

# A Mission of The United Methodist Church

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, went to the mines and the fields of England and Wales to share the Word with laborers right where they were. The Church of England, of which he was a priest, was, in his view, too much of a social club for people of high social status. His revitalization movement reached out to the poor. He published books on healthy habits and home remedies because he understood that the poor could not afford the services of a physician. A British man of the 1700s, he published his *“Thoughts Upon Slavery”* in which he exposed the unconscionable realities and denounced the practice of slavery.



The church building in Neyba, Dominican Rep.

Carrying on this legacy of ministry with the poor, and addressing the whole person: mind, body, soul and social context, Solar Oven Partners, working through the Volunteers in Mission model, shares solar ovens in places where historical and current social, political and economic forces have forced people to live with financial adversity, exposure to things detrimental to health and a ravaged natural environment.

## The Volunteer in Mission Model

The world-wide governing body of The United Methodist Church, called the General Conference, when gathered in 1976, established the Volunteer in Mission (VIM) model, and established services to organize and equip VIMs. There are certain principles to which VIM ministries adhere. Here are some of those principles and how Solar Oven Partners (SOP) practices them:



### Relationship over Task

We have ovens to assemble, cooking demonstrations to carry out, samples to pass out, dishes to wash, supplies to unload and load...We do get these things done, but are mindful to not get so busy or self-important that we neglect to relate to the people in our host community.



## **Partnership, Not Paternalism**

SOP VIMs bring the ovens and instruction on how to assemble and use them. But we also draw from our seminar participants. Once we share the assembly procedures and the cooking techniques, we work side-by-side with the students. And sometimes, a student will bless the whole group by teaching how to cook a special food. Or, a skilled carpenter who has come to the seminar will gently guide other students in the assembly process. The man in the photo to the right has a catering business and he taught our whole group how to make his specialty, onion bread. Our Spanish-speaking VIM is standing behind him and, with his permission, taking notes so that we can later attempt to re-produce his recipe and teach it throughout



## **Strengthen the Indigenous Church**

We partner with a regional church body who connects us to the individual churches and communities where we will hold our solar cooking seminars. It is important that the local and regional church leadership provide the seminar leadership for many reasons.

First, as short-term Volunteers in Mission, we know that we will spend a few days in a community, but when we leave the local church will remain. If people have questions about how to use their ovens, they can turn to our in-country partners for answers. The seminars also serve as a ministry of outreach to the unchurched.



Further, the local church is made up of people who know and understand the culture of the oven recipients in every sense from food, to social cues to emotional reactions. They are best equipped to lead in the context.

Finally, it is valuable for people in poverty to see their own people as knowledgeable, powerful, generous and gracious. It is also valuable for people from the US to depend on the leadership of people from economically and geo-politically less powerful nations. The subliminal messages that shape our expectations about who is capable of what need some reversal experiences. Isn't that what Jesus was all about?

## Ministries of Piety, Mercy and Justice

In keeping with our Methodist heritage, we engage in acts of piety, attending local church services, having group devotionals and private time for prayer, mediation and journaling. To the left is a photo of some of the youth at the church in Monte Cristi, the Dominican Republic, sharing a liturgical dance while Pastor Deisy looks on.



Also part of our Methodist heritage is engaging in ministries of mercy. For Wesley, this includes doing good works, such as feed-

ing the hungry and giving generously to the poor. SOP does this in a way that is self-perpetuating, like teaching to fish rather than giving a fish. The reduced need to purchase cooking fuel can save a family significant funds day after day, year after year. We provide the ovens with generous donations.

But the oven recipients contribute approximately 10% of the cost of the ovens. This assures that they have understood the value that the oven will add to their lives and that they will

care for it and provides pride of ownership. It also provides the funds for the indigenous church to follow-up and to bring this ministry to other communities when VIM teams are not present.



Finally, the collective form of ministries of mercy is acts that address root causes of poverty and injustice. Our VIM teams participate in education from a local expert who teaches us about the history, economy, political forces, etc. of the place where we serve.

### Cultural Training

Volunteers in Mission are taught some of the major spectra of cultural differences: direct or spiral communication; high or low power difference between leaders and followers; time valued as limited or expansive; direct or indirect communication; high or low context communication. These are concepts researched and developed by cultural anthropologists. By having an awareness of the ways that cultures differ, our groups are better equipped to not respond judgmentally to cultural difference and to use care not to unintentionally dominate relationships.