

## Putting Our Arms around a Dominican Community...A Week with Solid Rock

Martha and I spent February 28 through March 8 as a week-long work/vision visit to the area of San Juan de la Maguana, Dominican Republic as guests of Solid Rock International-ACPSI, and Second Presbyterian Church of Roanoke, VA. It is with eyes and hearts wide open that we return. We began with meeting David Rupp, father to our own Tyson Vaughn, in the Atlanta Airport to accompany us in air travel and in a faith journey as former Board leader of Solid Rock International, the stateside arm of a Dominican-U.S. program begun in the mid-1980's by Mennonite missionaries, Jim and Dorine Smith, and developed with the critical guidance of Dominicans Dr. Osvaldo Canario, Educator Jose Ramon Rodriguez, and Dr. Isaias Melo. It began with the directive of healing and strengthening the individual, then the family, and then the community. They found that malnutrition was a major obstruction to education, so that the infant/child feeding program became the bedrock program, upon which was built in 1995 atop the community garbage dump in a crime-ridden neighborhood of San Juan a Christian school which now educates not only pre-K through 12 and vocational instruction including adult ed., totaling 1300 students, with the finding that the likelihood of completing high school is 80% greater than in the public school system, and that the neighborhood has been transformed in the process. Four additional schools in San Juan, the mountain village of Cercado, and the capitol city of Santo Domingo have shared similar successes. Over 1000 students benefit directly from student financial sponsorships (\$30/mo.) by American families, and American classrooms are participants with these Dominican classrooms in the "Pen Pal Program ." A clean-water filtration system and distribution program has been developed by the partnership of the Dominicans with Second Pres. Church of Roanoke with First Pres. of Nashville. Spiritual growth has been fostered through VBS programs, the assistance of local ministers of various local churches (7 pastors affiliated with the Dominican ACPSI organization, the local church leadership education programs, and the boots-on-the-ground mission staff who run the Clinica Cristiana de Salud Integral, a "home base" from which also are run mobile barrio medical clinics (radius of greater than an hour), a pharmacy, two operating rooms, a prosthetics and a dental clinic, an community health education program, a 55-bed guesthouse for visiting church, health care, construction, and community assistance groups (adults and youth) from the States, a dining facility, and the staging site for the bold Revolution project which broke ground in the fall of 2014 for the construction of a \$3 million clinic/hospital/emergency services center which as in all other Solid Rock endeavors includes the cooperative planning, building, and management by Dominicans and Americans. Two million dollars have been raised thus far. Completion is slated for 2-3 years hence. Ken Potter, a Second Pres., Roanoke, member and home remodeler, has moved down to DR to assist in leading construction, truly a testimony to his own transformation. The SRI director, Joe Zimmerman, also our host for the week, and his wife, Shannon, are residents of Indianapolis.

So how was our visit? It was in a (hyphenated) word, "earth-shaking." Yes, it was close enough to Haiti to register strong tremors during the earthquake of several years ago. However, I am referring to the motherly "time to wake-up"-type shaking one may recall from childhood. Martha and I are now wide awake to new mission possibilities for Second Presbyterian church and for our multi-faith community of Indianapolis. Whether a first-time or veteran mission participant there is a transformative experience awaiting you.

Here was our week in the proverbial nutshell: Saturday we arrived in the capitol city, of Santo Domingo, and rendezvoused at the airport with an SRI mission staffer. I might add that all the staff, including Dan and Kari the guesthouse hosts, Laura the social worker-nutrition-educational program administrator, Nicole the nurse extraordinaire, Jeff and Kamanda the VBS and you-name-it organizers, and Joe and Shannon the SRI director team are in their 20's and 30's, are a relatively recent acquisition of mission-oriented young adults by a wise, and future-facing, gracefully graying SRI Board. We met up with Second Church (25 or so) participants at a lovely hotel, the next morning motored by bus 3-1/2 hrs. to the CCSI Guesthouse (capacity 55, mainly doubles) in San Juan, in view of the mountains. I enjoyed rapid friendship with head pastor of Second, George Anderson. We oriented with staff Sunday afternoon. Meals were wonderfully prepared Dominican dishes throughout the week. Staff Dominican translators were plentiful; most in our group did not speak Spanish. I must add that our Roanoke organizer emeritus, Bob Williams, was spectacularly helpful before, during, and even now after our week. Monday, Bruce Long, a Roanoke general surgeon, and I met many and operated several patients. Bruce provided the anesthesiologist, nurse anesthetist, and scrub nurses from Roanoke. Half the total Roanoke team were from Second Pres., the remainder from the community-at-large; ages ranged from 18 to 80 years. Martha participated Monday, and with me again on Tuesday in the barrio medical clinic, and yes, she had opportunities to paint. Wednesday we visited schools, and attended in the evening a local church. I also linked up and delivered a VBS (WWV Presbytery project) Dorcas basket to local Dominican Presbyterian minister, Rev. Wilson Jul. Thursday Martha returned to the barrio clinic, whilst I helped run a public high school CPR class in the morning, and did construction on the new hospital in the afternoon. Every morning we had a Bible lesson, and several times daily group prayer. Friday we returned to Santo Domingo for site-seeing (oldest church, and hospital in Western Hemisphere), and enjoyed a swim and stay at the "deluxe" hotel, before departing. Because of my desire to sample all the activities of the week, I enjoyed a smorgasbord week; most participants (1000/yr) stayed with one or two activities for the week. Of note is the summertime VBS youth group visitor program. Some adult/family (usually church-sponsored) groups limit their activities to construction, or medical, or VBS. Church-to-church relationships are encouraged. The highest church participation in recent years has been among Presbyterian (PCUSA) churches. Efficiency, flexibility, fellowship, can-do optimism, youthful passion, transformative partnering between Dominicans and stateside Americans, and loving presence of the Holy Spirit were all at the Table this week.

Respectfully submitted, Bill and Martha Sando March 9, 2015 More info@ solidrockinternational.org