

Babe Update from Haiti *August 2008*

July marked a milestone for Rodney and me. We celebrated 40 years of marriage. I wonder how all the years sped by so quickly, over half of which have been spent in Haiti extending the church's outreach. And what treasured memories I have to reflect on!

I'm enjoying life at the Episcopal University. Last month I finished up classes and all but one of my students were happy. The university lacks enough classrooms for me to be there as often as I would like but it's probably good because it's really not safe to walk there too frequently each week. Haiti is calm for the moment but the food riots last April are most likely just a harbinger for similar problems this fall. Big problem with security is the instantaneousness of how trouble explodes – things seem okay at noon and by early afternoon the blockades are up, tires burning, and looting started.

Both the departments of education and computer science had me teaching this past semester. Half of one class was previous students who had already graduated but came back for an additional class just because I was teaching. I teach from a problem solving, practical position (as opposed to typical rote learning used in Haiti) and once the kids get adjusted to it, they really shine. What is really great is that often students are already partially employed in church schools across the metropolitan area. Once they get their degree, the entire school frequently gets national acceptance by the Ministry of Education because there is a qualified teacher!

This past fall session saw the regal dedication of the university's library. To the casual glance it isn't impressive. Most preschools in America have more impressive book collections and reading areas. But to those of us who have been eagerly anticipating its arrival, this library is grand! The space may be small – but it's clean! The shelves may be sparse – but there are appropriate books available! And it was properly and thoroughly dedicated by the Bishop of Haiti himself. The dedication and celebrations were well attended by supporters, faculty, students, and friends. A true gala event for UNEPH!

The university continues its struggle to grow and mature. Qualified, dedicated teachers are a huge problem. Adequate finances and space seem to be an equal challenge. But there is now excitement over some new construction. It started just before this session's final exams began. As much as we love the addition of the new library, it did take two of the already insufficient classrooms (9 classrooms and 900 students). This summer will see the addition of a modest new wing. Perhaps the days of holding class in the canteen, the stairwell, and any other available nook or cranny will merely be a fleeting memory and the future will provide space for each professor. Now that's a really nice thought!

Rodney gets around Haiti much, much more than he ever did. His project is listed as "conflict mitigation" and although previously confined to the most volatile hotspots of Haiti's six largest cities, recently he has been requested to extend the geography slightly

and engage in some peri-urban agriculture. He's done some extensive rehabilitation of several small irrigation canals/structures and now has irrigation water for a thousand farmers who have not seen this critical resource in 10 years. This work (jobs) in agriculture and in the cities continues to be a critical reason the peace remains, however uneasy, across Haiti. Through his work, nearly 30,000 person/days of employment per month are created rehabilitating durable infrastructure.

Jointly, Rodney and I are overseeing several small reforestation works. Although not progressing as quickly as hoped for (a frequent complaint of Rodney for his last 40



years), there has been some really good movement this summer. With the lessons learned doing similar work for the past 20 years, we have refined a number of procedures and anticipate continued accelerated growth. As the late summer rains have now begun, we are beginning to plant nearly 50,000 trees this fall. It's hard to describe the difference that will soon make for thousands of kids hauling water or roaming the previously bare slopes looking for twigs for cooking fires.

One of my students watering his trees in a small home nursery

Training today's and tomorrow's leaders, providing jobs, food, and hope to the poor, and working to repair one of the world's worst environmental disasters, we've thus far had a pretty busy year. And being results oriented, it's been great to be able to see some. Thanks again for praying for us, the work here, and the many opportunities to openly share the Good News with so many.

In Christ,

Sharyn & Rodney