IHM Associate In Action

IHM Associate Dr. John C. Cavanaugh has a big job. He is chancellor of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE).

In that role, John works with 14 state universities and the nearly 117,000 students enrolled. John and PASSHE strive to ensure that a component of the university experience includes opportunities to reach out to others.

So following January’s devastating earthquake in Haiti, John and the campus presidents announced a PASSHE initiative of fundraising, service-learning and ongoing relief projects for the battered island nation.

"Many PASSHE students, faculty and staff have ties to Haiti," John says. "We have had faculty-led service missions to Haiti over the years, so we have some good connections we're using in order to direct aid where it's most needed."

PASSHE established a fund within its foundation and forwards money to relief agencies directly involved with disaster recovery.

"It's a team effort across all of our constituent groups -- faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends," John explains. "We pull together in all of our relief efforts."

PASSHE universities are also providing seminars and symposia about Haiti.

"It's important for people to understand how Haiti got where it is," notes John. "Its history -- of slavery, oppression under dictators and coups -- has contributed to it being the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere."

The seminars have proved inspiring to many. Student groups have held several types of fundraisers. Working with the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference, PASSHE universities took up a collection at men's and women's basketball games. Other groups are gathering books to restock Haiti's libraries.

"There's a tendency for us all to want to do something right now," John says. "But we want to be involved long-term. One of our university presidents is our contact person with the Red Cross, and we're taking our cues from them.

"We don't want to 'shotgun' our assistance, but rather, get our arms around the situation and target where we can do the most good. This is a marathon, not a sprint."
John got to know the IHM Sisters when he worked with Evelyn Craig, IHM, at a parish in Bowling Green, Ohio, in the 1980s and has been an IHM Associate for 18 years.

*John was recently selected to serve as vice chair of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities' Committee on Policies and Purposes.*

If you would like to partner with the IHM Sisters in support of their ministries, secure online giving is available.