

Local Christian lives up to his name during relief trip to Haiti

By Jerry Davich on March 1, 2010 8:36 PM

Christian Rath, 48, of Living Hope Church in Merrillville, recently embarked on an adventure of a lifetime. Last Thursday, he left for Haiti to take part in a ministry called Builders International.

This ministry is very active in building schools, colleges and churches around the world, and it specializes in sending and managing teams. Christian (who truly lives up to his name) was asked to visit Haiti on an exploratory trip to assess damages and come back with data required for a master plan of reconstruction.

Below is a quick question-and-answer session with Christian - to better understand who he is - followed by daily blog entries that he's been sharing with friends, including me, since he left this region last week.

I hope you find it as interesting and insightful as I do.

Q & A

Q. tell me a bit about you

ChR. I was born in France 48 years ago and grew-up in Italy where I got married, got my doctor degree in industrial engineering at the University of Pisa. 8 years ago I was offered a job at MonoSol LLC, a Merrillville based global company leader in water soluble plastic films. I moved in NW Indiana with my wife Cristina and our son Chris.

Q. Recently you were involved in a major expansion project in your church.. tell me more.

ChR. Our family attends Living Hope Church in Merrillville and I serve as Deacon of the Board. Two and a half years ago the church leadership started a process aimed to better serve the local community. As part of the process we did a market survey and found out that third places where people could connect are lacking the area. We decided to invest in expanding our facility offering among other things specific connection spaces, a commercial café and dedicated spaces for kids and youths.

Q. What was your role?

ChR. I served as Project Manager. I'm blessed having been able to serve God, our church and the community in that capacity. It has allowed me to get in touch with many different people and confirming the extreme generosity in this region's people.

Q. Now Haiti. Why? How?

ChR. In 2004 and in 2005 I had the privilege to coordinate 2 mission teams to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We helped building colleges buildings where future leaders are being formed. The organization we went with is Builders International and is part of the many Ministries of the Assemblies of God fellowship. BI offers engineering, architectural and logistics supports for teams that want to make a difference. After the Haiti earthquake hit, BI was asked by the HQ of the AG to go on a fact finding mission, assess the damage to buildings and structures, in order to come-up with a reconstruction master plan. This plan will be disseminate among the 15,000 US churches of the AG fellowship and will help getting better organized and structured help to Haiti in the coming years. The knowledge of French, my professional experience and my heart to help have probably played a role in the choice.

Q. What about your daily job?

ChR. I'm really blessed to work for a company which leadership is very supportive for such situations. I feel I can go with peace in my heart.

Q. Have you booked a hotel?

ChR. Actually my son took a piece of paper and wrote the name of my favorite hotel chain and suggested I should place it atop the cot I will be sleeping on... the situation is still very primitive in Port au Prince. We will be eating MRE, sleeping on cots and have only occasional cold water available for personnel hygiene. Multiple vaccinations and an expeditionary mind set are still required to safely operate there. Homes and building cannot be found w/o a GPS, roads do not exist and it will be a challenge moving around.

Q. What about communication?

ChR. I'm not sure and will know more Friday. I'm told that phone and blackberry work but we will see.

Q. what is your mindset?

ChR. I remember back in the days when I drove ambulances and you could not get emotionally involved when an accident occurred w/o risking to put the mission at risk. On the other hands, you are in contact with hurt people 24h/day, not a couple of minutes and that along with personal safety is the major challenge. You need to keep your mind focused on the assigned mission, but still be compassionate. But I go in peace knowing that this is what God called me to do and therefore He will provide for my safety and guard my eyes. Being part of a church family as the one at Living Hope Church is of tremendous help; it is as if 500+ people are continuously helping you. Same for the company I work for. Last but not least, the support I get from my wife Cristina is tremendous and invaluable