

To: Council of Bishops

From: Bishop Joel N. Martinez  
Interim General Secretary

Re: Volunteers and Teams in Wake of Haiti Earthquake

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This is a follow-up to an earlier memo in which I said that the time was not right for sending volunteer teams, or even individual volunteers, into Haiti for post-earthquake service.

I am here repeating that request with renewed emphasis.

We know that the church seeks to respond to the great crisis in Haiti. We are in touch with many persons and groups wanting to reach out in tangible ways to provide relief for suffering people there. We have already received an outpouring of inquiries and offers for volunteers to provide a variety of services. While we are encouraged by this spirit of support, we strongly advise that teams and others not set out for Haiti at this time.

There will be great need for short-term and long-term volunteer mission groups in due course—for medical care, rebuilding, and responses to many other needs. However, the current state of Haiti is not conducive to the safety and welfare of the volunteers; security is a major concern; infrastructures are shattered. There is little access to water, power, fuel, and even roads.

An UMCOR Team is on the ground, coordinating with relief partners on appropriate courses of action. As you know, the United Nations (representing government) and the Red Cross go into to massive disaster areas first. This is long-established international protocol. Church-related and other relief organizations follow. Objectives of our initial team include the assessment and organization for the reception of volunteers.

In collaboration with jurisdictional coordinators of UMVIM, we are making a registry of potential individual volunteers and teams. The time for volunteers will come and their assistance will be crucial.

In the meantime, the best way for congregations and individuals to respond to the Haiti crisis is by supporting the work of UMCOR. Not only are funds needed but also health kits. Please direct persons to <http://umcorhaiti.org>.

I will be glad to receive your questions arising from this memo, and I pledge to keep you informed on our relief operations in Haiti.