

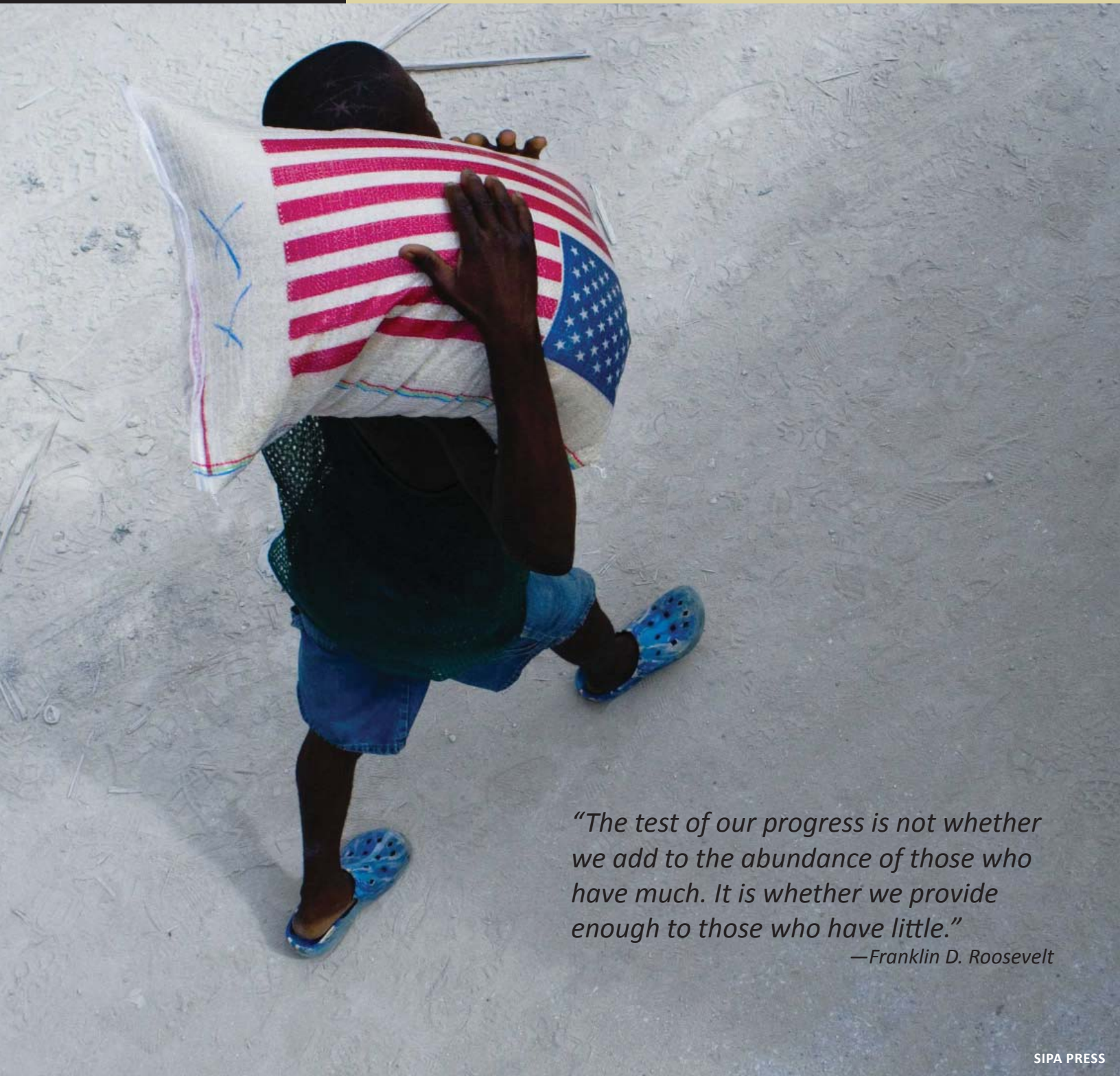
February 2010

Virtue In Action

From an Earthquake Comes Solidarity in Haiti

VIRTUE IN ACTION

FOSTERING CITIZENSHIP THROUGH CHARACTER EDUCATION



"The test of our progress is not whether we add to the abundance of those who have much. It is whether we provide enough to those who have little."

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

A truck serving as the only shelter for 24 orphaned babies, some only days old.

Weeping, praying people using their own hands to free their fellow citizens from mountains of rubble. Children wandering dusty streets looking for their relatives. Millions of people, now homeless, living in the streets and parks, and without a consistent source of food.

These are but a handful of the heart-wrenching images we have been seeing online, in newspapers and on television in the wake of the devastating earthquake in Haiti that killed at least 150,000 people in the capital of Port-au-Prince alone.

In January, the 7-point earthquake shattered the developing country of Haiti—the United States’ poorest neighbor in the Western hemisphere—**debilitating** its already weak **infrastructure** and leaving millions of Haitians in need, many without shelter, food, water or access to medical resources.

Even before the earthquake, the Haitian people suffered from extreme poverty and a history of corrupt and ineffective governments. According to a recent Wall Street Journal article, approximately 80% of Haiti’s residents live below the poverty line.

During a natural disaster, we often see the worst of human suffering. However, we also often see the best of humanity in the determination of survivors to rebuild their lives, and in the **solidarity** and **generosity** of the world community unifying around a common purpose to alleviate suffering, and to help the Haitian people build a more secure and prosperous future.

#help4Haiti: Technology, Social Networkers and Celebrities Answer the Call

On Jan. 12, Twitter—the microblogging service—

began trending heavily with terms that included the **hashtag** “help4Haiti.” Word of the 7-point earthquake seized the attention of news watchers, but also social media participants who worked to let one another know of the horrors in Haiti and mounting death toll.

Additionally, efforts to raise funds surfaced just as quickly, with hip-hop producer and rapper Wyclef Jean collecting funds via mobile text-ins to his Yele Charity Foundation. Jean, a Haitian native and a longtime award-winning activist for the country, was joined by other celebrities who felt a sense of **responsibility** and **compassion** to help others in need—



including Meryl Streep, George Clooney, Madonna, Russell Simmons, Alyssa Milano, and LL Cool J.

These celebrities showed their **solidarity** with the Haitian people by leveraging their access to their millions of Twitter followers to raise awareness and start soliciting funds for charitable organizations, including Doctors without Borders. Former NBA star Alonzo Mourning personally traveled to Port-au-Prince to work alongside doctors from Project Medishare.

On Jan. 22, celebrity activism reached a fever pitch, with a two-hour Hope for Haiti Now: a Global Benefit for Earthquake Relief telethon headed by Clooney and co-hosted by Jean. The event raised more than \$60 million in aid for Haiti.

“The mood was somber but **hopeful**, as performers selected relevant songs and delivered them with heavy-hearted sincerity,” PopEater bloggers reported. “Several sang solos like Shakira, with a hauntingly beautiful rendition of ‘I’ll Stand by You’; Beyonce, who modified her song ‘Halo’ to mention the people of Haiti; Madonna with ‘Like A Prayer.’”

Everyday Heroes for Haiti

Although it’s inspiring for celebrities to be **generous** with their time and talents, it’s important to realize the power of everyday people around the world to affect change. Approximately \$10 million in relief funds came in through text donations from everyday Americans, and much of the \$60 million in donations from the celebrity telethon came from individual viewers.

Individuals and organizations also have sent supplies to Haiti in record numbers across the country, with some even venturing to the country to volunteer for organizations including the Red Cross, Doctors without Borders, and Partners in Health. A senior pastor, Randy Landis, who spoke to MSNBC.com about his religious conviction to help Haiti, led several other nondenominational churches to the ravaged country.

“Our emphasis is to witness, to be the hands and the feet of Jesus,” Landis, founder of the Lifechurch in Allentown, Pa., told MSNBC.com before leading a relief mission to the Haitian orphanage the church sponsors. “If Jesus were here, what would he do? I don’t think he would be in America sitting and watching the television. If he had a way to get to Port-au-Prince, he would get here. He would be a first-responder.”

The Wall Street Journal chronicled the story of a search team from Belgium that, in an act of global **solidarity**, flew half-way around the world with the hope of saving those who were still alive but trapped in the debris. The search team was brought to the site of a collapsed apartment building where a 28-year-old woman, Rosemene Josiane, was buried alive deep in the rubble of her building. The team used specially trained dogs to determine Josiane’s exact location, and then spent hours slowing digging through and around the debris.

The work was especially dangerous as Haiti was continuing to experience aftershocks that were powerful enough to further shift the building, and injure the rescue workers. Eventually the team reached Josiane, but had to amputate her leg to free her.

Throughout her ordeal Josiane spoke of her strong sense of **hope** that she would be freed, and despite losing her leg was **grateful** to the rescue team and God for saving her.

In a testimony to the **perseverance** and determination of the Haitian people, many who have themselves suffered loss and heartbreak still are working to alleviate the suffering of others. Among them are the volunteers for Partners in Health, which supports 4,000 Haitian doctors and nurses.

Haitian nurse Naomie Marcelin told the Boston Globe “Yes, I lost my sister and niece. I told myself I can’t have them back. So if I can help sick people get better, that is exactly what my sister would want me to do.”

In the U.S., many young people have shown **empathy** in placing themselves in the position of the earthquake victims, and from this have developed a strong sense of **compassion** in wanting to help. An example is 12-year-old Zac Mansfield in North Carolina who appealed to his church to raise funds for Haiti after delivering a tearful speech to the congregation at St. George’s Memorial Church.

Zac recounted in the durhamregion.com, “I told them I wanted to raise money for an orphanage in Haiti ... I want to help an orphanage because I’m a kid and I can relate to the kids there. I told the people at church that together, we can make a difference.”

Across the “pond” in London, 7-year-old Charlie Simpson raised a massive amount of money through a simple but powerful act of **solidarity**. Simpson launched a JustGive bike ride, asking donors to sponsor his 5-mile ride around a neighborhood park, which he hoped would “make some money to buy food, water and tents for everyone in Haiti.” To date, the little boy who has been profiled in international media outlets for his **compassion** toward others has raised approximately \$190,000.

*“Our country has pride ... Don’t look at us as hopeless.
See us as your brothers and sisters and help.”*

—Wideline Jean Paul, a 15-year-old Haitian student

Hope for Haiti

The situation in Haiti is desperate but there are reasons to hope for a better future. The U.S. government has donated \$100 million and mobilized 11,000 troops, while American citizens and corporations have so far donated an additional \$300 million.

However, the long term success of the recovery effort will be determined primarily by the people of Haiti in holding themselves and their government accountable to effectively manage the recovery effort. We also can play a role in supporting projects that will give our Haitian neighbors a hand up to succeed.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told media outlets she expects the country to be back, and “better than ever,” after reconstruction projects, currently underway, take root.

Most importantly, according to some with Haitian ties, the country is made up of a resilient and tough people, who appreciate the **solidarity** and **generosity** shown to them by the world, but still want to take control of their own recovery as soon as they’re able.

“Our country has pride,” Widline Jean Paul, a 15-year-old Haitian student at Rosa Parks school, told the New Jersey Star Ledger of the support shown by fellow students who wore the red and blue colors of the Haitian flag. “... Don’t look at us as hopeless. See us as your brothers and sisters and help.”

Vocabulary

Debilitating: to make weak or feeble

Infrastructure: the basic, underlying framework or features of a system or organization

Compassion: feeling of sympathy for the distress of others, with the desire to help

Courage: the capacity to meet danger without giving way to fear; to have the **courage** of one’s convictions; to be willing to put one’s opinions into practice

Hashtag: a tool for tracking topics, communities, live events, or breaking news on Twitter. When you insert one of these short character-string tags beginning with #, Twitter users can follow a topic

Empathy: entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person’s situation

Generosity: giving freely of our own possessions, time and or talent to someone else

Hero: a person who is regarded as a model due to their acts of **courage**, or nobility of purpose and noble qualities

Hope: confident expectation of the fulfillment of a wish

Respect for Others: affirming the dignity and value of a person

Responsibility: accepting and meeting the demands of our duty in life; being accountable

Solidarity: a shared common interest; active loyalty within a group

Perseverance: trying hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties

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Lesson goals

- Help students to comprehend the scope of the disaster in Haiti, both from a macro perspective, and from the perspective of individual suffering
- Understand the virtues of empathy, compassion, generosity, courage, hope, responsibility and solidarity
- Present models of others living out these virtues amidst the disaster
- Make students aware of aid groups and opportunities for us to provide effective assistance
- Make students aware of careers in disaster relief

Highlighted Virtues

Compassion: feeling of sympathy for the distress of others, with the desire to help

Courage: the capacity to meet danger without giving way to fear; to have the courage of one's convictions; to be willing to put one's opinions into practice

Empathy: entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation

Generosity: giving freely of our own possessions, time and or talent to someone else

Responsibility: accepting and meeting the demands of our duty in life; being accountable

Solidarity: a shared common interest; active loyalty within a group

Discussion Question Options

1. What happened in Haiti on Jan. 12? How many people are thought to have died in Haiti's capital alone?
2. What has the U.S. government done to assist Haiti to

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date? How much money has our government pledged to Haiti? What factors have you learned about in the media coverage that might complicate the Haitian people receiving this aid?

3. Do you think our government has a responsibility to assist other countries when they experience natural disasters? If yes, do you think our government is doing enough?

4. What roles have some celebrities played in the relief efforts for Haiti?

5. How have emerging communications technologies affected the ways we learn about and then impact a natural disaster? Do you think there's a risk of too much coverage?

6. What roles have regular citizens played in helping Haiti? What are some examples of how everyday citizens have helped, both from the lesson and from our own community?

7. Do you think that we as citizens have a responsibility to assist with disasters in other nations?

8. Define the virtue of empathy, and then explain why it's important in addressing a disaster. What other virtues and actions flow from empathy?

9. What is your opinion of the actions of our media, government leaders and celebrities from the perspective of whether they have been effective in telling the story of Haiti's needs and inspiring empathy, compassion and generosity?

10. Do you believe our government and citizens will remain engaged in Haiti to help them rebuild over the long term, or just during the short-term relief mission? What can we do to assist the rebuilding efforts in Haiti over the long term?

Writing Options

1. Write about one story from the disaster in Haiti that has affected you personally. Outline the story, and then incorporating specific virtues explain why and how this story has affected you.

Extended Learning Activities

1. Have the class organize a project (bake sale, supply-gathering initiative, or fundraiser) and donate to Haiti through a charitable organization chosen by a team of students.
2. Split the class into four different groups and assign each group a not-for-profit organization to profile such as the Red Cross, Partners for Health, Doctors without Borders and Oxfam. Each group should give a presentation on the work each group is doing in



Haiti, the history of each group, and why their work is important for Haiti's recovery.

Internet Resources

- “Students at Rosa Parks School in Orange Show Haiti Earthquake Relief Support,” Barry Carter, The Star-Ledger: http://blog.nj.com/njv_barry_carter/2010/01/students_at_rosa_parks_school.html
- “Oshawa Boy Opens His Heart to Haiti,” Jillian Follert, Durham Region, <http://newsdurham-region.com/news/article/146613>
- “US Charity for Haiti Outpaces Giving after Tsunami,” Brett Zongker, The Associated Press www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/21/AR2010012103178.html
- “Twitter Grows up in the Aftermath of Haiti Earthquake,” Tim Leberecht, CNET, http://news.cnet.com/8301-13641_3-10436435-44.html
- “Her World Collapsed; Then She Was Saved,” Dionne Searcy, Wall Street Journal, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704381604575005472772608794.html#articleTabs%3Darticle>

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