

# Record-Journal

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Dan Champagne of the Record-Journal went to the Dominican Republic with the First Baptist Church of Wallingford, CT in July 2006, and wrote the following articles documenting the trip.

For further information please visit

[www.drmissionteam.org](http://www.drmissionteam.org)

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## July 2

### That 'what did I get myself into?' feeling

Reporter Dan Champagne is with local church missionaries in the Dominican Republic. Here is the first of his reports.

**By Dan Champagne**  
Record-Journal staff

LA ROMANA, Dominican Republic — "Policia! Policia!" the children scream as they run through mud and stones to the street. They temporarily forget about lugging rocks to a trash pile and posing for pictures. They are

completely focused on finding that whooping siren.

Unfortunately, the siren passed through quickly and they seemed a bit disappointed. They didn't let it bother them for too long. They turned around and hurried back to their new friends on the Dominican Republic Mission Team.

One of the mission teams is in Batey La Higuerra, a sugarcane field and home to Haitian migrant workers in La Romana. The team is just beginning its week long mission of building a computer school for the village's children.

The children immediately run to the bus to greet the group when it comes to a stop on the dirt road. They want to be part of everything going on. They grab at the shovels and pickaxes to help dig the foundation. They don't request, but order, anyone with a camera to snap their picture. They smile in front of the camera, and they continue to smile when it has been put away.

Gina (pronounced "Heena") Borrero has lived in the Batey for several years. She and her three daughters share a home comparable to the size of a small second bedroom in most American homes. They have no bathroom. They must go in the sugarcane field behind their home.

"I feel safe here," Borrero said through a translator. "I have everything we need. The only thing I'm scared of is hurricanes." Rightfully so. Hurricane George destroyed her home in 1998 and she was forced to move to a new location. Her original home had indoor plumbing.

Those who have taken the trip to La Romana before all said the same thing. Something will inevitably go wrong during the weeklong trip. This year's group of nearly 70 volunteers got that out of the way before it even left the airport.

The flight from New York's Kennedy Airport was scheduled to begin its trip to Santo Domingo at around 8:30 a.m. Friday. The group was at the airport

unloading its luggage and around 70 duffel bags full of donated clothing and medical supplies by 5 a.m.

The captain made the announcement just after the plane was scheduled to depart. There was a mechanical problem with the rudder and he wanted to get it checked.

Five hours passed before the group found itself on board another plane. Later in the evening, the Rev. William Huegel of the First Baptist Church in Wallingford thanked God for allowing the pilot to detect the malfunction and giving him the wisdom to switch our planes.

The plane landed in Santo Domingo after battling a bit of a pop-up storm during its descent after 5 p.m. Group members staked out a spot at the baggage carousel and quickly began to grab at the passing luggage.

The journey began at the Wallingford church at around 2 a.m. Friday. The bus stopped at the dorms at the Haitian Missionary Baptist Church around 9 p.m.

The dorms are basically white concrete boxes stuffed with bunk beds. The men's quarters has a few toilets, a couple of showers and a few sinks. Some wobbly fans help ventilate the rooms.

The look of exhaustion was everywhere by the time the group sat down for dinner Friday night. Some of the first timers had the "what did I get myself into" look.

After a few hours of sleep and a quick shower, the look was gone by Saturday morning. The weary eyes turned wide as the group approached the baseball diamond in the middle of a sugarcane field Saturday afternoon. Several local residents joined the group to play a quick game of softball.

A horse roams in dead center field and there was a goat tied to the backstop. The mound was not quite regulation, rising noticeably above the ground with a piece of wood instead of rubber.

Dark clouds began to gather

overhead, but there were no worries. The group had arrived safely and was ready to get down to work Monday. Suddenly, all the troubles of the airport seemed miles away.



Sarah Strosahl, 19, of Southington, plays with a boy in Batey La Higuerra, Dominican Republic, Saturday. Strosahl is with a group that is building a computer school there.



Shannon Kelley, 18, of Wallingford, hands rocks to a boy in Batey La Higuerra, Dominican Republic, Saturday. Kelley is part of a group building a computer school there.



# July 3

## A quick, but appreciated visit

Reporter Dan Champagne is with local church missionaries in the Dominican Republic. Here is the second of his reports.

**By Dan Champagne**

Record-Journal staff

LA ROMANA, Dominican Republic — The heat in the Haitian Missionary Baptist Church is overwhelming. So is the spirituality.

The choir of about 40 people is already in mid-song when the Dominican Republic Mission Team enters Sunday morning. There is a full band, banging drums and plucking the bass guitar. The sound system could rival those of some small music venues.

The Rev. Eldon Perez steps to the altar and takes the microphone. The parishioners close their eyes and bow their heads. Their right arms are stretched toward the sky.

Women wearing white dresses and large hats enter the church and sit to the left; the men, wearing full suits, go to the right. They continually wipe their brows with handkerchiefs during the three-hour service. The majority of the mission team cannot understand Perez's sermon, which he delivers in the Haitian language of Creole. The only word with any sort of familiarity is "Amen." A warm breeze sifts through the windows along with the sound of leaves rustling from outside. Collection plates make their way around the church.

A man with a large hole in his church shoes reaches into his pocket and pulls out 10 pesos, which converts to roughly 30 U.S. cents. He drops it in the plate and smiles at the woman as she walks to the next pew.

The Rev. William Huegel of The First Baptist Church in Wallingford is next up to the altar. He preaches in English

so the mission team can understand at least part of the day's sermon. The Rev. Lubin Beaucejour of the International Center of Deliverance in Wallingford translates his words to Creole.

Huegel speaks of honesty and integrity during his time behind the microphone. He uses an example of a man who may be dishonest while weighing sugarcane to pocket extra money. The large crowd grumbles as if they have all been in the situation. Some surely have. A young couple walks to the front of the church, the woman holding a small child. They are celebrating the baby's dedication within the church. Beaucejour places his hand on the child's head and says something in Creole. Friends take pictures for the couple. Collection plates are passed around yet again.

Church lets out and the team changes from stuffy dresses and slacks into more comfortable shorts and T-shirts. Large bowls of chili and crackers are waiting in the dining hall.

There is a bit of excitement in the air during lunch because the team members know a trip to the beach is scheduled for later in the afternoon. But before that, the team needs to make a quick stop.

Francisco and Pilar are waiting by the barbed-wire gate at Batey 205 when the three buses arrive. The Dominican Republic Mission Team has sponsored this family for several years, helping to build them a new house in the middle of the sugarcane fields.

The elderly couple looks after their two grandchildren. The children's parents died of AIDS a few years back.

Francisco shakes hands with group members as they walk up to their home. Pilar will not let anyone pass without a hug and kiss on the cheek.

They have a small pineapple farm in the backyard and there are several animals tied up around the property. You could see the lime trees through the large holes in the kitchen wall.

The visit is quick, only about 15 minutes, but it ends with a prayer for the family. Pilar smiles so wide, it's as if she has been waiting for this quick visit for months. When the team members board the bus, she stands on the side of the dirt path and applauds.

The team arrives at the pristine beach with light green water and sloping palm trees. It's almost difficult to fathom that just a few minutes and a few miles away, Pilar is anxiously awaiting the next visit.



The Rev. Lubin Beaucejour of the International Center of Deliverance in Wallingford helps dedicate a baby at the Haitian Missionary Baptist Church in La Romana Sunday morning.

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# July 4

## Where 'patient' can mean you've been waiting for years

Reporter Dan Champagne is with local church missionaries in the Dominican Republic. Here is his third report.

**By Dan Champagne**  
Record-Journal staff

LA ROMANA, Dominican Republic — A group of around 20 Dominicans gathered outside of the Good Samaritan Hospital's emergency entrance just a few nights ago. Two guards stood watch at the door.

Moises Sifren, the hospital's administrator, says, "Somebody has probably died." Ten years ago, somebody probably would have.

Doctors at the hospital were able to revive the young man who had been stabbed in the chest. The following day, Sifren said, the patient was doing fine.

The Good Samaritan Hospital opened Nov. 9, 1997 after volunteers from the United States, including the Dominican Republic Mission Team, donated their time and money. They began working on the hospital about 15 years ago.

The outside of the large concrete building has been painted pink; the volunteers describe it as "Pepto pink." Inside, the ceilings are white and the walls are painted light green. There are colorful pieces of framed artwork everywhere.

The windows are just interlocking bars of steel. There is no glass. The window frames serve as the largest pieces of artwork, showing off the bright green leaves and blue sky filled with enormous marshmallow clouds. A few people are sitting in chairs watching the news in Spanish in a dark hallway. They are in the waiting room. The lights stay out in some areas to

conserve electricity, since the hospital typically goes without power for 12 to 14 hours every day. It has two generators, but they are unreliable.

During surgery, employees wait by the electrical system to turn on the backup power in case of a problem. There are seldom surgeries that have no problems.

There are now 23 employees, whom Sifren described as secretaries and custodians, plus 32 specialist doctors, 12 general doctors and 18 nurses at the hospital.

The first floor has some private rooms and doctors' offices. Signs by the doors read: "Cardiologo-Internista" and "Urologo." The second floor is decorated the same as the first, except for the mural on the walls of the pediatric center, which the mission team helped dedicate last summer.

There are bright yellows of the sun and deep grays of a cartoon elephant. A small stack of multi-colored plastic chairs leans against the wall. A young girl sits on the floor, smiling at the painted dolphins on the wall.

A few feet away, a fleet of women are sitting in plastic chairs in the middle of an open room. Some have babies in their arms, some have stomachs starting to show. They are waiting outside a door that reads "Ginecologo-Obstetra." The women behind the desks are friendly. They smile and say "Hola" each time you pass. They do not ask questions. They don't seem to care who you are or where you're going.

The term "patient privacy" is non-existent, although the patients don't seem to mind. Ask them to take a picture and they'll use all their strength to sit up. Ask why they are there and they seem happy to talk about it.

They seem happy watching television in the dark, waiting to see a doctor some have been waiting for their whole lives.

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# July 5

## Mission team encounters voodoo

By Dan Champagne

Record-Journal staff

LA ROMANA, Dominican Republic — The French toast and cantaloupe slices disappear from the breakfast table quickly Tuesday morning. Members of the Dominican Republic Mission Team are anxious to get back to work.

Nearly 70 people file into three buses that will take them to three different locations for most of the day. It is hot, but the clouds offer much needed relief from the unforgiving sun.

One bus heads to Batey 50, one of the poorest villages in the sugarcane fields. The trip is well over an hour long.

Team members are busy constructing a chain link fence around a small concrete building. The building serves as the village's church. The mission team built it last year.

The fence is necessary to keep animals out and help serve as a property boundary. Many of the families, especially the children, smile and look at the group members through grateful eyes. Some, however, do not.

A snake has been hung by a noose on a tree near where the team has been working. Its belly has been sliced open.

The Rev. Lubin Beaucejour of the International Center of Deliverance in Wallingford and a native of Haiti explains the snake has been left by voodoo worshipers looking to cast a spell on the missionary team.



In La Romana, Dominican Republic, 14-year-old Melissa Copas, of Wallingford, mixes cement on the roof of the Good Samaritan Hospital.

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# July 6

**Elderly man keeps gift received from the heart close to his own  
Medical team does all that it can for those locals who need care**

Reporter Dan Champagne is with local church missionaries in the Dominican Republic. This is the fifth of his reports.

**By Dan Champagne**  
Record-Journal staff

LA ROMANA, Dominican Republic — A long line has already formed outside the concrete church in Batey Benerito when the medical team arrives Wednesday morning. A weathered old man is the first in line. He's been there for hours. The team sets up a makeshift pharmacy in another room and assigns teenagers to measure the heights and weights of the people who enter. They have acquired tickets in advance to help reduce overcrowding. It may be the only medical consultation they get for the next six months.

The man enters the church and stands by the wall. He is wearing a light blue button-down shirt and dark pants that are dirty around the thigh. In his shirt pocket is a small copy of The New Testament.

He is 67 inches tall. He weighs 120 pounds. His blood pressure is 150/64. He is 80 years old.

He is Marin Fosario.

A small walking stick supports Fosario as he walks over to Sandra Drozd, a nurse from Wallingford who helps run the medical clinics for the Dominican Republic Mission Team.

She uses a translator to ask him what is wrong. Fosario does not speak a word. He opens his mouth wide and wiggles a long jagged tooth. He only has a few.

A few seconds later, he puts his hand to his chest and turns his weary eyes toward Drozd. He is having trouble breathing.

The translator asks him what is wrong with his chest. Fosario does not speak a word. He cannot hear the question.

Drozd immediately places the round end of her stethoscope to his back. She makes a heaving motion to Fosario. He imitates her.

"I don't hear any air in his lungs," she says with a worrisome tone. "I've never heard lungs so constricted." Drozd believes he has asthma. She asks someone to see if the team has any inhalers. It does not.

Cara Gooding, a Bristol resident and nursing student at St. Joseph's College in West Hartford, overhears the conversation as she is checking the blood pressure of other patients. She reaches into her bag, wipes off the mouthpiece of her inhaler and hands it to Drozd.

"He's barely breathing," Gooding says. "I'll live without it for a few days." Drozd places the inhaler to Fosario's lips and pushes the button.

Whoosh. A shot of air and medication enters his lungs.

He sits back and looks up at Drozd. He points to his chest, raises his arm and makes a muscle. He is telling her that he can breathe.

Drozd gives Fosario Tylenol, Singulair and vitamins before he leaves her. She gives him strict orders on how much and how often to take each through a form of primitive sign language. He holds up the Singular tablets and holds up two fingers. He understands that he needs to take two each day.

He lifts himself off the wooden pew and makes his way toward the corner of the church where Liciana Juan is waiting to remove his aching tooth. Juan is a dentist at The Good Samaritan Hospital in La Romana.

She readies a needle full of Novocain and inserts it into his gums. A few minutes later she takes out a pair of pliers. Fosario shakes his head, alerting her that the Novocain has yet to set in.

A few minutes more pass and Juan grabs hold of the tooth. It comes right out as if it were barely attached to his gums. A small stream of blood runs down his chin and onto his shirt. He puts a piece of gauze in the hole where his tooth used to sit and makes his way out the door. He sits on a blue plastic chair outside the church, spitting and wiping the blood from his chin, for about an hour before getting up to head home.

He reaches into his pants pocket and removes the inhaler. He places it in his shirt pocket next to his Bible, next to his heart.



Drozd gives an inhaler to Marin Fosario, 80, in Batey Benerito. Fosario has severely constricted lungs and could barely breathe, and he also needed a tooth pulled.



Sandra Drozd, a nurse from Wallingford, examines a young boy's ear during a medical clinic earlier this week.

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# July 7

## Local pastor witnesses to those in Batey El-12

By Dan Champagne

Record-Journal staff

LA ROMANA, Dominican Republic — A group of about six men are playing cards at a wooden picnic table under a makeshift tent in the middle of Batey El-12 Thursday morning. The table is littered with gold coins and paper bills of various colors.

A young girl is chewing on a Verizon calling card. A man wearing an American Red Cross T-shirt is holding a small child, not even one year old. On the child's right wrist is a red piece of cloth with a large bump. The bump contains meat, corn, wood and oil. All of the items have been cursed by Haitian voodoo spells.

The Rev. Jean-Lubin Beaucejour allows the group to finish the hand of cards before he joins them.

He speaks to them in the Haitian language of Creole and within minutes he has them laughing. A few minutes later, it's like he's a regular at a weekly poker game. The men hang on his every word, waiting to see what comes next.

Beaucejour, of the International Church of Deliverance in Wallingford, is on an evangelical mission with the Dominican Republic Mission Team. Each day this week, he has gone to a different area and tried to help people be "saved" through a commitment to Christianity.

The volume of his voice rises and lowers depending on the subject during his speech. The Rev. William Huegel, of The First Baptist Church of Wallingford, is sitting alone in a sugarcane field, praying Beaucejour's faith transfers to those around him.

Beaucejour bangs on the table during his sermon as if he were throwing down four aces and a king. His wedding ring makes a clanking noise against the wood of the table.

He asks Crystal Diaz, an 18 year-old Meriden resident, to stand next to a large Haitian woman. He asks the group gathered around to talk about the differences they see in the two.

Suddenly, the men and women are yelling out answers. They talk about the color of the two women's skin and their hair length. They become students and Beaucejour is the teacher.

He tells the people that God does not care about the color of their skin or the differences in their appearance. God does not love one more than another, he says.

The group, which just a few minutes ago seemed hardened and suspicious of Beaucejour, applauds.

There is a moment of silent prayer followed by a loud "Amen, Amen, Amen." Beaucejour hands out Bibles. Nearly every person within an arms reach grasps on to one.

Beaucejour turns around and sees a woman breastfeeding the baby with the red bracelet. He goes to her.

With a Bible in his hand, he speaks to her about the difference between living in lightness and darkness. He tells her she is living in darkness and her baby is sure to follow.

Within minutes, the mother hands the baby to Beaucejour. He tears the red bracelet from the child's wrist and holds it up. The mother appears to be crying.

Fifty-eight people committed themselves to Christianity before lunch Thursday afternoon. Beaucejour has successfully witnessed to 200 people this week alone.

At a session earlier Thursday, Beaucejour helped lead 36 people to become Christians.

"That's triple Jesus' church," he says with a mix of pride and humor. "He started with only 12."



The Rev. Jean-Lubin Beaucejour, of the International Church of Deliverance in Wallingford, preaches the gospel to a group of men in Batey El-12 in the Dominican Republic Thursday morning.

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# July 9

## Build a foundation, and there may just be a future for these kids

Reporter Dan Champagne is with area missionaries in the Dominican Republic. Here is another of his reports.

**By Dan Champagne**

Record-Journal staff

LA ROMANA, Dominican Republic — “One hour to breakfast, guys,” the Rev. William Huegel yells in the men’s dorm at around 6 a.m. Friday morning, just as he has done each day this week.

But this morning is different. This is the last day of work for members of the Dominican Republic Mission Team, and it’s only a half-day at that. The rest of the day will be spent with some much-needed and much-deserved relaxation at the beach.

The group known as Team B jumps on its bus and prepares for the hour or so journey to Batey La Higuerra, where it will continue to build a computer school for the village’s children.

The bus ride is bumpy. Melvin, a young Dominican wearing a teal Michael Jordan cap with a frayed brim, jerks the wheel to the left and right to avoid the knee-deep potholes. A family of four squeezed onto a moped passes the bus on the right.

There are miles of sugarcane plants, creating a sea of green against the blue of the sky. The sugarcane stalks are nearly identical to corn stalks except for the actual canes, which appear to have a purple tint to them. With miles of spectacular summer colors, the senses long for the smell of fresh air to complete the scene. Exhaust fumes from the bus won’t allow it.

The bus arrives at a church at Batey La Higuerra. The team is anxious to see the work it completed the previous

day. Group members walk around to the back of the church. The cinderblock walls climb higher than any team member.

Team B began its work just a week ago by clearing debris and digging trenches for the foundation. In just a few short days, the trenches have reached 42 inches in depth and concrete has filled the gaping holes.

The team creates a line — an assembly line of sorts, only with no assembling — of about 15 people to get the cinderblocks where they need to go. A local mason takes it from there, hoisting the blocks above his head and carefully placing them on the wall.

Twelve-year-old Matt Powers uses a sifter to separate the gravel from sand along with Cory Kroon, 22. Both are Wallingford residents. The sand will be tossed into a cement mixer and will eventually become concrete.

Oscar Belisaia, a La Romana resident and worker from the Haitian Missionary Baptist Church, pours concrete into the cinderblock holes at the corner of the building. Concrete has already been poured in all the holes of the first five levels of the walls. Hurricanes make this process a necessity.

The school is expected to be around 600 square feet and have two rooms where children will learn basic computer skills from government-appointed teachers.

When the team returns home Saturday, another mission team from the United States will finish what it started.

The hope is that the children will become educated enough to leave the Batey and get a good job in the city, thus ending the cycle of poverty within their respective families. Thanks to the members of Team B, a strong foundation for that goal has already been laid ... and filled with cement.



Two young Haitian boys help move sand Friday for the cement that's being used to build a computer school at Batey La Higuerra in La Romana, Dominican Republic.



Karen Grunwald, 17, right, of Wallingford, hands a concrete block to Brittani Piekarski, 16, of East Haven. They are building a computer school in rural Dominican Republic.



Craig Hlavac and Chris Mayes, both of Wallingford, work on the school Friday.

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# July 10

## Leaving the Dominican Republic

By Dan Champagne

Record-Journal staff

LA ROMANA, Dominican Republic — Many have been longing for this day and now that it's here, there are mixed emotions. On the itinerary, Saturday is marked "Travel Day." It is the day the Dominican Republic Mission Team returns home from La Romana.

Most of the suitcases have already been packed for the trip. They are loaded onto an open truck and tied down with a tarp and cords. The team of nearly 70 people climbs into two buses. It will be the last time they have to do without air conditioning for the rest of the day.

The trip from La Romana to the Santo Domingo airport is about an hour. The bus is relatively quiet. Some sleep, some listen to music through their iPods, some just stare out the window and think.

There has been so much to think about this week, so much to process, so much to comprehend.

For the first-timers on the trip, the extreme poverty they have seen will stick with them forever. So will the wide smiles on the faces of the children. It is difficult to understand how people living in such horrific conditions can be so happy. It is difficult to understand much of what has been seen this week.

During breakfast Saturday morning, The Rev. William Huegel of the First Baptist Church of Wallingford spoke to the group for the last time. He urged them to be aware of the incredible

waste that occurs in America each day.

While on the trip, the group ate three solid meals each day and had some sort of meat at every one. The people the group served are lucky to have a bite of chicken once a week, Huegel said.

The comforts of home suddenly seem more comfortable than ever.

Imagine turning on the faucet and being cleansed with hot water, being able to brush your teeth and not having to use bottled water to rinse your mouth and toothbrush, a place where cockroaches in the shower are the exception, not the norm.

All week, the group has prayed for health, strength and safety. All week, it has longed for a comfortable mattress, an endless supply of electricity and Dunkin' Donuts coffee.

Now that those luxuries are all attainable, it makes the memories of those living in the Bateys even more difficult.

The group passes through the automatic sliding doors of the Santo Domingo airport and breathes a collective sigh of relief as the central air conditioning drops the temperature about 20 degrees. The flight home is delayed about 40 minutes, seemingly miniscule compared to the nearly five-hour delay on the flight down here.

Some pass the time by playing cards, some call their families while others hit the duty free shops. Neon green collared shirts, a way to help the group stay visible to one another, are everywhere.

To others in the airport, the group must look like one big family. That's exactly the way members feel.

The group members have grown incredibly close since leaving the First Baptist Church last Friday morning. They have grown close in a way only sleeping in bunk beds and sharing toilets that can't handle flushing toilet paper can bring people.

The wheels of the airplane separate from the runway and the group is

officially on its way home. In just a few hours, its members will return to their regularly scheduled lives. There are errands to run, laundry to do and work is waiting on Monday.

The bus engine shuts off at the First Baptist Church just before 10 p.m. Saturday. The doors open and group members begin to file down the stairs. The parking lot is filled with people and even some pets.

Spouses hug spouses, parents hug children and children hug parents. Tears run off cheeks and onto the shoulders of the neon green collared shirts.

Those who have been missed all week are suddenly close enough to embrace. Families are whole again, a sight more sweet than all the sugarcane in La Romana.



A young Haitian boy waves goodbye to the Dominican Republic Mission team at Batey La Higuerra Saturday.