

Hugues Bastien forms local “Board of Directors” for school and clinic October 2009

Reported by Dave Mann

This Saturday marked what may prove to be an important date in the structuring of Institution Univers Chrétien d’Haïti.

As many of you know, we have struggled for some time with the seemingly whimsical application of taxation laws in Haiti. We believe that we are paying our lawful taxes, only to be informed that we have totally ignored the payment of another one. This is especially true when we seek to pass a container through customs. When we ask how the tax is calculated we are given arbitrary numbers which do not make sense. In the end, we are obliged to pay whatever is presented to us.

On numerous occasions we have sought NGO (Non-Governmental Organization or official non-profit) status which would exempt us from most of these taxes. We have retained a lawyer in Port-au-Prince. We have filed numerous application forms. We have contacted friends of friends of friends, who are supposedly “well-connected.” We have received written letters of recommendation from other NGOs in Haiti. To date, none of those efforts have yielded any fruit.

In addition, we have been encouraged to begin to develop relationships with local donor organizations such as Plan Haiti, which we have done. One of these organizations is named *Aide et Action*. This organization has provided us with key information. Mr. Nesmy Manigat (“Nene”) originally from Ouanaminthe, director of Aide et Action, has taken a particular interest in Univers and has made a significant financial donation to IU already. He has met with our administrators and has provided comments similar to what some of our American partners have noted.

- Univers has done a remarkable job in building a school and medical facility.
- The results in the official exams of Univers students are truly remarkable, worthy of national note. (He said this prior to the announcement from the Education Ministry which included Univers in the top ten schools in Haiti.)
- However, the way the ministry is structured with everything being funneled through the three remaining founders has a built-in limitation for growth. If the ministry is to expand to include all the things which the Univers has envisioned (Vo-Ed school, chicken/egg farm, businesses, radio station, etc.), it will need to find a new and broader local structure.
- In addition, Nene noted that he knows of no organizations being granted NGO status in recent years that do not have a structural basis for local oversight – a board of directors and an annual gathering of multiple members which is distinct from those who run the day-to-day operations.

As a result, we have held the first ever meeting of the Assemblée Générale (general assembly) of the Institution Univers Chrétien d’Haïti (IUCH). This group of twenty-two friends of Univers (both Haitian and expatriate residents of Haiti) approved a constitution and selected a seven-member Conseil Général (general council). The general assembly will meet once a year, and the council will meet at least three times a year. None of the members of the general assembly or council will receive a salary for their work on these bodies.

The day-to-day operations will not change. All of us will continue to do what we have done in the past, but we now give an account to the general council (three times per year) and to the general assembly (once a year). This is in addition to the reports we provide to the COCINA executive committee and the COCINA annual board meeting.

The General Assembly of IUCH

The general assembly has no determined number of members. New members can be added at any of the annual general assembly meetings. Non-Haitian resident friends of Univers may be part of this group (i.e. COCINA members), but the meetings will be held in Haiti and conducted in Creole. The participants/members of IUCH's general assembly:

Hugues Bastien, founder	Azurene Jn-Baptiste Lapis, long-time employee
Joe Dumay, founder	Dieudonné Monestimé César, long-time employee
Jaccin Bernard, founder	Alexis Lafleur, long-time employee
Justine Bernard, wife of Jaccin, teacher	Jacquessaint Antoine, parent
David Mann, teacher, financial operations	Manfred Remy, parent, veterinarian
Pamela Mann, teacher	Mirlene Dumay, wife of Joe, receptionist
Alex Joanis, parent, economist	Jn-Baptiste Bien-Aimé, consul of Haitian consulate in Dajabon
Martine Leonard, bank officer, accountant	Yasmine St Vil Noel Manigat, entrepreneur
Avelina Emmanuel, long-time employee	Nesmy Manigat, director of Aide et Action, M.S.
Gerald Legitime, entrepreneur	Harry Emmanuel Dumay, brother of Joe, PhD
Jocelyn Daniel, long-time employee	Smoye Noisy, journalist, actor

The General Council

The general council is elected by the general assembly and consists of five to seven members, serving a 2-year term. The general council selects its own officers. Those elected on Saturday: Hugues Bastien (president), Yasmine Manigat (secretary), Harry Dumay (treasurer), Alex Joanis (vice-treasurer), Gerald Legitime (adviser), Jean-Baptiste Bien-Aimé (adviser), and Smoye Noisy (adviser).

Please pray that this re-structuring will “work,” that is, that Univers will be in a better position to be granted NGO status, and that the inclusion of those who are involved more significantly in the ministry locally will broaden the support base and increase local “ownership.” Who knows what this will yield? We had a comment from the Port-au-Prince entrepreneur stating that his company spends thousands of dollars every month on Dominican chickens which are resold in Haiti, and that he would love to have his money stay within the country. So, as soon as Univers gets the chicken farm going, he would be a client.