

Manigat or Martelly? Haiti Decides Sunday

This Sunday, Haitians will hit the polls—hopefully the last time for this particular presidential election.

Elections were first held a few months ago in November 2010. Riots immediately erupted at polling places, however, when registered voters' names weren't on the list and ballot boxes were full. Accusations of fraud filled the air for weeks.

A couple of weeks later the results were announced for a run-off election to be held in January between former first lady Mirlande Manigat and government technocrat Jude Celestin. At that point, thousands poured into the streets in protest over what they believed to be a rigged presidential poll favoring ruling government coalition.

Finally in February, the situation was ironed out and a decision was made to reverse the results of the disputed first round. Celestin was out of the running for presidency, and Manigat would now be running against popular carnival singer Michel Martelly for the presidency on March 20.

After a frustratingly drawn out process, though, Haiti is finally ready to vote. Reports suggest that 70-year-old Manigat's experience and educational background will appeal to some, while 50-year-old Martelly's lack of involvement with corrupt politics and campaign for change are desired presidential qualities for others. Only Sunday's vote will determine the true winner.

Ron Sparks with Baptist Haiti Mission says believers seem to be torn by the candidates, neither of whom seem to be a perfect Christian choice, Sparks says.

"Madame Manigat is a lawyer. She's smart, she's got some

experience, but she is also is sympathetic to some non-Christian practices,” explains Sparks. “On the other hand, Martelly is very popular with the younger people. He’s a carnival singer and musician, but not the best on morals in a lot of ways.”

Sparks suggests that the best thing for onlookers to do is pray. Haiti has been in shambles even before the January 2010 earthquake, but especially since then. Heightened anxiety coupled with the return of former leaders Duvalier and Aristide could easily provoke November-like violence at the polls.

In light of that, Sparks gives a few prayer suggestions: “The main thing, at this point, is that things go peacefully, that there be a clear decision as to who the newly-elected president’s going to be, and that there be an agreement following the elections that the people will follow this leader and maybe get Haiti on the track to make some progress that’s been so lacking in the past.”

Haiti’s church continues to grow. Whatever the outcome of the elections, pray that the church would move forward with the spread of the Gospel and would shine the true hope for the Haitian people.