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## Local churches do hands-on mission for Haiti

Churches join together to help haiti effort.

*Linda Leicht*  
*News-Leader*

The entryway at Brentwood Christian Church offers a wide hallway, but boxes and buckets full of hygiene items, diapers and medicine left little room for church members to get into the sanctuary last Sunday.

"It was great," says Phil Snider, pastor of the church. "It allowed everyone to really see the communitywide effort."

The effort was part of a hastily called opportunity presented by Festival of Sharing to gather items to help victims of the earthquake in Haiti.

Festival of Sharing, an ecumenical convocation organized by Missouri's United Methodist Church's Office of Creative Ministries, gathers a variety of kits -- including health/hygiene kits, layettes and medical kits -- that are distributed through agencies such as Church World Services.

Within 24 hours after the earthquake hit Haiti, Festival of Sharing coordinator Terri Williams was on the phone with CWS and other agencies to determine what could be done to help.

She learned that there were only about 1,000 health/hygiene kits on hand to send to Haiti, so she sent out a plea to all the more than 2,000 churches that participate in the October Festival of Sharing.

"What was impressive about this one," she says, "we only gave churches a little over two weeks to respond, and they put together 14,820 health kits, 791 baby layettes and about 200 medical kits that will go to IMA World Health next week."

More than 2,000 of the health kits, 129 layettes and 25 medical kits filled the hall at Brentwood Christian Church, along with eight cleanup buckets and nine boxes of miscellaneous items to go into other kits.

The items came from churches all around southwest Missouri, and even some from Kansas.

"We just put the word out among the membership," says Ralph Clark, pastor of the First United methodist Church of Nevada. "We also invited St. Paul Lutheran to join us in the project. The pastor there got some kits at St. Mary's Catholic."

That interdenominational cooperation resulted in more than 250 health kits, as well as layettes.

National Avenue Christian Church in Springfield put together 150 kits, valued at more than \$2,000, and \$2,252 in cash, says Linda Bossi, who headed up the effort.

"We're still doing more," she says. "This Sunday, we're doing the kits with Sunday school children putting them together."

In Aurora, the United Methodist Church served as a gathering point. Two vanloads of kits were then

driven to Brentwood in Springfield before a gooseneck trailer picked them all up on the way to Little Rock, Ark., and then on to Haiti.

The much-needed supplies are expected to arrive in Haiti by early next week, Williams says.

"We need to thank folks across the whole state who reacted to the need," says George Bohn, a member of the Aurora church and the Festival of Sharing coordinating committee. "Gathering nearly 15,000 kits from across the state of Missouri is quite an accomplishment in a hurry.

"Our church is just proud to be a part of that."

As churches continue to collect supplies for kits, they are likely to be collected in a few months for another shipment or they will be held for the Festival of Sharing this fall, Williams says.

The Festival of Sharing gathering is held every year on the third Saturday of October at the State Fairgrounds. Kits are gathered each year to distribute in the state, country and abroad through CWS, IMA, Habitat for Humanity, Heifer Project, Foods Resource Bank, Missouri Impact, Bread for the World, Rainbow Network and Personal Energy Transportation of Missouri.

Last year, churches gathered nearly 8,500 health kits, as well as nearly 6,500 school kits, more than 1,200 layettes and 284 cleanup buckets for Church World Services, plus much more for other agencies.

"The need is constant," says Bohn. "We're doing everything we can to help all around the world."

Williams is confident that the state's churches will continue to respond to the needs in Haiti and elsewhere.

"I really am very thankful for their hard work and their efforts to help people in Haiti," she says. "I'm always amazed by how much people will do for this hands-on mission."

Collecting for and packing the kits provides an opportunity for people to respond in a concrete way, she says.

"You know that something you touched and handled will really be used and touched by those who receive it," she says. "That's a very powerful tool, a personal connection."

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