



February 2017

Volume 18, Issue 1

Solar Oven Partners UMC

Dakotas Conference Mission Newsletter for SOP UMC

Marking Exciting Milestones

While Solar Oven Partners UMC (SOP) mission teams often return home with life-changing stories to tell, reports from this past December's mission trip to the Dominican Republic (DR) may have set a record for newsworthy tales. Here's why:

- *SOP and the Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana (IED) church signed a covenant agreement, including the naming of an in-country director to help guide the program in the Dominican Republic.*
- *SOP distributed its 10,000th solar oven in the ministry's 17-year history.*
- *During one of the cooking demonstrations, the team recorded the highest known temperature registered in an SOP oven—350 °F.*

These milestones (see accompanying photos and stories) took place while the eight-member United Methodist Volunteers-In-Mission team (UMVIM) was doing what our teams do best: sharing the love of Christ to people in need through the miracle of solar cooking.

The team traveled to Cabral, Fundación, Canoa and Vicente Noble—communities in the DR's poverty-stricken southwest region. They distributed 56 ovens during demonstrations and training. Another newsworthy event was the abundant sunshine after months of rainy weather.

God's sun at full power

"We were concerned that we would not have the needed sunshine for cooking," says Gordon Graner, Global Ministries missionary in the DR who, along with his wife and fellow

missionary Ardell, is helping to facilitate the SOP-IED partnership. Instead, according to co-team leaders and SOP board members



On its first full day of solar cooking and training, the December mission team handed out the 10,000th oven in SOP's 17 years of ministry. Mario, who serves as the mission team's driver and helps out during training sessions, has a big smile as he hands over the oven to a Dominican woman at Cabral.

Gene Bethke and Dave Silbernagel, God's sun was at full power. "We had fantastic cooking weather," says Gene. Members even carried

(continued on page 2)



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

*Find/Like us on Facebook: **Solar Oven Partners**

Marking Exciting Milestones (cont.)

ovens up to a rooftop one day to take full advantage of the sun.

The Dominican people responded. First-time SOP mission team member Darci Brown was amazed at the peoples' enthusiasm during the training and assembly sessions. "The women wanted to do all of the cooking, and when we were building the ovens everyone wanted to be right in there and involved, which was awesome."

Gene's wife Wanda, also a first-time team member, says she enjoyed seeing the reaction once the food was out of the oven and on their plates. "They would give us a

thumb's up or say something in Spanish that you could tell was positive," says Wanda, explaining that on one day the team ran out of food because so many people showed up to try out the solar oven-cooked fare.

People have really big hearts

"The opportunity to lead this team, build relationships and learn more about the Dominican people was great," says Dave. "These people have really big hearts." Gordon, who has now worked with the fifth SOP mission team in the Dominican Republic, would agree, adding that the hearts of mission team members have been large as well. He points

to the interaction of Gene Bethke with the children. "Gene was a particular favorite among the Dominican children," says Gordon. "He has a full grey beard and with a twinkle in his eye he hoisted many kids onto his broad shoulders and became a kind of Papa Noel/Santa."

It was just one example of the relationships built between mission team members and the people they serve. "Each team member is a gift to us and essential to the solar oven mission," says Gordon. "We are very grateful for all of their hard work, unique personalities and willingness to take the love of God to those who need it most."

SOP-IED Covenant Names Dominican Director

SOP board members Gene Bethke and Dave Silbernagel had a unique charge as they headed to the Dominican Republic late last year. Not only would it be their first time leading a mission team, but they were to meet with the Rev. Miguel Angel Cancú, the executive secretary (bishop) of the Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana (IED) church, and to finalize a covenant agreement to move the solar oven ministry forward in the island nation.

As part of that agreement, the Rev. Erasme Figura was named as national director of SOP-IED. "We have been moving in this direction for over a year, and it is very good

to finalize it," explains Global Ministries Missionary Gordon Graner. "Having a Dominican take the responsibility as in-country director is vital as we progress towards sustainability." The Rev.

especially those within the Dominican Evangelical Church," says Gordon. "He will enable the solar oven mission to become better suited to the Dominican family and culture. Understanding the



December 12, 2016: SOP board members Gene Bethke and Dave Silbernagel (seated at right) signed a covenant agreement with the Dominican Evangelical Church. Bishop Miguel Angel Cancú (head of table) and the Rev. Maria Bock join the signing. Looking on are December team members (L to R) Darci and son Zach Brown, Wanda Bethke, Dale Thorpe, Paula Morgan, and Wade Juracek.

Figura will work with the SOP-UMC director in the U.S. to reach Dominicans in need through the Solar Oven Partners ministry. "Erasme is a very capable person with a strong faith in God, professionally prepared, and has a great rapport with people,



Rev. Figura teaching with UMVIM team.

Dominican culture, political, economic, and social context is of extraordinary importance in planting this mission here." Erasme has also lived and studied in the United States, giving him an understanding of American culture as he works with UMVIM teams.

"This is an important step for SOP's future in the Dominican Republic," says Dave Silbernagel. "To have the IED church supporting this ministry in this way is huge."

A Youthful Impression

Zach Brown is a busy young man. A freshman at West Central High School in Hartford, SD, he's in a drum line, marches with his high school band, wrestles in the winter and runs track in the spring. He's a Boy Scout, FFA member and also works at a farm. He and his mom, Darci, have also volunteered at SOP's Volga workshop.

In the midst of those activities he and his mom decided to travel to the Dominican Republic as part of the SOP December mission team.

The Browns were introduced to Solar Oven Partners through their church, Montrose United Methodist, a financial supporter of SOP and home to others who have served as SOP mission team members. The church helped support the Brown's trip. Zach was also a recipient of a

youth scholarship given in memory of the late Pastor Bob Neff by his wife, Bonnie, both former SOP



Zach Brown and his mom, Darci, setting up and positioning ovens on a rooftop.

mission team members who wanted to encourage youth involvement in the program.

As part of the mission team, Zach helped assemble ovens at the various sites, working with Dominicans of all ages. With a limited grasp of Spanish, Zach says

he found a way to communicate. "There is a lot of pointing," says Zach. "I got along just fine showing them what to do and they'd follow." Zach was also the individual during the trip who witnessed the highest temperature—350 °F.—ever recorded in an SOP oven.

Zach is back home now, fully immersed in his busy schedule. He admits, though, that he was changed by the trip. "In the U.S. we don't have to worry about having clean water every day or having electricity," says Zach. "We just take stuff for granted. It's hard to come back and realize you have it so easy compared to them."

Zach is happy for the support from his church family and the Bob Neff Scholarship. "I know they all wanted me to make this trip and experience what it's like," says Zach. "Their help was a big deal."

Niedert Named to Board

Jay Niedert, Madison, SD, was recently named to the SOP Board of Directors. Jay has traveled to Haiti three times with SOP and has also worked at the Volga workshop.

Involved in commercial and residential property management in South Dakota, Nebraska and Iowa, Jay and his wife, Lois, parents of three grown children, are travel enthusiasts who first met on a bus during an overseas trip.



Jay says he enjoys learning about different cultures. He also admits that his first mission trip in 2006 was an eye opener. "SOP has worthy long-term goals of assisting people, and their focus on self-sufficiency attracts people to the project," says Jay. "In order to be an oven recipient you have to be invested in the project.

It's a win-win and I'm thrilled to be a part of it."

GivingTuesday: A Blessing

On November 29, 2016, generous spirits once again stepped up to celebrate the joy of giving by being a part of the UMC #GivingTuesday movement. Within a 24-hour period, supporters of Solar Oven Partners UMC went to the web site of The Advance, clicked the DONATE button and contributed a total of \$7,925.



"This is an excellent single-day response by donors moved to think critically and act compassionately by directing their gifts to those struggling with day-to-day hunger," says SOP Director Rick Jost. Thank you to all who participated to make the UMC #GivingTuesday a success.

SOLAR OVEN PARTNERS UMC

Solar Oven Partners UMC
928 4th Street, Ste 2
Brookings, SD 57006-2172

~ CONTACT US ~

Rick Jost, United Methodist Missionary
E-mail: rjost@brookings.net
Phone/Fax: 605-692-3391
Web: solarovenpartnersumc.org

Connie Smith, Newsletter Editor
Phone: 605-363-5097
E-mail: cmsmith@siouxvalley.net

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage PAID
Permit No. 33
Brookings, SD

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Advance Approval!

SOP received word this past December that the mission project's application seeking Advance status for the 2017-2020 Quadrennium has been approved. The Advance is the accountable, designated mission giving arm of The United Methodist Church that ensures 100 percent of each gift is used for its intended mission or ministry. It is required that all Advance projects submit an annual report, where the project outlines how funds were used for the past year and plans for the next year.

"We have approval to raise funds for the next four years, assuring our donors that 100% of their contributions given through The Advance directly serve 'the least of these' while 'Advancing hope in Christ's name,'" says SOP Director Rick Jost. "This is definitely something to celebrate!"

SOP has been a project of The Advance since 2005. The SOP Advance project number is 418812.



The Advance
Advancing hope in Christ's name

SOP-UMC Director Search

Over a year ago, the SOP Board of Directors appointed a task force assigned to search for a new SOP-UMC project director to replace Rick Jost when he retires in early 2017. ***See also SOP-IED director story on page 2.*** The Search Task Force and SOP's communication team, working in collaboration with Rev. Rebecca Trefz, Director of Ministries for the United Methodist Dakotas Conference, advertised this position widely.

In late fall 2016 and early January 2017, preliminary interviews with applicants were conducted. In the near future, in-person interviews will be held with selected candidates.

The SOP-UMC project director provides supervision, instruction, and leadership in all SOP operations, recruits and manages volunteers, leads United Methodist Volunteers-In-Mission teams overseas, and works to expand and sustain the donor base.

The Search Task Force and the SOP Board of Directors would ***appreciate your prayers*** as we move into this important phase of hiring.