

...and the death rate went down!



When Peter and Patricia Gruits went to Haiti over 35 years ago, they were stunned by the poverty they witnessed. From that first trip came a life's ministry of service to *the sick and poor of Haiti*. They were dismayed by the many graphic signs of poverty and hopelessness. **Among the most shocking to them though was the fact that 65% of mothers and babies were dying in childbirth!** Patricia Gruits had her focal point!

Being pregnant in Haiti in 1978 was dangerous. *Without adequate food to sustain her pregnancy, a woman's body will harvest from her own body to provide for the growing baby, leaving her weak and unable to fight off infection or disease.* A developing baby's brain is almost entirely fat, so when a pregnant woman is malnourished, the baby at birth is frequently underdeveloped. *This often translates into lower intelligence and learning disabilities as well as various physical deformities.* Vision and hearing are often compromised. Bones and muscles can be deformed. Delivery of the baby was often a home birth with family members inadequately equipped to handle any problems. Hygiene was poor at best. Infection attacked even the strongest. **The weak rarely survived.**

Patricia Gruits opened clinic

after clinic in and around Port-au-Prince. Finally, she was able to purchase property in Bocozele and construct the hospital. With her own building came real change. Pre-natal care was established for the village. During these visits women were taught hygiene and new baby care, treated for illnesses and infections, given clean water from RHEMA wells... **and the death rate went down!** With all deliveries being performed at the hospital, mothers and their babies were attended by a Haitian physician and supported by a Haitian nursing staff. The area is clean, the bedding is clean, the instruments are sanitized... **and the death rate went down!** Mothers returned six weeks after delivery with their infants for post-natal visits. They were both checked for illnesses and infections. The babies were vaccinated against diseases which kill many babies and children in third world countries... **and the death rate went down!**

Recent years have brought new affiliations: **Convoy of Hope** and **Kids Against Hunger**. These alliances have allowed RHEMA to bring food into the region in numbers never thought possible. Food to effectively fight the damaging effects of malnutrition. Haiti needs strong and healthy children. It is these children who will grow up to be strong adults. Adults who

can learn. Adults who can hold a job. Adults who can go to a university and *be the doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs and leaders of tomorrow!*



Toni Unick, R.N.

RHEMA began in 1978 battling against a **65% mortality rate for mothers and babies**. Today, at the **J. Peter Gruits Hospital** in Bocozele, Haiti, **the number of mothers and their babies dying in childbirth is ZERO!!!**

While this accomplishment is impressive, it was a long and difficult journey. It will not be easier tomorrow, or next week or even next year. But our path is clear. It is the same path RHEMA has been on since the beginning... **to care for the sick and poor in Haiti.** It is a journey we could never have made without the fervent support of all the RHEMA partners. I would like to thank every one of you and wish you and your families the fullness of God's blessing in this New Year. ■

Toni M. Unick, R.N.

Toni Unick presented this information to our guests at RHEMA's 6th Annual Gala in December, 2013.