



Church is at the Center Of Haitian Community Life

In the Haitian Community in Florida the church is at the center of family and cultural life. A perfect example is St. John's Haitian Mission in Boynton Beach.

With a congregation of some 344 active members, Rev. Jocelyn Adhemar reports that the church facilities are almost never out of use. Not only do they have two celebratory services, morning and evening, every Sunday, a healthy schedule of classes, prayer meetings, Bible studies and other activities, keeps the church busy seven days, and evenings, per week.

On Mondays the United Methodist Women (UMW) conduct home visitation throughout the evening. Tuesday is a congregational prayer service lead by the youth. Wednesday is choir practice. Thursday is Bible study, and Friday features a three-hour worship and fellowship service which typically adjourns after midnight when everyone joins hands to pray.

On Saturdays, the church offers beginning and advanced computer classes for its members, in addition to a "fasting" prayer meeting. And, on Sunday evenings, before the regular service, people from throughout the community are invited to attend a UMW-sponsored ecumenical prayer vigil.

According to Rev. Montreuil Milord, Conference Coordinator of Haitian Ministries, there are currently 23 Haitian congregations growing and thriving within the Florida Annual Conference. Many started as small "boukans" or "house churches," and have grown into missions or chartered churches. Some share facilities with older churches; others have filled churches that were closing.

According to Milord, the addition of four to six new congregations per year is “our great joy.”

Since the church serves as a focal point for the Haitian Community, it often takes an active role in providing health, education and social services, in addition to ministering to spiritual needs. At Ft. Pierce Haitian, for example, the church offers English classes, health clinics and pre-school and after-school programs. Tutoring programs for youth and vocational training programs for adults are not uncommon.

Revivals also play an important role in the spiritual life of the Haitian Church in Florida. St. John’s in Boynton Beach offers three each year, and attracts “standing room” crowds. It also ministers to friends and relatives back in Haiti by broadcasting one service per month live, by radio, to Haiti. The Conference Haitian Ministry maintains a continued relationship with the United Methodist Church in Haiti through the Haiti-Florida Covenant.