, the skepticism fades and the hope grows and, friends, I get a lump in my throat because of the vastness of this work we are doing here.

When you signed on to pray us through this process; when your church or witness committee agreed to send funds to support Joining Hands in Haiti; when you felt a God-nudge to share in sending me—insignificant, little human that I am—to Haiti to walk in step with our brothers and sisters here, we took on a big job. And I am blessed to look into the eyes and hearts of these wonderful people who live high on mountaintops and along hot, dusty plains, all the time waiting for God to send them some help and a fair shot at a better life.

Yeah. It's the lump in my throat that gives me pause. But it's that same lump that spurs me on.

These are the times when I feel most alive. God's spirit moves among all of us while we gather and we talk and we listen.

I listen.

And I know you listen, brothers and sisters.

**"I am not here to offer you anything right now," I say. "I do not have the things that you need to make your work easier or your life better. All I have is the time to be with you, to listen to you, to hear you tell me what your challenges are.**

**"And I believe that together—**with all of the organizations of FONDAMA and the people in the United States who love you—together we can find ways to make your lives better.

**"And it all comes from God." And they nod. One gentleman calls out, "Amen!"**

And I believe.

I'm just getting started here. I—and we—have a long way to go. But when I'm in those meetings far away from the city, I bottle up that spirit to carry with me. I hope I share that spirit with you. It's the Holy Spirit. And it is what will fuel us all as we continue this work.

And I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the support you have sent to nurture the work of Joining Hands in Haiti. It is GOOD work. It is GOD work, and I'm blessed to be in the middle of it all.

If you have not partnered with us, please consider doing so. And please come. Please share in your continued prayers, your financial gifts and a physical visit if you can.

Come be with our brothers and sisters here.

They will find a chair for you.

Cindy

*2013 Mission Yearbook for Prayer & Study*, Haiti, [p. 25](#)

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