

Haiti Cherri



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Passports, Visas, What's the Value?

By: Dan Merrefield

Do you have a passport? I do. Mine was issued by the United States Government, and it cost me only \$65.00. With that passport, sometimes in combination with a visa, I can travel nearly anywhere in the world. Sure, I have to be able to afford the cost of the travel, but that is really the only limitation. Such freedom is an amazing thing that is easy to take for granted. It was only when I traveled to the country of Haiti that I realized the value of that passport.

Imagine yourself living in Haiti along with 8-million other people. You live on an island approximately the size of the state of Maryland. Perhaps you live in a remote village along the coast and you have no job. If you're lucky, maybe you can grow a few vegetables in your garden and catch a few fish or a crab to feed your family. As you look across the ocean, you dream about a life elsewhere. You hear the stories. Some people leave and are able to find a new life with more opportunity. Some people just leave and are never heard from again.

You dream, but you are trapped. You can get a Haitian passport easily enough, but no government will issue you a visa. Some wealthier people pay thousands of dollars to criminals who will provide a fraudulent visa. It seldom works, and they just end up deeper in poverty. You know of others who pay equally outrageous sums of money to people who will attempt to illegally take them to the United States in a dangerous, overcrowded, rickety boat. The United States Government does not

welcome them with open arms. Most often, the Coast Guard intercepts them at sea and returns them directly to Haiti. If they do make landfall, asylum is rarely granted because Haitians are considered economic refugees, not political refugees. Imagine paying thousands of dollars, every penny you and your entire family could raise, so that you could sail for the United States. You are intercepted at sea and returned. The disappointment must be crushing.

I know a man in Haiti who builds boats. He has attempted to sail to the United States five times, and the Coast Guard has intercepted him every time. He believes a story, though. He believes that if he can just set foot on the shore, he will go to jail for three days and then he will be released and will be given a job. His belief in this lie keeps him building boats and keeps him trying to get to that better life he dreams about.

I don't mean to suggest that everyone in Haiti is desperate to leave. Many people love their country and want to see it changed for the better. Many people wouldn't leave if they had the chance, especially those who are engaged in the battle over the soul of the country. I am just struck by the irony of the ease with which I can travel in and

out as often as I want, but the people I visit are not able to do the same. They are trapped in a country that has devoted itself to the devil, a country that will not really change until that fact changes. There's something else, though. Are they really trapped?

Many people I know in Haiti have a different kind of passport. Even if we have one of those very valuable passports issued by the U.S. Government, we need the same passport many of my Haitian friends have. You see, we need a passport to gain entrance at the most important border crossing we will ever encounter. Whether we believe it or

not, everyone will be at that border crossing some day. The best news of all is that this passport is free. No amount of money would be enough to pay for it. We don't even deserve it. We can't do enough to earn it. It's the passport to Heaven God freely gives through his son Jesus Christ. Jesus

paid the price for this passport on the cross. We need to be prepared now, and accept the passport that is freely offered to all. It should be in our possession at all times, because we never know when we will appear at that border crossing. Everybody is on even terms at that point, regardless of nationality or opportunity here on earth. If you haven't received your free but priceless passport yet, there is no possession more valuable or important. Why not accept it now? With this kind of passport, everybody is set free.



These photos tell a little of the Mitspa Haitian Baptist Church mission trip story that took place from June 28 to July 5, 2002. On this trip we traveled to Cap-Haitien, Vaudriel, and Au-Bougne. We will be returning to Cap-Haitien and Dolval in late December through early January, and to Cap-Haitien and remote villages in the northwest in June of 2003. Please contact Dan Merrefield at 770-479-9608 or dan@merrefield.com if you would like more information or would like to help in any way. Special thanks go to Dr. Lonnie King for these digital photographs.



Here is some of the team assembling on the tarmac at the Port-au-Prince airport. We are on our way to Cap-Haitien on a small plane.



The streets of Cap-Haitien are always very busy and dusty.



We estimate the attendance at the Wednesday morning service at the Tabernacle to be 10,000. The battle is hard, but God is truly at work at this church.



The road to Au-Bougne is a rough but scenic 3 1/2 hour drive. Being packed in a minivan with 14 people makes it even more memorable!



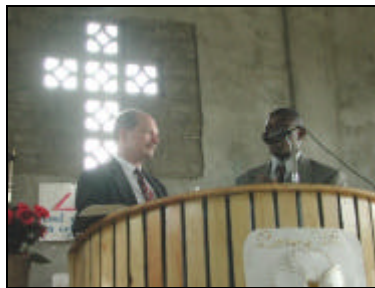
The first day of our trip we traveled from Atlanta to Cap-Haitien and immediately went to a crusade under way at the Tabernacle de Louange. These people are responding to the invitation the first night of the crusade.



Au-Bougne is in a beautiful Caribbean setting, but as with all villages in Haiti, is desperately poor with no public services of any kind.



Rev. Ecclesias Donatian, pastor of the Tabernacle de Louange, positively radiates nonstop energy.



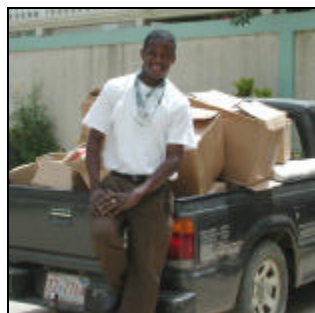
On Sunday, I was invited to speak at the Baptist church in Vaudriel. Rev. Oris Guillaume translated for me.



The wait at the church clinic in Au-Bougne was long and hot. Unfortunately, not everyone could be served. It is always a shortage economy in Haiti.



Dr. Lonnie King and Mitspa translator Odiles Nelson consult with a patient at the clinic at Tabernacle de Louange.



Medical student Frisner Guillaume from Mitspa was a tremendous help to Dr. King during the week of clinics.



Rev. Achime Guillaume studies his notes before delivering a message at the Tabernacle.