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# Solar Oven Partners UMC

Dakotas Conference Mission Newsletter for SOP UMC

## Like God's Abundant Sunshine, SOP Opportunities Abound!

God is good. Two years ago, when a door to our long-time work in Haiti closed, we prayed that new doors would be opened to the life-changing ministry of Solar Oven Partners (SOP) UMC. In response, God has opened not one, not two, but *three* doors. We are excited to share with you the opportunities and possibilities before us as we reach out in new ways with the gift of solar cooking to the Dominican Republic, Sierra Leone, and the Navajo people of Arizona.

### Door #1: The Dominican Republic

In the fall of 2014, United Methodist Missionaries Gordon and Ardell Graner visited the SOP's Volga workshop during their itineration in the States. The Graners were intrigued with the concept of SOP, wondering if it might be a viable program in the Dominican Republic (DR), where they were serving.

Turn the clock ahead three years. This September 26, the Graners visited that same workshop. Only this time, during an open house, they could share with SOP supporters how the solar oven ministry, in partnership with the Iglesia Evangelica Dominicana (IED) church, is spreading the miracle of solar cooking across this Caribbean nation—not only touching the lives of Dominicans in need, but also people of Haitian descent.

That was especially evident this past July as an SOP United Methodist Volunteer-in-Mission (UMVIM) team—the sixth since August 2015—worked with their Dominican counterparts to distribute 109 ovens at three different sites, including a refugee community of persons of Haitian descent, born in the Dominican Republic and without a home in either country. Called K-2, the refugee community lives in the southwest corner of the Do-



*SOP's UMVIM team and Dominican partners from left to right: Pastor Erasme, Ardell Graner, Gertrudis, Chris Davis, Pastor Maria, Zona Hairgrove, Pastor Scott McKirdy, SOP Director Marj Evans-de-Carpio, Rita Robison, Gloria and Ron Borgman, and Mario. Not pictured: Gordon 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**

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## Door #1: The Dominican Republic (cont.)

minican Republic, along its border with Haiti.

"The seminar reached refugees of Haitian ancestry who had been living in the Dominican Republic, many of whom have been deported, having neither Dominican nor Haitian documents," explains SOP Director Marj Evans-de-Carpio. "They are a people without a country, and are among the most needy."

About 100 K-2 residents braved the intense heat and humidity during each of the two-day outdoor sessions. Held on the Dominican side of the border, the seminar gave a chance to help assemble the ovens, learn about solar cooking, cook their favorite foods, and taste the results. Seventy refugee families carried their new ovens home.

Also exciting is what's happening when UMVIM teams are not in the DR. In March 2017, the Dominican team, led by in-country SOP Director Erasme Figaro, presented seminars in three different communities in the province of Samaná, reaching at least 200 people with the message of solar cooking, and distributing 96 ovens.

Pastor Erasme followed up in April by going back to visit with oven recipients to see how much the ovens are being used and answer any questions the people have. And the message of solar cooking is spreading. "We were contacted by [a pastor] at Paraíso, requesting a second visit because more than 50 people are requesting it," explains Erasme. That presentation was originally scheduled for September 8, but had to be postponed twice due to hurricanes Irma and Maria. Two additional presentations are planned prior to the December UMVIM trip.



*A woman in K2, a refugee community near the Dominican/Haitian border, carries her oven home.*

## Door #2: Sierra Leone

Who could have imagined three years ago that one day a shipping container of solar ovens would be on its way to Africa? We're excited to announce that on September 22, a container loaded with 665 solar ovens and accompanying pots departed from the SOP's Volga workshop, headed for the West African nation of Sierra Leone. The shipment is in response to a partnership forged between SOP and the Sierra Leone Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. That partnership was facilitated by Roger and Melanie Reiners, members of Milbank Central United Methodist Church who are very involved with the operation of the Lowell and Ruth Gess UMC Eye Hospital in Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital.

An SOP exploratory team visited Sierra Leone this past March, and the reception to the team's demonstrations and training sessions was very positive. In response, SOP received a formal invitation from Sierra Leone's United Methodist Bishop John Yambasu to help start an in-country program.

The ovens traveling across

the Atlantic should arrive approximately November 10. "They will be stored and waiting," says Marj, "for a SOP mission team expected to travel to Sierra Leone during the second half of April 2018—timed to coincide both with the country's dry season and to avoid any possible political unrest during national elections scheduled in March and early April."

Knowing solar ovens are on their way to Sierra Leone is especially meaningful following the tragic mudslide in Freetown this summer.



*Members of the SDSU Jackrabbits football team with Assistant Coach Marc Davis along with Rick Jost and Eladio Carpio-de-Evans (lower left), pose in front of a loaded shipping container headed for Sierra Leone. Team members filled the container with 665 ovens and accessories.*

More than 1,000 people were killed, and many others injured and/or displaced.

"I don't expect that the mudslide will affect our work there," explains Marj. She says it does illustrate, however, the importance of preventing deforestation—an important goal of Solar Oven Partners. "One news article I read attributed the mudslide to tree removal for construction purposes," says Marj. "Whatever the purpose—whether for construction or making charcoal for cooking fuel—tree removal makes soil susceptible to mudslides, which can result in the tragic loss of life as well as the loss of property and degradation of the soil." It's just one of the reasons we're glad the door to Sierra Leone has been opened.

## Door #3: The Navajo People of Arizona

In early July, a six-person SOP team set off from South Dakota for Arizona with 20 solar ovens and accessories. Its mission: to lead an exploratory oven assembly and teaching session with 20 Navajo families at the invitation of FaithWorks—Flagstaff Area Christians in Mission.

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## Door #3: The Navajo (cont.)

Two separate paths brought SOP to this particular door. First, SOP board member Dave Silbernagel and his wife Renae winter in Arizona. Aware of that state's abundant year-round sunshine, Dave saw the potential for solar cooking among the Navajo people.

Following up on Dave's intuition, retired SOP Director Rick Jost contacted fellow United Methodist missionary Glen Allen. Glen is executive director of FaithWorks, an ecumenical organization that connects church groups with mission opportunities in Arizona and beyond. The idea of a pilot SOP trip took hold, and FaithWorks coordinated the trip through a connection with a Christian church on the reservation.



*Mother and daughter pose with Navajo Pastor Lola Bahe and her grandson before taking their new oven home.*

"Homes are very remote [on the reservation]," explains SOP Director Marj Evans-de-Carpio. "And many do not have utility services, or reliable transportation, making going out to purchase propane for cooking a problem, even if they had the money for the propane. Solar ovens were a very welcome idea."

Charlie Schnabel, veteran mission team member and long-time SOP volunteer,

says the enthusiasm of seminar participants within the United States was no different than anywhere else he's been with the ovens. "The excitement when the cooked foods are taken out of the ovens seems to be much the same whether we are in Haiti, the Dominican Republic or Arizona," claims Charlie. "The words may be different, but the smiles and emotions exhibited are the same. It seems to be a wonder to behold in their eyes."

Marj says the SOP Board of Directors, along with the Navajo people and their leaders, Pastors Dean and Lola Bahe, and the FaithWorks team, are in discussions about a future SOP program on the reservation. "It seems that this is the beginning of an on-going relationship," says Marj. "The pilot trip resulted in happy, enthused partners all-around."



*Arizona Team: SOP Director Marj Evans-de-Carpio, Charlie Schnabel of Brookings, Dave Silbernagel and Joshua Krumm of Zeeland, ND, and Lorna and Rick Jost of Volga.*

## A Michigan Commitment to SOP

Why would a church in Michigan, with no direct ties to the Dakotas Conference-based Solar Oven Partners, make an ongoing financial commitment to this ministry of solar cooking? The answer lies with a mission-focused church, the passion of one woman, and a desire to reverse deforestation and its tragic consequences for people living in third-world countries.

That mission-minded church is First United Methodist Church of Midland. The woman is Nancy Hannum, a retired Michigan nurse and member of the church's mission board.

The story begins in the 1990s, when Nancy's friend and then fellow church member Baz Cunningham asked her to travel to Haiti. Baz was on the board of directors of International Child Care (ICC), a Christian organization that focuses on health and wholeness for children and families in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

She said 'yes', and it was on that trip that Baz told her the story of George Reed, a Florida man who, during a similar mission trip, had seen the impact of deforestation on Haitian families. Committed to making a difference, he sold everything he had, moved to Haiti, bought land and began planting trees. Sadly, when George had to return to the United States, his land was taken over and the trees were cut down for charcoal. He was heartbroken.

"People needed charcoal to cook their food," says Nancy, who was touched by the story. "And so, when I saw your brochure I thought, 'That's it! That's the answer to purifying water and to cooking without charcoal.'" That brochure, she explains, prompted her to make a personal donation for 10 solar ovens during the #GivingTuesday event a few years ago—and her donation was matched. It was then that Nancy began receiving the SOP newsletter.

"I took that newsletter to the mission board, telling them the story of Haiti and George Reed and the charcoal," recalls Nancy. "I told them, 'SOP has everything necessary to fill the desperate need.'"

Her passionate and persuasive skills have had a very practical and wonderful result. Midland First has been an Oven-a-Month Partner (donating a minimum of \$1,800 annually) since 2015. And the church, she says, has added Solar Oven Partners as a separate line item on its missions' budget. "I want to make sure that the solar oven project fund continues," says Nancy, "whether or not I'm on the mission board."

At SOP, we thank God for churches like Midland First UMC, supporters like Nancy, and stories like George's that inspire people to care about the people we serve.

## **SOLAR OVEN PARTNERS UMC**

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## **Take the Next Step with Solar Oven Partners**

Chris Davis of Spearfish, SD, was part of this summer's team to the Dominican Republic. The experience was especially meaningful for Chris, who graduated from a Dominican high school in the mid-1970s while living there with her family for a year.

She says she was pleased to return for the first time as a United Methodist Volunteer-in-Mission (UMVIM). "I feel good about what we accomplished," says Chris. "We were successful in showing the people the variety of foods that the ovens can cook—meats, rice, beans, bread, cake—plus purifying water. Now I'm trying to determine my next step with Solar Ovens. I don't want to let this experience go. Please let me know how I can continue to be involved with this ministry."

Like Chris, are you looking to take the next step in changing people's lives through solar cooking? Following is a list of ways you can make a difference.

*Chris Davis joined the July 2017 mission team to the Dominican Republic.*



### **Join a mission team:**

**Dominican Republic**—March 2-12, 2018; **Sierra Leone**—mid-to-late April, 2018; **Navajo Reservation, Flagstaff, Arizona**—to be determined. To discuss these opportunities, or to put yourself on a waiting list for future trips, contact SOP Director Marj Evans-de-Carpio at 605-692-3391, [sopdir@swiftel.net](mailto:sopdir@swiftel.net).

### **Volunteer at SOP workshops:**

**Volga, SD, Workshop** (oven assembly), contact Rick Jost at 605-692-3391, [rjost@brookings.net](mailto:rjost@brookings.net); **Zeeland, ND, Workshop** (reflector production), contact Dave or Renae Silbernagel, 701-391-9468 or 701-425-1382, [silbernagel.dave@yahoo.com](mailto:silbernagel.dave@yahoo.com); **Raymond, SD** (bread pan production), contact Gene Bethke, 605-233-0168, [gbethke@itctel.com](mailto:gbethke@itctel.com).

### **Assist with oven accessories:**

Sew black baking cloths or pot holders, donate new sets of plastic measuring cups and spoons (make certain the measurements are embossed into the cups/spoons so they do not wear off). Contact Marj at 605-692-3391, [sopdir@swiftel.net](mailto:sopdir@swiftel.net).

### **Donate funds:**

With an expanding ministry, the need for solar ovens will grow. You can contribute in various ways: on-line at [www.solarovenpartnersumc.org](http://www.solarovenpartnersumc.org); through either The UMCOR Advance or the Dakotas Advance (see The Advance box on page one); through your United Methodist church; or send a check to Solar Oven Partners UMC, 910 4<sup>th</sup> St., Suite G, Brookings, SD 57006-2172. Consider specifying Solar Oven Partners as an alternative gift this Christmas! Watch for the 2017 Alternative Giving brochure coming soon.