

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE FOR MARCH 2010

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”
Mahatma Gandhi

On January 12, 2010 an earthquake of cataclysmic proportion struck Haiti and its people, rendering death, destruction and confusion on an unprecedented scale. All of us were moved by the images from the earthquake zone showing death, pain (both physical and emotional) and helplessness. Since the disaster, there has been an outpouring of support from around the world for the victims of this national disaster. Let us hope this good will may be sustained.

Haiti has long been the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. It has suffered with exploitative, corrupt, and inept leadership. Solutions for the problems facing the country will be difficult to formulate and even more difficult to implement. In its own way, the Dade County Bar Association is doing what we can to help.

Within 24 hours of the earthquake, the DCBA Board of Directors unanimously passed a Resolution seeking an immediate declaration of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for eligible nationals of the country of Haiti. We were the first voluntary bar association in the country to do so. This Resolution was promptly forwarded to all members of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Immigration, the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Immigration, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, and local members of the 111th U.S. Congress. You can view the Resolution on our website at www.dadecountybar.org. On the evening of January 15, 2010 Secretary Napolitano granted TPS to Haitian nationals. Since that time, our Immigration Law Committee has been particularly active. On Tuesday, January 26, we conducted a two hour seminar in conjunction with our Put Something Back Program to educate volunteer lawyers on assisting Haitian nationals seeking to apply for TPS. The seminar was held at the Lawson Thomas Courthouse Center. We were space limited to 90 participants with many more seeking to attend. The response to our request from our members for pro bono assistance has been heartening.

On Wednesday, February 10, 2010 at the McDonald Center in North Miami Beach the DCBA and the City of North Miami Beach conducted a Haitian American Relief Drive with free preparation of TPS applications and dispensing of other immigration law related advice. There was a huge turnout with many grateful attendees. A special thank you is in order for those involved and to our DCBA and Legal Aid/Put Something Back staff for assisting in making our efforts a success to help those in crisis. We will soon be sponsoring a live “webinar” on TPS and orphan adoption issues targeting potential volunteer lawyers nationwide. Please check our website for daily updates on our efforts to assist those most in need as a result of the disaster in Haiti and to find out how you may be able to lend your personal skills to be of service.

Speaking of service, as you may know, there is a Florida Bar Board of Governors race ongoing in the Eleventh Circuit. The four candidates seeking the open seat vacated by Florida Bar Governor Ervin A. Gonzalez are Michael B. Feiler, Leslie J. Lott, Roland Sanchez-Medina, Jr., and Jason M. Murray. We applaud all of the candidates for their commitment to serving the Bar. Two of the members running for the Board of Governors seat (Mr. Murray and Mr. Sanchez-Medina, Jr.) are active DCBA members. Given this, it is the policy of the DCBA to refrain from endorsing any candidate in the race. The same policy applies to the officers of the DCBA, including myself. However, I am personally acquainted with all of the candidates and would feel honored to have any one of them as my representative on the Board of Governors. We are truly fortunate to have such wonderful leaders in our midst who are willing to volunteer their time for the betterment of our profession. Please be sure to complete your paper ballot or vote online in the Board of Governors race.

On Friday, March 19 we will hold our second annual Professionalism, Ethics and Diversity Symposium. Participants will enjoy an elaborate continental breakfast and an outstanding program while garnering five (5) hours of CLE Professionalism/Ethics credits. The event will also include a sumptuous luncheon (okay...I'm puffing) featuring a keynote address by nationally renowned trial attorney, community leader, and philanthropist, Willie E. Gary. The program will run from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Luncheon attendance may be separate for those unable to commit to the full seminar.

Please join us to mingle with friends and colleagues. Doing so may lead you to a way to find yourself in the service of others.