

'Matthew Sunday' Spurs Haiti Evangelism Opportunities

The dirt road is hilly, pocked with mud puddles and strewn with pebbles. But the sky on this day is blue, the sun bright, and a gentle breeze carries the scent of the sea just a few miles away.

The Haitian mother and her two daughters who travel the road each week on their way to First Eglise Evangelique Baptiste de Saintard enjoy the walk. Dressed in their Sunday best—Mama in a crisp red suit and wide-brimmed black hat, daughters in white lace and pink satin respectively—the three join arms and sing a little chorus of praise.

In this remote area of Haiti, the scars of the 2010 earthquake aren't visible on the landscape, only in the souls of its people. But tell-tale signs of poverty haunt every corner—in the form of emaciated dogs and hungry children looking for scraps of food.

The church is a haven, tucked behind a security wall.

Mother and daughters enter the courtyard and are greeted by a tall man with an enormous smile. "Welcome," pastor Robert Jean Bilda exclaims warmly.

Soon the girls take their place on the left side of the sanctuary with the rest of the children's choir. Mama joins friends seated in the back, ready to worship and absorb the message.

Excitement buzzes through the church as Bilda strides to the pulpit. "This Sunday is special," he tells the congregation. "It is Happy Children's Day all across Haiti *and* we are preparing for Matthew Sunday."

The cornerstone of the *My Hope* World Evangelism through Television Project, Matthew Sunday is a day dedicated to training people who will invite neighbors and friends into their homes during a nationwide television broadcast featuring a message from Billy or Franklin Graham.

The national broadcast dates for *My Hope* Haiti are July 21-23.

After the broadcast ends, “Matthews” share their personal testimonies then invite their guests to begin a personal relationship with Christ. Matthews are named after the disciple who invited people into his home to meet Jesus (Luke 5:27-32).

Encouraging the congregation to attend training on Matthew Sunday, Bilda taught from Matthew 9:9-13. “We need the Holy Spirit in our lives. Our mission is to go out and preach the Gospel, to share God’s love with all people. But we can’t do it in our own strength. We need the Holy Spirit to help us.”

The pastor continued preaching: “You may be afraid to take this step—to invite the people to your house and share Jesus, but the Holy Spirit will give you power. It is the Holy Spirit’s responsibility to change a person’s life. The burden is not on you.”

In an interview after the service ended, Bilda, who is the National Coordinator of *My Hope* Haiti, expressed his excitement for *My Hope* and shared why the project is so important at this time: “After the earthquake, many organizations brought food and water to Haiti. But you can see inside the life of the Haitian people that they are very empty.

“That is why we appreciate the work of the BGEA here—through the Festival in 2011, the work of the Rapid Response Team, and now with *My Hope*, they have brought the Gospel. And that is what we need.”

My Hope, Bilda said, is “like having a mini-Festival inside the living room. You can receive your friends, your parents, your family, your neighbors inside your home to show the Gospel, to listen to the Gospel, to share the Gospel.”

Even though people are receiving food, water and clothes, Bilda continued, they recognize that they need something more. “The main problem in Haiti is the spiritual thing, the voodoo. God can give the Haitian people freedom through the Holy Spirit.

“When the Holy Spirit can touch your heart, change your heart, fill it with love and not with hate, you are going to have a new Haiti,” he added, which is his prayer and the prayer of thousands of other pastors and leaders in Haiti.

Some 5,247 churches have been trained up to this point. “It is absolutely unbelievable that there are even that many churches on this small island,” said Jeremy Anderson, deputy director for *My Hope* Haiti.

“We need to pray that the church would begin to really shine,” Anderson said, “and that God would use *My Hope* Haiti to further it, because if the Church in Haiti looks like Jesus Christ, the country will be transformed.”

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