



You Can Be Part of
THE CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS
LA ROMANA MISSION

SPONSORED BY
THE FIRST CHURCH IN STERLING
AND
WAMS,UCC

MARCH 7 – 15, 2009

You are invited to join a combined group of:

- medical team personnel who will run clinics in the barrios of La Romana, Dominican Republic, and with the Haitian Immigrant cane cutters in the Bateys (workers villages);
- construction workers who will continue work on building the Good Samaritan Hospital for the Haitian/Dominican poor.
- Village(Batey) Bible School leaders (to work with children and youth)

Trip Leaders: Jonathan and Shantia Wright-Gray 978-422-6256,
jonathanwg@gmail.com shantiawg@gmail.com

Total cost: \$1,200

A deposit of \$200 is due with application by Nov. 30.
The \$1,000 balance is due Jan. 30

The trip cost includes your complete travel, room and board.

[The cost of the trip does not cover all of our group mission expenses. We need at least \$200 more per person for construction materials, buses, medicines, translators, etc. There are many ways to raise this additional funding - we hope you will join us in some of our group fundraising efforts and solicit donations on your own.

Each participant is also invited to collect donated vitamins, over the counter medications of all kinds, sewing and knitting materials and summer weight clothing for adults and children.]

- *The trip is from Friday night, March 6, to Sunday night, Mar. 15.*
- *Bus transportation to Kennedy Airport, NYC, is provided from Sterling, MA.*
- *Teenagers - usually 16 and older - are welcome if accompanied by a parent or another responsible adult (may be assigned by trip leaders).*
- *At the end of the week, the group will move to a local hotel for Saturday night, offering time for relaxation and reflection on the mission experience.*

Whatever your skills or background, you could be part of this year's experience...

Central Mass. La Romana Mission is a church-related, ecumenical effort partnering with two dozen similar groups and with a Haitian Baptist Church in the city of La Romana. Such trips have been happening for over 15 years. It is organized locally by the First Church in Sterling and WAMS,UCC, but welcomes participants regardless of their religious affiliation.

A REFLECTION:

In March, 2007, 36 people from Central Massachusetts—from high school students to senior citizens—embarked on a Caribbean trip like no other. These volunteers gave a week of their time and paid over \$1,000 to work very hard in the hot sun and encounter the sadness of poverty. And they also had the rich experience of meeting people whose happiness and faith is often contagious, and watched the barriers of language and cultural differences melt away into friendship. They lived and worked together as a real community with people they didn't know at all before, and discovered what it really means to give of oneself for others.

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## BACKGROUND:

Here is the story of this fascinating and exciting mission, which changes the lives of Americans who go to the DR every bit as much as it helps the people there. Since the early 1990's, groups of volunteers from Central Massachusetts have been making the 1,300-mile trek to another world and culture in the island country of the Dominican Republic, and the city of La Romana. Home to famous baseball players, the DR is also home to many who are desperately poor. Some are also second-class citizens even in this culture, because they are Haitian in origin—coming from the even poorer country on the other side of the island.

### Haitian Cane Cutters

Haitians are among the poorest people anywhere in the world, and as immigrants in the Dominican Republic often have little or no legal status or rights. Cutting sugar cane is back breaking seasonal work, which Dominicans refuse to do. Haitians have fled the tyranny of previous governments and the oppressive poverty of their homeland, or sometimes were captured and sold to work in the sugar cane fields. *Bateys*, or cane-cutter's villages, are found wherever cane is grown. The residents are almost all of Haitian descent and most have no means of returning to Haiti. Lacking citizenship papers or documentation of any kind, the *braceros*, as they are called, are trapped in the *bateys* where they perform back-breaking labor and live in sub-standard housing. They own no land; even their houses are owned by the company for whom they work. During the *saфра*, or harvest season, which lasts only about half the year, a good worker cutting for 9-12 hours will typically be paid \$4-\$7 per day. Employment opportunities for women are limited to gleaning fields, or cooking and cleaning for men. Young boys frequently cut cane alongside the men. The *braceros'* families lead a grim, often desperate existence.

### A Church and Hospital Serving the Poor

La Romana is a city of over 100,000 in the southeastern part of the country, surrounded by sugar cane fields. The Haitian Missionary Baptist Church of La Romana has been serving the large Haitian population there since 1922. Until his untimely death in 2001, Pastor Jean Luc Phanord established churches in the rural *bateys* surrounding La Romana, working tirelessly to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the Haitian immigrants. Under the leadership of Pastor Marc Massenat the work of the Haitian Missionary Baptist Church (H.M.B.C.) has continued to thrive and grow. They have established schools to teach basic academic skills and a growing sewing school to help equip the women with marketable skills. There is also an exciting scholarship program to help the young adults of the churches to obtain skills in administration and medical fields. Today, the church consists of 21 congregations with about 1000 members. Most of these are located in *bateys* outside the city of La Romana, with a large central church in the city.

The dream for the Good Samaritan Hospital began back in 1987 with Pastor Phanord and an American volunteer, Rodney Hendrickson...prayers were said, land was purchased, more prayers were said, and

construction began in 1991, with teams of American volunteers coming to work for a week at a time. “Construction” consisted of digging holes by hand in the rough, coral-rock ground to make a home for the footings that would, a decade later, hold up a two-story hospital—built literally one block at a time.

Based totally on support from a number of churches across the United States, little by little, the hospital took shape. On November 9, 1997 the doors of The Good Samaritan General Hospital were opened. The following year, the “Good Sam” provided medical service to 10,000 people, despite the inability of many patients to pay for their services. In 2002, this figure had quadrupled to an estimated 48,000 people receiving medical care, from treatment of minor infections to life-saving surgeries. In the spring of 2004, the hospital completed its new dialysis unit, providing care for up to 6 persons at a time, thanks to equipment donated from Texas. It is now the only hospital east of Santo Domingo providing dialysis care.

The primary mission of Good Samaritan Hospital was initially to serve the families of Haitian sugar cane workers, who often have little or no access to health care. Today its staff is providing open access to basic health care for the poor in the La Romana region regardless of age, religion or nationality. This includes both Haitians and Dominicans, in the city and rural areas alike. Achieving a high degree of self-sufficiency for the mission and its outreach is an important priority for both the Haitian Missionary Baptist Church and its partner congregations in the U.S.

### **Volunteer Mission Teams**

In its ongoing work the mission is organized to make maximum use of volunteers coming from North America. About 25 to 30 groups travel from all over the US and Canada to support this work. The focus of these teams is either medical or construction, and often times, both. Construction teams labor on various projects. The most obvious is the ongoing hospital building. Currently the second floor is virtually completed. The second floor is home to the pediatric center. An elevator shaft was constructed by the 2007 groups and work has begun on the third floor. Other construction projects include work on school or church buildings in the surrounding bateys.

Volunteer medical teams are part of the outreach of the church and Good Sam Hospital to the poor. Simple one-day clinics are held in poor or remote areas, where basic treatment and medicines can be offered. More serious illnesses can be referred to the hospital for follow up. Sometimes this is the only medical care that will come to an area for months or even longer. Doctors, nurses and other medical specialists from the U.S. adapt to very basic working conditions, and often struggle with what they cannot do under these circumstances. Missionary nurse Kristy Engel coordinates the work of these teams, and has begun a social service program to support the most needy in the bateys.

Regardless of the work in which a team is engaged, virtually everyone served is grateful for their assistance, and receives them with kindness and Caribbean good cheer. They know that we are working as brothers and sisters—as partners—under the banner of the Haitian Missionary Baptist Church, and that our work is an extension of the church’s work.

The task before the H.M.B.C. and The Good Samaritan Hospital is gigantic. Every team of mission workers edges a step closer to fulfilling that mission! Over the next several years at least \$250,000 will be needed to complete the third floor of the hospital, install an elevator, provide an adequate air handling system and a larger power supply. In addition, the hospital struggles continually to care for the poor who cannot pay for their treatment. Even with sliding scale fees, currently about 3,000 charity cases are seen each year, representing about 6% of the hospital budget. Without subsidies and contributions from visiting mission teams, this could not be done. Some mission teams provide specific funding for batey nutrition programs and local health promoters, and for batey schools and

social service programs. There are also scholarship programs needing funding for college, nursing and medical school students.

Every mission volunteer and every financial contribution fits somewhere into this picture, and because there are many groups and hundreds of individuals involved, the mission flourishes. We hope that hearing this story will make you want to take some part in this wonderful work of helping others. .

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*Donations made to the First Church in Sterling, designated for La Romana Mission, are fully tax-deductible and will be acknowledged.*

***Send your donation to:***

***The First Church in Sterling (La Romana Mission), PO Box 40, Sterling, MA 01564***

*(Please include your name and address for acknowledgement—and thank you!)*



Medical assistant does check up at batey clinic.



Typical sugar cane cutter housing in a batey.



Gathering outside a batey church on Sunday.



Pouring cement on a construction project.