

## **“Honoring Human Dignity by Building Group Capacity”**

November 16, 2002

Dear Friends, Family, and others interested in The Experiment in Alternative Leadership,

In the Haitian tradition, I greet you with honor and respect. I want to give you an update on my work. For those who do not have the time or interest to read this letter, I take no offense. The delete button is just a finger touch away. No one will ever know. :)

### **Finances**

October 31 marked the completion of the first trimester of my 2002-2003 fiscal year. Thank you to all of you who have contributed, helping me reach 91% of my revenue objectives.

Budget Revenue from July 1 – October 31, 2002: \$16,620

(This includes the funding for me to become a Christian Peacemaker Teams reserve, as well as the resulting travel to Palestine and monthlong training on nonviolence in Chicago.)

Contributions received during this same period: \$15,160

I am pleased to report that actual expenses are aligned with budgeted expenses. My budget can be found on Beyond Borders' website:

[www.beyondborders.net/experiment.htm](http://www.beyondborders.net/experiment.htm).

### **Learning about prayer from boys who lived on the street**

"God, who is good, I ask you to be with people who are in the hospital, people in prison, children who live on the street, those who don't have food, others who are hurting, and who are lonely. Be with them. Comfort them." For a year, in 1992, when I lived at Saint Joseph's Home for Boys, I heard this prayer uttered several times each day by boys who had previously lived on the streets. Every day about 15 of us gathered at 5:00 am for prayer before we started our chores. Again, before we went to bed, we would reconvene for prayer, singing and discussion. Never would these young boys fail to pray for the unfortunate ones mentioned above. They also always remembered to pray for people who made St. Joseph's Home a reality: volunteers, funders, etc.

Children living in the street throughout the world, prisoners, families of the victims of the D.C. sniper and of the tragedies of September 11, people in Afghanistan, those in Palestine - Do I pause each day to hold those who suffer in thought or prayer? Do I regularly open myself to the sacred opportunity to be with these brothers and sisters spiritually and to invite the "God, who is good" to comfort them? May the boys of St. Joseph's be my example. May I feel compelled daily to pray for and remember those who suffer and encourage others to do the same. And, may I also hold in thought and prayer people who are important in my life.

### **Working with two new groups**

In August, I had the unique opportunity to use the Open Space method in facilitating a three-day leadership retreat for nine young men. In collaboration with Michael Geilenfeld, these men run St. Joseph's Home for Boys, Trinity Home for Boys, and Wings of Hope, which is a home for 35 children with severe disabilities. These nine young leaders were among the dozens of boys who, more than ten years ago, Michael rescued from the street or detention homes and integrated into the structured community life at St. Joseph's. I feel particularly close to six of the nine who were at St. Joseph's when I was there ten years ago. What an honor and privilege it was to be with them during this retreat, and to see how they have grown and evolved. Michael and these young leaders have invited me to work with them to aid in preparing them for Michael's eventual retirement. Our next retreat is December 13-15, 2002.

In July, leaders of the ministry entitled Haitian Street Kids invited me to do weekly Reflection Circles (referred to as Touchstones Discussion Project in the US) with 40 boys who, until recently, lived on the street. We had four meetings prior to my planned departure from Haiti during September and October and I have continued with them upon my return to Haiti in November. I will work with them in improving their skills in critical thinking, reading comprehension, dialogue, and collaborative problem solving (i.e., the fruits of regular use of the Reflection Circles method.)

### **Ongoing work with existing groups**

I continue to use Open Space and/or Reflection Circles with 12 different groups and institutions on a regular basis. The effectiveness of a group is based on the growth and development of the individuals within it and on their ability to work and evolve together. I use Reflection Circles with groups of students — adults or youth — and Open Space with people working collectively to achieve a goal. Both methods are used among this sampling of organizations and groups: FAVILEK (35 female rape victims of Haitian military who are working toward bringing perpetrators to justice); Haitian Network of Open Space Practitioners; Reflection Circles Project; Rotary Clubs of Haiti Literacy Initiative; Louverture Cleary School; Limye Lavi Foundation; and Beyond Borders.

My work with groups stretches me and makes me question my own assumptions about how I think things should develop. It challenges my tendency to want change to come about quickly. I find meaning in participating with them to identify and overcome obstacles. In general, I am discovering that the most important things I can do with groups are listening; creating space for voices to be heard; affirming truth-telling; and helping them to develop regular habits of evaluating their interaction and performance together. I see progress individually and collectively, as people integrate these practices. In light of Haiti's never-ending political crisis and deteriorating economy, it is a gift to find meaning and positive results in one's work.

### **Palestine and training in nonviolence**

Thanks to generous contributions, I am able to pursue steps to become a reserve with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT). As you may recall, CPT reserves participate in one or two delegations to areas of unrest each year for three years. The next step toward becoming a reserve is for me to join a delegation to travel to Palestine and Israel November 19 - December 4, 2002. Seven of us will accompany and support the long-term team along with local people who are being persecuted. Following this trip, I will attend a monthlong training session on nonviolence in Chicago in January 2003.

Increasingly, our network of Open Space and Reflection Circle practitioners in Haiti are using these methods to help groups address violence and issues connected to violence. I look forward to a cross-pollination between my work in Haiti and my involvement with CPT.

### **Documentary of The Open Space and Reflection Circles experience in Haiti to date**

My colleagues and I are undertaking a project in collaboration with two acclaimed Haiti-based professionals to create a 20-minute documentary of our experience using Open Space and Reflection Circles in Haiti. In Haitian Creole, with English and French subtitles, we will profile four or five organizations that have been using one or both of these methods consistently for several years. The intent of this mini-documentary is:

- to foster reflection and learning among the network of Open Space and Reflection Circle practitioners, which now number in the hundreds;
- to encourage other groups and institutions in Haiti and abroad to consider experimenting with these methods; and
- to make known our experience among existing and potential funders.

This project is 9-10 months long and is projected to cost \$11,000. Beyond Borders and Limye Lavi will match every dollar given toward reaching this goal. I welcome ideas and contributions toward raising \$5,500 so that this important tool can be created. See below regarding how to contribute.

### **Invitation to contribute financially**

I invite your financial involvement with my work, be it through periodic onetime gifts or monthly pledges - however you feel led. As you may guess, monthly pledges are especially helpful, as they allow me to better plan and focus on my work. I would like to remind you that my budget is approved by my fiscal agents, Port au Prince-based Limye Lavi Foundation and Norristown-based Beyond Borders. At year's end, contributions that exceed my approved budget and have been designated for "The Experiment" or "John Engle" will go to fund other Beyond Borders programs.

I extend a special thanks to all of you who are making my work possible through your prayer, encouragement, and financial contributions. I invite you to visit my website — the link is below — to find additional information about The Experiment in Alternative Leadership.

Blessings,

John Engle

Tax-deductible contributions can be made out to Beyond Borders, with "John Engle" or "The Experiment" written in the memo area. Please send to: P.O. Box 2132, Norristown, PA 19404.