

Jan Crouch Building Hospital in Haiti

Through her Smile of a Child foundation, the TBN co-founder is helping the world's children

Jan Crouch is no stranger to the limelight. But on a warm day in January, the co-founder of the world's largest Christian TV network worried that media attention would spoil the work she says God has called her to do.

"I've been doing it for 20 years, and I would do it as long as I lived if nobody knew about it but the children," said Crouch, who leads the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) with her husband, Paul. Keeping it out of public view "kind of kept it precious in my heart," she said. "It's a personal thing the Lord just keeps blessing me to do."

That "personal thing" is the humanitarian work she funds through her nonprofit foundation, Smile of a Child (SOAC). She gives out toys and dolls stamped with the message "Jesus loves you and He has a place in heaven for you," as well as supplies to needy children around the world. In Costa Rica she's building a medical facility, and in Port au Prince, Haiti, where her private plane landed for a day in January, she's funding a hospital.

Built in cooperation with Bishop Joel R. Jeune of Grace International Inc., the \$2 million project will be the most sophisticated medical facility in the nation. And despite Crouch's efforts to remain low-key during her Jan. 27 visit, her generosity, like her signature pink hair, hardly went unnoticed.

For most of the day she was escorted by Alix Baptiste, secretary of state of Haitians living abroad. Later she met with Interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue to present him with the keys to six fire trucks and three ambulances, more gifts to Haiti "from Jesus and the Christians of America," she said.

"Let me officially thank you and the Christians of America," Latortue said during a private meeting with Crouch and several other American Christians.

He told Crouch of his nation's need for fire trucks last summer, and their conversation was broadcast on TBN's Behind the Scenes in late August. "I realized I was dealing with pure Christians," he said of the meeting. "I had no doubt one day you would be here to help the people of Haiti."

Crouch's work in Haiti began more than 20 years ago. When a local minister took her to a hospital for abandoned children, she saw children lying on cardboard beds, covered in newspaper, so thin "they looked like skin wrapped around a bone skeleton," she said.

"I just kept saying: 'Jesus, that could be me. That could be me.'"

The memory of one child still haunts her. "As I was holding him, all I could say was, 'Jesus loves you.' And as I was holding him, he just quit breathing and died in my arms. I said, 'One day children won't have to die on cement floors.'"

When the 60,000-square-foot hospital is completed this summer, it will house at least 85 beds and two operating rooms—unlike

any other on the island. Crouch said the project has evolved organically, as a result of a handful of low-key requests.

Joseph Montopoli, assistant fire chief for the City of Pembroke Pines Fire Rescue in South Florida, was watching TBN one night when he saw Latortue telling Crouch that his nation needed ambulances and fire trucks.

Montopoli quickly went to work, getting his station to donate two vehicles. He then located a vendor who sold decommissioned trucks. SOAC purchased six fire trucks for roughly \$35,000. One is valued at \$24,000.

“As a Christian man, your heart definitely goes out to them,” said Montopoli, who will also help Haiti develop its fire department and teach rescue workers how to operate the vehicles. “Whatever I can do to help out.”

Ministers working in Haiti see the construction of the hospital and the donation of the trucks as one small sign that God is turning things around in a nation long plagued by violence, poverty and government corruption. Since the ouster of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004, local ministers say the nation has seen more calm and the beginnings of needed improvements, such as road construction and sanitation work.

“The church here in Haiti is very strong,” said Luke Weaver of Florida-based Gospel Crusade, which has partnered with Jeune to oversee 260 churches in Haiti.

Weaver, who has visited Jeune’s ministry annually for 30 years, said adherence to Voodoo has decreased since 1997. That

year Jeune led a team of 150 pastors in confronting a demonic spirit they believed to be behind Haiti's involvement with Voodoo, which under Aristide had been declared the national religion.

"Haiti is in the midst of a big blessing because so many Christians have been praying for Haiti," Weaver said. "With a stable government, other nations will pour resources into Haiti. I believe God is going to cause Haiti to become the pearl of the Caribbean; I believe it will turn into a tourist attraction."

Other observers agree that the elections in October and November will signal a turning point. "It's time for this nation to have God at the center of this country," said Dr. Luc Mesadieu, a dentist and pastor who is running for president. "Forty-six percent of the nation is Christian. We have the power to take this nation for the Lord. When the right people lead a country, we have blessing."

Mesadieu said his house and car were burned during Aristide's regime, and his bodyguard was burned alive because he opposed the former president's policies. Though he says Haiti is safer now that Aristide is gone, he still faces threats. "We are ready with God's help," Mesadieu said. "We are for progress and development. We are for a Christian movement for a new Haiti."

Changing a nation isn't exactly what the "little girl with the pink hair," as Crouch called herself, expected to do when she met Jeune 20 years ago. She simply wanted to help him feed hungry children, provide them with a school and later develop a clinic.

But she said surviving colon cancer last year convinced her that God had a big work for her to do. Founded just six years ago, Smile of a Child uses all the donations that come in to fund ministry work, Crouch said, adding that none of the money is spent on administrative costs.

Now she has her sights set on building a similar hospital in Kenya with help from her friend Makena Marangu, a Kenya-born plastic surgeon. Her experience in Haiti is challenging her to think big.

“I am just one of 2.5 billion Christians,” Crouch told Charisma. “If everyone would undertake something that only you and God could do ... can you imagine what would happen?”

Adrienne S. Gaines in Port au Prince, Haiti