

Pastor Visits from Haiti

Rev. Thomas Bernard depicts reality of homeland, has Indiana connections

By Amanda Wray & Richard Gootee



After a Sunday baptism, four men kidnapped the Rev. Thomas Bernard.

They took Bernard into his own neighborhood. He knew they were headed to a place where kidnappers killed their accused of working for the government. Bernard explained he was a pastor, not a government worker.

“I’m just a pastor, a humble teacher,” Bernard said to his kidnappers.

Minutes later he was free, a case of mistaken identity.

On September 11, Bernard came to Franklin and spoke about experiences such as his own kidnapping and general life in Haiti. He talked about how the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church and School, which he is pastor of, in the capital city of Port-au-Prince is bettering lives there.

With a population of eight million people, Bernard said Haiti is the third poorest country in the world. Eighty percent of the population in Haiti is unemployed, causing it’s inhabitants to live in poverty like conditions.

Some Haitians live without electricity, running water, floors in

houses, windows, garbage services, cars or air conditioning.

“If you visited Haiti (and saw the conditions), you would cry” Bernard said.

Children in Haiti also lack another opportunity – education.

Bernard said parents are too poor to pay for schooling, so their children stand on the streets, begging for bread and water. He also said only 50 percent of children make it past their fourth birthdays.

Bernard said that they put great emphasis on children becoming self-sufficient. He said that without education available for its children, there is no possibility for Haiti to remain a nation. He said that most students cannot afford the \$200 yearly tuition, but the school still accepts children to teach them the gospel. Tuition pays for books, uniforms, some food and money to pay the teachers.



Senior Jennifer Redicker introduced Bernard. Redicker and her family met Bernard five years ago through her church in Vallonia in Jackson County. Their pastor was adopting two children from Haiti, and Bernard baptized the children.

Redicker's parents, Ray and Jeannie Redicker also attended the lecture. They said Bernard impresses them because of his dedication to his homeland.

"Even with all his despair and poverty, he is very joyful for the blessing that he has." Jeannie Redicker said.

Bernard said Haiti needs him to stay in the country to help the country progress.

"No matter how the situation is I am bound to be in Haiti, Bernard said.

Bernard has additional ties to Indiana. He graduated from the Concordia Seminary in Fort Wayne in 1988.

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Photo by Lex Roach