

May 2006

Dominican Mission Report

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Dear Mission Partners:

The germ of an idea began to grow when Pastor Paul Munday heard Pastor Anastacia Bueno of the San Luis church preach at the 2005 Annual Conference. He heard in her sermon the excitement of her dynamic and resilient faith and wondered how the church he pastors in Frederick, Md., could become involved in the mission in the Dominican Republic. The Frederick church had previously sent members on mission trips in Latin America but had not connected with Brethren mission projects. Through a series of e-mails, visits, and phone calls, we considered plans together for how a group of Frederick members could visit the Dominican Republic and become familiar with the Brethren mission.

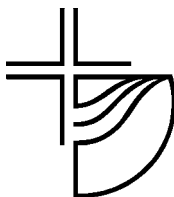


Irv Heishman, third from left, poses with the Frederick (Md.) Church of the Brethren group as they prepare to return home from their workcamp in March.

Caring for body and soul

In March a group of five persons, led by Pastor Bill Van Buskirk and Frederick member Dr. Julian Choe, visited the Dominican Republic for nine days. The experience was a rich blessing for the church here and was personally transformational for the group members. Their schedule included visits in two

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congregations—Fondo Negro and San Jose. In these communities, medical outreach efforts and children’s activities were offered.

The group traveled first to Fondo Negro, a small congregation located in the southwestern part of the country. The church members gave them a tour of their community including the beautiful Yaque River where many go to swim and bathe.

The group also stayed overnight in the homes of congregational members, a “stretch” for the group members, given that not

all homes have indoor plumbing or other comforts we are used to. While this was a challenging experience that pushed them beyond their “comfort zones,” it also deepened their understanding and appreciation of Dominican life and their friendships with Fondo Negro members. “It gave us a deep appreciation of their culture and lifestyle,” commented Pastor Bill Van Buskirk in a recent article in the Frederick, (Md.) News Post. On the days when the group offered children’s activities, they shared simple craft activities, like the making of a “salvation bracelet.” This activity facilitated a clear sharing of the Gospel message and yielded delightful interaction with the children. After sharing in a worship service and the overnight stay, the group headed back to the capital in preparation for spending several days with the San Jose congregation.



A girl wears her “salvation bracelet” made in a craft activity lead by the Frederick Church of the Brethren. She points to a paper showing the meaning of each color.



Dr. Julian Choe from the Frederick Church of the Brethren consults with a patient.

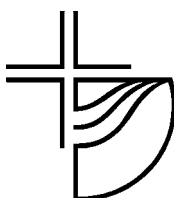
In contrast to Fondo Negro’s semi-desert, rural, southwest location, the San Jose church is located in the middle of a desperately poor community, surrounded by abandoned sugar cane fields northeast of the nation’s capital. This type of community is called a batey which means a community where Haitian immigrant workers are housed for work in the sugar cane industry. In San Jose the sugar industry has been abandoned, so residents eke out a living with limited, low-paying seasonal work in a near-by palm oil plantation. In San Jose, the Frederick church group

offered the same types of activities. In their planning for the trip, group members had felt called to respond not only to the physical needs of persons but also their spiritual needs. For this reason they planned a combination of activities designed to reach out to the whole person. As Pastor Van Buskirk put it: "The first day was physical saving. The next day was soul saving."

Even though several of the group members had participated in mission trips before, they were shaken by the desperate poverty in the San Jose community. Under the direction of Frederick member, Dr. Julian Choe, the group was prepared for their medical outreach. They had brought 100 pounds of medicine along, focusing mostly on treating dysentery and parasitic conditions and offering much-needed vitamins. While this treatment was effective in the short-term, the group realizes that these problems will continue to plague this community and others like it. Parasites can be treated, for example, but if the people are drinking contaminated water, they will soon have parasites again. For this reason, the Frederick church is interested in forming a longer-term relationship with the mission, specifically in the area of health. "We want to establish relationships with [places like these]," said Pastor Bill. "We don't just want to do a hit and run." (Quotes are from the Frederick News Post April 15, 2006 article.)

Dominican church leaders are currently giving consideration to the possibility of developing a preventative health ministry in cooperation with the General Board and congregations like the Frederick Church of the Brethren. The focus of this ministry would be to try to work at some long-term solutions. There have been and continue to be a number of obstacles to overcome in developing this new program. Thus we welcome your prayers for those working on plans for this new ministry. Let's dare to pray boldly that God will open the way for this ministry to become a reality in 2007.

Other activities from this spring include a successful series of meetings offering orientation and preparation for this year's Vacation Bible School. Each of the 24 Churches of the Brethren in the Dominican Republic is invited to consider holding VBS this summer. In preparation for the upcoming VBS, a committee of



representatives from all three regions of the church has been working to prepare for the week-long event. Some areas also plan a day camp in conjunction with VBS, bringing kids together from a number of Brethren churches for learning and fun. When mission groups of American Brethren come to volunteer, their help is especially welcomed for this all-day event. This summer, a group organized by the Pennsylvania-based Brethren World Mission and retired Brethren pastor Earl Ziegler, will volunteer their time helping with VBS in two of the churches in the capital region. We are very thankful for the faithful work of the Brethren World Mission in organizing financial donations for VBS. Through their efforts, Dominican churches are able to receive financial assistance to supplement their own preparations.



Anabel, Solidad, and Merkis teach teachers the theme song, 'Creciendo Como Jesus' (Growing Like Jesus) along with hand motions at a meeting to help prepare congregations for this summer's Vacation Bible School.

Faithful mission workers

We want to give thanks to God for our faithful staff of mission workers serving here in the Dominican Republic. Guillermo Encarnacion is our director of theological education. In April, he guided the pastors through a study of the Annual Conference paper on church structure which was recently translated into Spanish. He has invited Bethany Seminary professor Dan Ulrich to come in November to lead a Bible Study on Matthew 18, looking at the biblical foundation for spiritual restoration of persons and reconciliation. In preparation for this, Guillermo and his wife Gladys are translating portions of the Brethren Press book "Caring Like Jesus: the Matthew 18 Project," written by Dan Ulrich and Janice Fairchild. It has also been a joy for us to work with Guillermo and Gladys in translating Galen Hackman's book, "The History of the Brethren." This was originally written to be used in Nigeria in their Theological Education by Extension program. Brethren students here in the Dominican Republic will be studying this book in 2007. Guillermo (who was born and converted to Christ in the Dominican Republic) now lives with his wife in Lancaster, Pa. He travels to the Dominican Republic four times a year to lead the theological conferences. Two mentors guide the pastors through Bible studies between Guillermo's visits.

Beth Gunzel, York Center (Ill.) Church of the Brethren, came to the Dominican Republic to assume the responsibility for the Community Economic Development program, sponsored by the Global Food Crisis Fund. This program is providing micro-credit to about 500 participants in seventeen of our church communities. Beth had just completed a master's degree in International Economic Development prior to her arrival. She is building on the pioneering work of former mission workers Jeff and Peggy Boshart to develop the program's strength. This program provides economic assistance to desperately poor individuals and families in a way which enables them to increase their family income while also developing their own business and leadership skills. We give our thanks to God, to Beth, to strong Dominican volunteer leaders, to the Global Food Crisis Fund, and to those many contributors who make this vital ministry possible.

Our BVSer, Robert Raker, from the Greencastle (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, will be completing his two year term of service in September. Rob has been teaching English as a Second Language classes, focusing on the more advanced students. His work involves a lot of travel as he heads out daily to congregations two to three hours away to work with his students. In May, students from his class in Tabara Abajo will graduate and the accomplishment of these students will be recognized during an evening worship service. Rob has also been preaching on a regular basis which is good practice for his future plans. He hopes to begin seminary study upon his return home in preparation for pastoral ministry. We also give thanks to Renee Reyes who is serving as teacher/coordinator for the English program. Among our various responsibilities as mission coordinators, we have been helping the national church leaders work through a number of contentious issues. It has been a long and arduous process but we are thankful for God's sustaining grace. We are seeing signs of significant breakthroughs which we trust will be used by the Spirit to provide deepened maturity, spiritual and numerical growth, and clarified vision for this young and vibrant church. We are eternally grateful for the sustaining and renewing power we receive from God through your prayers.

With Appreciation for your Support and Prayers,
Mission Coordinators, Nancy and Irvin Heishman, and Timothy and Jennifer

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