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Dominican Mission Report

Nancy and Irvin Heishman
Mission Coordinators, Dominican Republic
c/o Agape Flights, Inc. DMG 14671
7990 15th Street E
Sarasota, Florida 34243

"I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O Lord. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly." (Psalms 40:9-11)

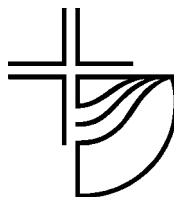
Dear Mission Partners:

The two Haitian-Dominican pastors were locked in a bitter conflict. As part of our work as mission coordinators, we arranged two meetings designed to try and work at reconciliation between them. We watched with surprise and awe as the Holy Spirit took over the process and blessed us all with a miraculous restoration of their relationship.

This brought new meaning to the verses quoted above which were read during a daily devotional time. Surely, we should never be shy about extolling the praises of such a wonderful God whose greatness and goodness breaks forth for those with eyes to see! When we find ourselves in the middle of a miracle of transformation and liberation from hopeless discouragement, we realize that this good news is simply too good to keep to ourselves. We must give praise and testimony to God!

Here is the story behind the miracle, shared with the permission of those involved: These two pastors, now currently serving as Moderator and Moderator-elect of the Brethren mission in the Dominican Republic, have had a long-standing bitter conflict. Because of their new positions of leadership, the mistrust and hurt between them was threatening to bring division into the heart of the mission itself. There was fear of an extremely tense and trying year

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ahead. We arranged a meeting with the two pastors and two observers: the president of the denomination, and another pastor seeking to be supportive.

We sat around our coffee table graced with a beautiful orchid which Irv had given to Nancy as a birthday gift. At one point, the petals on the orchid began flying in all directions as the two expressed with their hands (and voices) the intensity of their frustration and anger. They were so engaged in their feelings they didn't seem to notice the punishment the orchid was taking. For four hours we tried to keep them listening actively to one another as they hashed out their anger and bitterness. Exhausted and with little hope, we adjourned and scheduled a second meeting a week later.

Unknown to those of us gathered around the orchid, there was a group of women who had felt called by God to gather in fasting and prayer for the healing of this relationship. Unknown to them, the reconciliation meeting described above was taking place during their time of prayer. The pastors returned home heavy in spirit from the weight of wrongs and from the profound hurt between them. Imagine the surprise of the pastor who found these women gathered for prayer in his home! He joined them in the prayer and fasting through the rest of the day and throughout following night. The next day, there was a moment of divine grace in which the women felt the Spirit declaring that "even this day" the conflict would be ended, "the day of reconciliation" had finally come. That very day, the two pastors got together. Somehow, as the one shared about the praying women with the other, the cloud of resentments between them was lifted and joy broke forth. The following week, these two completely transformed men met with us. They were freely confessing their wrongs to one another, joking and rejoicing, and giving thanks for the wonderful thing God had done for them.

We don't know why in some conflicts this gift of the Spirit is held back for a time, but what a powerful encouragement it was to us to see what God can do and what God wants to do among us. How rich it is when people welcome the signs of the Kingdom of God into their lives and experience the health, shalom, and the deep down satisfaction of God's forgiveness and grace.

Other mission news:

—At this time, preparations are being made for Vacation Bible School to be held in all of the 22 churches and official preaching points of the Conferencia from July 23 to 28. Jubilee Sunday School materials translated into Spanish are being adapted for use in the VBS. These easily-affordable materials will continue to reinforce Anabaptist teachings in the churches while at the same time serving as a vehicle for introducing children to Jesus Christ and deepening the faith of current church participants. Last year's total of children was over 3100 - What could God have in mind this year? Many thanks to those who generously donated funds to help support this year's VBS.

–Thanks to the Emergency Disaster Fund and the Southern Pennsylvania District volunteers, a shipment of 100 cases of canned chicken is being delivered to the Dominican Brethren Churches (and even more is being sent to flood damaged regions in Haiti). The Dominican churches will divide the quantity equally among the churches, for distribution among the neediest and poorest in their churches and communities. This gift is especially appreciated in the Dominican churches of Haitian immigrants who live in "bateys," privately-owned or

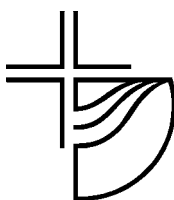


Pastor Cristina Lamu, Beth Gunzel, General Secretary Stan Noffsinger, Nancy Heishman and Annual Conference Moderator Jim Hardenbrook visit the Sabana Torso congregation's new land.

government-owned sugar cane plantations. The residents of these communities have no access to any land of their own and many are not allowed to plant or raise anything where they live. Their lives are severe and so this shipment of meat is a real blessing for them.

–A balance to this kind of short-term emergency aid is the long-term development work being done by Beth Gunzel, staff for community economic development. Beth is currently working in 17 church communities with 493 participants who are managing small economic loans. A total of \$101,875 is currently invested in these micro-loans. The Global Food Crisis Fund is supporting this project, giving persons the possibility of alleviating their poverty and the hope of improving their lives. Beth is assisted by an excellent committee of church representatives and they are currently exploring the idea of incorporation as a non-governmental organization.

–Five pastors currently participating in the Vital Pastors Cohort Group and sponsored by a Lily Foundation grant recently visited the Dominican Republic. These Southern Ohio pastors spent the majority of their time learning to know



the Mendoza and Los Toros congregations. The goal for their time was to learn how leadership development is done in these churches. Since both Mendoza and Los Toros have outstanding records of leadership development, the experience was rewarding and joyous. With a 3-day home stay in the rural Los Toros community, relationships were developed which helped the pastors to learn how Dominican Brethren cultivate the gifts of persons and involve them intentionally in leadership experiences from a youthful age. The pastors took home many new ideas and the Dominicans enjoyed the challenging questions, genuine interest, and appreciation of the Americans.

—In our role as coordinators, we assisted Guillermo Encarnacion, coordinator of the theological education program, in teaching a one-day workshop entitled "An Integrated Stewardship." The new cycle of students numbers near 50 and specializes in not only training pastors but developing the gifts of lay leadership, equipping them for their roles as active church leaders and evangelists.

—The Brethren mission in the Dominican Republic passed through a time of change this spring as the decision was made to close the Brethren Mission House located in Azua. The house served the churches for some time as a base for English-as-a-Second-Language teachers. Other models for involving short-term volunteers and groups may be utilized as needed in the future. At the same time the four classes currently being taught by volunteer Rob Raker and former teacher, Jewel Sheeler Reyes, are continuing. Many thanks go to Ron and Laura Brinton and family for their term of service as house parents who returned home in June.

—We recently had the enjoyable experience of preaching at two churches which are interested in the possibility of affiliating with the Church of the Brethren. One, located in Rancheria, is situated in a remote and beautiful rural area in the southwestern part of the country near the Caribbean Sea. The "La Vida Renovada" congregation, on the other hand, is a middle-class new church in the capital of Santo Domingo. Rancheria is small with about 45 members, served by a strong lay team of leaders. La Vida Renovada numbers more than 80 and is pastored by a professional accountant who, assisted by his wife, gives his free time to the ministry. Rancheria is a poor rural community blessed, however, with a source of clean, fresh drinking water and a population of goats that we guessed out-numbered the residents! La Vida Renovada folks are worshipping in a 2nd-floor apartment space overflowing with children, carefully organized into three classes as well as a discipleship class for those preparing for baptism. Both congregations welcomed our introduction to the unique way in which Brethren approach scripture study. We gave each congregation Moderator Jim Hardenbrook's challenge to read through the gospels in order to "soak in" the teachings of Jesus.

–Our children have had a good year in school and we recently rejoiced with this in their end-of-the-year accomplishments. Jenny received a Fine Arts Award at her school, recognizing her outstanding work through her art elective. Tim was recognized by his Spanish teacher for his excellence and work in Spanish language acquisition. We rejoice at their developing gifts and abilities.

Prayer concerns:

As you remember the mission in the Dominican Republic, we would be glad for your prayers for the following concerns:

–For our family during our 7-week furlough in the US and then as we resume our life and work here in the DR on August 15;

–Mission staff members Beth Gunzel and Rob Raker as they continue their duties throughout the summer;

–The Brinton family as they transition to life back in the States;

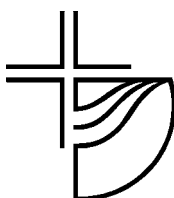
–The Dominican Board-appointed committee which is exploring ideas for helping congregations to more adequately provide for their pastors' needs;

–The Sabana Torsa congregation which has recently acquired land for a building and is in the process of raising its part of the needed funds to build its building;

–Rural congregations, some of which are struggling to reach out to their communities which are being diminished by the exodus of young people to the cities;

–The Viajama congregation in a time of pastoral transition as they contemplate the challenge of ministering to a growing population of Haitian immigrants in their rural community;

–Several congregations which are growing to the point of needing additional worship space. Pray that they would work diligently to discern God's vision for



their future and their part in working toward developing needed resources in partnership with the American church support.

–The people of the island of Hispaniola (which includes both the Dominican Republic and Haiti) during what promises to be a very active hurricane season and the people of Haiti during the current political unrest. Pray for God’s mercy and providence.

In closing, in recent conversations with Dominican church leaders regarding their philosophy and practice of leadership development, we are impressed by their clear focus and commitment to the truth of these words of Jesus, delivered during the Sermon on the Mount:

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14-16)

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