

partners

THE CHURCH PLANTING NEWSLETTER OF THE EC CHURCH

The Local/International Church Planting Connection

by Kolleen Long



Believers from across the Dominican Republic gathered with missionary Abernardo Donato and EC pastors Ramon Mendez (above, front left) and Edwin Mieses (front right and in inset) to install a group of pastors during the first annual convention at Buenas Nuevas "Los Alcarrizos." This church plant site is one of eight in the Dominican and Haiti which are sponsored by EC congregations, also church plants, in West Hazelton and Reading.

Led by pastors Ramon Mendez and Edwin Mieses and fueled by Pennsylvanian churches, EC church planting is spilling beyond our borders. Over the past several years, the two men and their congregations have worked to establish eight churches in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, located on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola.

"It becomes part of who we are, our DNA," Mieses, pastor of Buenas Nuevas EC Church in West Hazleton, Pa., says of the church multiplication efforts. "Our church is mission-minded. They feel like, 'Ok, we have work going on here. We're part of that.'"

One of the churches they are part of is located in Haina, just outside of the capital of Santa Domingo in the Dominican. The church is based in a building that at best holds about 60 people, and is now bursting at the seams

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with some cell groups approaching 100 or more people.

The Haina church, also called Buenas Nuevas or “Good News,” has already birthed a second church, Mieses notes. The facility additionally houses a sister Haitian church, with services in French Patua; a new school with 35 students; a food store which offers low-cost, grocery staples to its neighbors; and the Buenas Nuevas Mission Team Community Family Office.

“We have medical teams [that] provide a free clinic and at times dental work,” Mieses says. “This office deals with other community matters, from family disputes to providing burial for the dead and relief from natural disaster.”

The other church plants in the Dominican and Haiti are in more rural areas. There is a second, more established school with over 70 students in Haiti.

All these works are tied to a project called the Apostolic Generation. The term “apostle” is used here to designate a messenger, “someone that has been sent to do a job,” Mieses explains, noting that their five-fold pattern for ministry is based on Ephesians.

“We need the evangelist to evangelize, the teachers to instruct the church, the pastor to lead the church and the prophets to remind us what scripture says and rebuke us when we get out of line,” Mieses explains. “And we need the apostolic guy, the one with the vision.”

As a stateside pastor and church planter, Mieses knows firsthand that by focusing on one aspect of ministry, such as pastoral leadership,



the other areas can suffer. “And that’s a frustration,” he says. “We forget why we are called.” When he found himself in the midst of such frustration in his ministry, Mieses began talking to Ramon Mendez, a fellow church planter and pastor of Vida Nueva, Reading, Pa. Mendez shared a similar burden he had carried for years. As the men began looking for a way to change the situation, the Apostolic Generation project was born.

“And now we have all these churches,” Mieses says. The Hispaniola churches have had a

positive effect on his West Hazleton congregation, generating excitement to be part of the church-multiplication movement among members.

The church has already sent one missionary, Abe Donato, to oversee the churches in the Dominican. Lay members of the

congregation are also involved with the churches, with groups traveling to the island nations about every other month, bringing much needed supplies like rice and clothing, as well as a desire to serve the people they meet and teach them the truth of the gospel message.

Mieses hopes, in the future, to start a water company on Hispaniola to help raise support for the churches and schools, as well as provide jobs and much needed clean water to the community. The congregation in West Hazleton is not large, and he admits supporting so many church plants can be a strain.

“We’re such a small church, we don’t always know where the resources are coming from,” he says. “We’re looking for people to help. We can’t do all the work by ourselves.”

Bethany EC Church in Sunbury, Pa., has already adopted one of the children’s ministries, which typically reaches 100-150 children. Other EC congregations interested in learning about the church plants in Haiti and the Dominican Republic can contact Rev. Edwin Mieses, (570) 401-8291, for a video on the ministry efforts there. ■

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Pour a Second Cup: a Coffeehouse Ministry Update

Previously in Partners, we looked at a new coffeehouse ministry, LifeTree Café, begun by Bethesda EC Church, Schuylkill Haven, Pa. Since that time, two more EC churches have begun a similar program.

Community Evangelical Church in Sinking Springs, Pa., and Mohn's Hill EC Church in Reading have teamed up to start a LifeTree Café in a local restaurant, "Off the Avenue" in West Lawn. The first meeting was held in October and was well received by the community. One week, in fact, the café split into two groups in order to accommodate the large number of attendees.

Rev. Michael Snedeker, Community's pastor of discipleship, notes attendance on Tuesday evenings has ranged from 27 to 45 people. "Never more than half of those were part of our churches," he says. "We're building a base of individuals with no church connection that have become a part of LifeTree."

People from the community are coming back week after week to the

café to watch a video on a cultural hot-topic, then spend time sharing their views. "We're forming some really neat relationships," Snedeker says. "There's some pretty significant spiritual impact from the ministry."

Jerry Artz, director of administration at Mohn's Hill, agrees. "It's exactly what the people at LifeTree told us it could be. And it's exactly what we felt God was calling us to do."

The leadership at Mohn's Hill spent about two years looking for the right outreach effort. Artz recalls that while the congregation was thriving and enjoyed many active ministries, most of their efforts were, frankly, internally focused.

"What LifeTree has done is reveal to us that there are many people who are just not comfortable in church anymore,"

he says. These same people *are* comfortable coming to a neutral setting and seem eager for the opportunity to discuss topics not found in the typical church setting.

Many believers think it is too difficult to talk about faith issues with those outside the church, Artz says, but the café conversations have proven the opposite. "That's what they want to talk about. [The café] is breaking down walls, taking away the fear of talking about our faith."

Since Community and Mohn's Hill are fairly close in location, the joint community outreach works well. Both congregations share the financial cost as well as draw on a bigger volunteer base. About 40 volunteers – many of whom attend the café as "friendship teams" – work to make each Tuesday evening

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Praying

DAY OF PRAYER FOR CHURCH PLANTING,
THE FIRST SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH

Pray for our church planters by name (see the current list of planters).

ASK GOD TO:

- Provide the daily needs of their families.
- Protect them from unnecessary distractions.
- Provide ministry contacts in their communities.
- Protect them from Satan's attacks.

Pray for our church works by name (see the current list of plants).

ASK GOD TO:

- Provide the financial needs of the ministry.
- Protect the unity of each fellowship group.
- Provide the necessary leaders and volunteers.
- Protect the heart of the pastor, leaders and volunteers.

for Church Planting

Current Projects Updates (new info only)

RESTART/REVITALIZATION

- Tallmadge, OH . . . *New Direction* (Tim Ream)
- Gratz, PA . . . *The Dwelling Place* (Bob Stoner)
- Slatington, PA . . . *Trinity* (Brian Kern)
- Sunbury, PA . . . *Bethany* (John Miranda)

PLANTS

- Allentown, PA . . . *Horizon* (Bud Daneker)
- Philadelphia, PA . . . *Comunidad Biblica* (Rolando Diaz)
- Reading, PA . . . *Vida Nueva* (Ramon Mendez)
- West Hazelton, PA . . . *Buena Nuevas* – chartering 2011 (Edwin Mieses)
- York, PA . . . *Iglesia Cristiana* (Carlos Kelly)
- Highland Park, IL . . . *Maranatha* (Salvador Cardoso)

INFORMAL PARTNERSHIPS / POTENTIAL ADOPTIONS

- Bethlehem, PA . . . *Sonrise* (Rick Sergi)
- Ephrata, PA . . . *House of Blessings* (Abe Montanez)
- Lancaster, PA . . . *Iglesia De Dios Ven A El* (Luis Martinez)
- Reedsville, PA . . . *LifeTree Café* (Jeff Byerly)
- Sinking Spring & Mohn's Hill, PA . . . *Lifetree Café* (Jerry Artz, Mohn's Hill & Mike Snedeker, Sinking Spring)
- Harrisburg Trinity . . . missional outreach (Brian Parker)
- Boyertown . . . missional outreach (Rick Christman)



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meeting a success.

"It made sense to share this type of ministry that wasn't based at a specific church," Snedeker adds. "It's been exciting to partner with another church [and have] that kind of kingdom-building mindset together, doing something that wasn't just 'us.'"

Meanwhile, the Lifetree Café sponsored by Bethesda EC Church continues to meet each week at the Lazy Dog Coffeehouse in Minersville, Pa. "We continue to see interest from many in the community," Pastor Jeff Byerly confirms. "We are also seeing newcomers to the Monday night venue."

The ministry also impacts Bethesda's volunteers. "We are learning to become better listeners," Byerly says.

For more information on the national Lifetree Café movement, an outreach of Group Publishing, go to lifetreecafe.com or call (970) 292-4138. ■



Three new church plants have started in the rural area of Hato Mayor, Dominican Republic, in part through the efforts and support of stateside EC church plants.

The congregations are led by Rev. Johan M. Tolentino (above, left) and Revs. Carlos Heredia and Israel Caraballo (not pictured) and are overseen by Rev. Abernardo Donato (above, right). The churches are in various stages of construction, with the cinder block structure shown on the right recently receiving a roof and floor.

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