**Companion Diocese Committee**

During 2023, the Companion Diocese Committee did not hold regular meetings; however, our Companion Diocese (CD) has continued to stay in relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ who live in the Dominican Republic (DR) though the Dominican Development Group (DDG). We will be re-evaluating the need whether to resume scheduled CD meetings over the next few months.

In February, the Dominican Development Group held its first annual Board of Directors meeting in person in the DR since 2020. Board meetings are now held quarterly. St. Bartholomew’s (St. Petersburg) is hosting the mid-year meeting in early October.

During the DDG board meeting in February 2023 in Santo Domingo, members were able to participate in the dedication of the second-floor parish hall of Iglesia Monte de Sión in Boca Chica, which Church of the Redeemer (Sarasota) helped to complete. The ceremony honored Padre Sandino Sanchez, a longtime friend of many missioners from the Diocese of Southwest Florida. Also visited was the site a new vicarage, which will allow the ministry of the Monte de Sión community to grow for years to come.

For nearly three decades, Church of the Redeemer has served alongside the Dominican Episcopal Church. In the coming months, the clergy and vestry at Redeemer will discern their next steps to walk in mission in the DR.

In late April, a team from Redeemer sent an adult mission team to Boca Chica. The trip included worship at the Monte de Sión and mission, painting the interior of the new second floor parish hall, and repairing the roof and water leak damage at dormitories located in the Diocesan Office in Santo Domingo. The team also visited Iglesia de la Gracia in La Caleta for a weekday Eucharist.

After twenty-one consecutive years, the most recent Tampa Deanery projectsuspend it's in-person participation due to Covid concerns. We are gratified that ongoing construction and repair work was completed on numerous churches, schools and community centers all over the DR. Efforts are still ongoing to fund local workers to assist in preparation for construction of a new church in Catalina, Santo Nombre de Jesús, but there are no future plans at this time at the Deanery level. In 2023 individual projects from the Tampa Deanery resumed.

For the first time ever, the DDG and the Dominican Episcopal Church welcomed Dominican-American students from the University of South Florida. In May, two USF students and one graduate, served at the Bishop Isaac Home for the Elderly and Disabled in Boca Chica. With the director of the program, they assisted in facilitating occupational therapy and art activities. They also helped the pre-K students at the San Jos School.

In early June, the first team from the Tampa area since 2019 traveled to Santo Domingo to do mission work in La Barquita, a barrio adjacent to the Ozama River several miles north of Diocesan Headquarters. A Youth Mission Team of senior high students from St. John’s (Tampa) worked at Iglesia San Pedro y San Pablo for a week doing Vacation Bible School (mostly in Spanish!) and painting and repairs to the church and school. They worked closely with Padre Bienvenido Lopez and participated in services in English and Spanish. St. John’s (Tampa) continues to support the Clinica Esperanza y Caridad, a medical clinic dedicated to bringing health services to the underserved in San Pedro de Macorís.

The need for educational scholarships has increased as many Episcopal schools in the DR are struggling financially. We are estiamting 365 scholarships of $500 are needed for the 2023-2024 school year. We give many thanks to the various individuals and groups of the Diocese of Southwest Florida who continue to support these students. If you would like to contribute a full or partial scholarship, please email cwallace@dominicandevelopmentgroup.org.

The DDG continues to serve alongside Companion Dioceses to love and serve the people in the Dominican Republic along with the Dominican Episcopal Church. DDG board members are located throughout the US and the Dominican Republic. In May, DDG hired Miquea Saintivil as the Director of Field Operations to assist in the logistics of mission planning, preparation, and execution.

The President of the Board, the Rev. Ethan Cole, is Rector of St. Bartholomew’s, and Bishop Scharf's representative on the Board is Retired Bishop J. Michael Garrison. The Executive Director is Christy Wallace.

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