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# Solar Oven Partners UMC

Dakotas Conference Mission Newsletter for SOP UMC

## Scratching the Surface of Need

On Dec. 6, 2017, when a plane from Miami touched down on the tarmac at the Santo Domingo airport, eight members of a Solar Oven Partners (SOP) United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (VIM) team hit the ground running. After a two-day weather and mechanical flight delay, the team was committed to make up for lost time.

And make up for it they did. Working in partnership with their Dominican counterparts, the three men and five women hailing from Minnesota and North and South Dakota took off immediately for the southwest portion of the country. Their goal: to introduce solar cooking to the communities of Uvilla, Tamayo and Neyba.

"These people so badly wanted to learn and be involved," explains Paul Hilgedick, a Huron, SD, retired carpenter making his first SOP mission trip. "The outstanding part was the enthusiastic people coming to learn—not only children and women but adult men, as well. That's something I hadn't seen on other mission trips I've made."

While that eagerness to learn is typical in all solar oven seminars, what happened here was extraordinary. After having distributed a total of 25 ovens between Uvilla and Tamayo, the group departed for Neyba, where they distributed 15 more ovens. Before their return to Santo Domingo, the team received word that more people in Tamayo who had heard about the seminar were asking for another training session. "Before we left the country," explains SOP Director Marj Evans-de-Carpio, "there were already 17 people petitioning for a return trip by SOP's in-country Director Erasme Figaro. And after we left, he had a similar response in Neyba."

In fact, in less than one month after the VIM team's departure from the Dominican Republic, Erasme and his team had already conducted second seminars in both Tamayo and Neyba, distributing 38 more ovens. And a third request from Neyba is on hold until Erasme can return to follow up with those who

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SOP's UMOVIM team and Dominican partners from left to right, bottom row: Gordon Graner, Mario De Oleo, Rita & Paul Hilgedick, middle : pastor Joy Tracy, Back row: Gene Bethke, Harris Bailey, Gertudys Garcia, Wanda Bethke, Lisa Ivers, Pastor Elsa, SOP Director Marj Evans-de-Carpio, Jairol Puente and In-Country Director Pastor Erasme Figaro. Not pictured: Ardell Graner.



**The Advance**  
Advancing hope in Christ's name

**DONATE an OVEN for \$150**

- Dakotas Advance #637...Checks to: Solar Ovens / PO Box 460 / Mitchell, SD 57301-0460
- UMCOR Advance #418812...Online Giving Link <https://www.umcor.org/UMCOR/Donate/Donation-Form?type=1002&project=418812>

\*Check out web site: [solarovenpartnersumc.org](http://solarovenpartnersumc.org)  
\*Find/Like us on Facebook: **Solar Oven Partners**

have already received an oven—answering questions they may have after cooking with their ovens.

“I look at it like this,” says Paul. “We distributed 40 ovens, but we didn’t even scratch the surface. And yet, the lives we touched we touched in a very meaningful way.” Meaningful, it appears, in profound ways.



*Left: Team members work with some of the younger seminar participants to assemble ovens.*



*Above: Team members and seminar participants busy in the “kitchen.”*

## Word of Solar Cooking Seminar Spreads Fast

The SOP VIM team was finishing up its seminar at Neyba when they received a phone call from an excited Elsa, the pastor in Tamayo who had helped organize a solar oven seminar there. She wanted to share that the day after the SOP team had distributed ovens in Tamayo, people were bringing food to her home, showing off what they had already cooked in their brand-new ovens.

Word about the miracle of solar cooking was getting out, and it seemed there was no stopping the enthusiasm. That excitement is what drove the requests from others for an additional seminar.

In response, In-Country Director Erasme Figaro returned to Tamayo in January, accompanied by Ardell and Gordon Graner, United Methodist missionaries, and SOP partners in the Dominican Republic to conduct a second seminar. Ardell shared the positive response they received during that visit in their blog (<https://granerfamily.org/>)

where they recount their mission experiences. It tells the story best:

“The second day of the demonstration, we got to cook with ladies who have become familiar with what the ovens can do, confident even... We could tell they were soaking up as much as they could and asking lots of questions in order to work with the ovens they would receive.

“The day prior... we went to visit folks who received ovens when we were first there in December. Jairol, Pastor Elsa’s husband... took us to visit six different family homes... It was so humbling to be received in their homes and hear about their experiences with their ovens. At one point I had to laugh hearing Jairol tell about how one person after another [had] brought their solar-oven-cooked food to share with them. They ‘oohed’ and ‘aaahed’ at the ginger cookies Jaciline baked. Migilin showed off her fluffy rice, and one day, as

Jairol was walking by Abuela Jovani’s house he yelled in, ‘The chicken on your roof sure smells good!’

“As we finished our family visits, we arrived at Jairol’s gate. Elsa came out of the house to meet us. Jairol stopped and said very seriously, ‘Now you have to hear about *our* cooking.’ We burst out laughing. He then turned to Elsa and said, ‘Tell them!’ Elsa proceeded to tell us everything Jairol had cooked in the past three weeks in their new oven. May God have the glory!”



*Back by popular demand, Pastor Erasme Figaro and Gertudys Garcia teach a second cadre of solar cooking students in Tamayo the techniques of cooking using only the light of the sun for free, clean fuel.*

## Thank you, Generous Supporters

SOP partners continue to support this ministry with their prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. At no time is financial giving more prevalent than during the seasons of Advent and Christmas—beginning on Nov. 28, 2017, with UMC#GivingTuesday.

SOP was blessed to be the recipient of \$9,535 during this annual one-day event when people from across the globe go online to donate to The Advance mission projects of the United Methodist Church. In addition, many SOP supporters also choose to give or receive an alternative gift instead of—or in addition to—buying material “stuff” for Christmas. At last count, alternative gift giving totaled \$30,000, with more expected to come as alternative gifts are processed through the Dakotas Conference office. In total, seasonal giving is expected to top \$40,000. Our supporters truly are generous! Thank you.



# SOP Mission Trip Updates

On Mar. 2, 2018, the next Solar Oven Partners UMVIM team will depart for the Dominican Republic to continue to share the ministry of solar cooking. They will return on Mar. 12. The team, said SOP Director Marj Evans-de-Carpio, is full, with 12 members. There was even a waiting list in case an existing team member was unable to go. Scheduled over spring break, Marj says SOP is also celebrating the fact that four college students are among the 12.

The mission trip to Sierra Leone originally planned for April 2018 is postponed until the fall. The April date was selected to avoid elections in the West African

country, but would have pushed seminars close to the rainy season. Early inquiry about joining a UMVIM team to Sierra Leone is encouraged, but SOP Director Marj Evans-de-Carpio invites anyone who would like additional information to feel free to contact her for more information. Call her at 605-692-3391 (office) 612-226-6556 (cell), or e-mail her at [sopdir@swiftel.net](mailto:sopdir@swiftel.net), to discuss vaccination and passport requirements as well as costs and possible scholarships.

## Oven Assembly Workshop Moves to Raymond

Raymond, SD, (pop. 50) is the new home to Solar Oven Partners' oven assembly workshop. Here, 10 miles west of Clark, SD, volunteers will cut foam insulation, package lids and fasteners, assemble water pasteurization indicators (WAPI), and load shipping containers for their destination to places like the Dominican Republic and Sierra Leone.



*Historic building in Raymond that now houses the SOP workshop.*

The SOP Workshop-South moved to Raymond after being located for nearly 18 years on SOP founder Rick Jost's and his wife Lorna's property south of Volga. Following his retirement as SOP director in early 2017, and after volunteering to continue managing the workshop for a time, Rick decided to fully retire toward the end of the year.

SOP Board of Directors' President Gene Bethke and his wife Wanda stepped up to offer space for the workshop in a former mercantile/bank building in Raymond that they had purchased three years earlier. With space in the two-story building to house volunteers, plus room for work and storage, its location just north of US 212 offered easy access for the Dakotas.

On the morning of Jan. 16, 2018, Jobbers Movers arrived at the Volga workshop. By 6:30 p.m., the 90-mile move was complete with assistance from Rick and Lorna, SOP Director Marj Evans-de-Carpio, three members of the SOP board of directors, and additional volunteers.

The workshop space offers volunteer teams lodging with a mission trip flavor, with sleeping space for 12-15 people, a full kitchen, two restrooms and a shower. Gene says, "It's not a four-star resort condo, but you'll probably find it as comfortable as the little motel in Clark."

Board of directors' member Karen Workman celebrated the new workshop location that may bring Volunteers in Mission not only from the Dakotas but also from SOP supporters across the region and beyond.

Marj agrees that the move opens a new chapter in the 18-year history of SOP. She adds that SOP supporters are also thankful for Rick and Lorna's long-time commitment to the workshop. "In hosting the Volga shop, Rick went above and beyond his duties as SOP director," she says. "He opened his property and gave countless hours of his time. And he played a major role in developing and constantly refining the product that is now our solar oven. The volunteers learned and were inspired by the solar oven mission through Rick's seemingly infinite knowledge and, experientially, through the solar baked goods that Lorna would often prepare for the teams."

Interested in continuing that legacy? Consider volunteering at either of the SOP workshops. To schedule at the Raymond workshop call Gene Bethke at 605-233-0168. To schedule at the Zeeland workshop call Dave Silbernagel at 701-391-9468 or 701-425-1382.



*Settling in: Cooking pots and other items unloaded in Raymond had to be carried to their place in their new home. Pictured: Rev. Phil Lint, Wanda Bethke and Director Marj Evans-de-Carpio.*



*Ready to go: Components brought to Raymond will be boxed with other parts for shipment..*

## **SOLAR OVEN PARTNERS UMC**

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# **Oven-a-Month Partner: Montrose UMC**

Big things often come in small packages. That's why it shouldn't be surprising that some of the most ardent supporters of Solar Oven Partners are small-congregation churches like Montrose United Methodist Church in Montrose, SD.

One of the SOP's early Oven-a-Month Partners (\$1,800 or more annually), this southeast South Dakota church's tie to the solar oven ministry goes way back. "I can't hardly remember this church *not* being involved with Solar Oven Partners," says Bonnie Smith, long-time member and past Mission and Outreach Committee chair. "We hosted Rick and Lorna Jost in our old church basement back when Solar Oven Partners was just getting started," recalls Bonnie. "That evening one young man, a friend of our church, was so impressed that he wrote out a check

for \$100 that night."

Over the years, Montrose UMC has partnered with SOP in a variety of ways: monetary donations, collecting measuring cups and spoons, sewing potholders, sending volunteers to the Volga workshop or on mission trips to Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Sierra Leone.

When the concept of becoming an Oven-a-Month Partner first surfaced, Bonnie said the church jumped at the chance. "We thought, 'this is a goal we can work for. Let's challenge ourselves,'" says Bonnie. And challenge they did. The first major fundraiser, a Penny War between men and women of the church and planned by the youth, was a major success. "Our goal was to raise enough to support an oven a month for a year," Bonnie explains. "We ended up with enough money to give an oven a month for 18 months!"

Montrose Pastor Nancy Manning says missions is part of the church's DNA. "It is the very makeup of this congregation," she says. "They're grounded in sharing their gifts, whether it's monetarily or in terms of service. And as new people come into this family of Montrose Methodists, they begin to understand the importance of missions as well."



*Montrose UMC; longtime SOP supporter.*