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Andrews Academy Sees God Do Great Things

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Andrews Academy

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Steven Atkins

SOW Safari participants, students and adult volunteers from Andrews Academy, built a new church in Nueva Esperanza, Dominican Republic, during their Christmas holiday. It was the answer to prayer for which village residents had been praying.

Andrews Academy sees God do great things

Michigan—SOW Safari, Andrews Academy's biennial two-week mission trip, has been an important part of the academy's mission since 1986. The name, SOW Safari, speaks to the reason for these trips: Service through construction on a church or school building, Outreach through vacation Bible schools, and Witness through evangelistic efforts. To date, several hundred people have been baptized through the evangelistic component of these trips, including some of the students themselves!

This Christmas holiday, 26 AA students and nine adult volunteers served in a Maranatha Volunteers International project in the Dominican Republic, in Nueva Esperanza, near Monte Plata, about one hour from the capitol of Santo Domingo.

The story of the "miracle church" began with unexpected miracles a week prior to and continued throughout the mission trip. About this time, the school was informed the church project had to be cancelled because needed funds had not been received. A number of the adult sponsors of this trip gave generous gifts of many thousands of dollars to make this building project happen.

SOW participants were to arrive at the site with the footings and supports in place so they could build the walls and roof. However, when they arrived, it was only a somewhat-cleared field

and they began to dig, by hand, the 40' by 20' footings for the building. Then, they placed the rebar and poured the cement. After a couple grueling days to accomplish this, participants began the scheduled project. Despite this extra, unexpected work, they still were able to build the church in the seven days planned.

The participants actually built two structures; the second building, of almost the same size, is an outdoor multi-purpose shelter for Sabbath school classrooms. Not only did they complete these two buildings, they also went to another Adventist church nearby and repainted it as well.

God worked many miracles to make this happen. The day after the church was built, students joined the new congregation in a Wednesday evening prayer meeting. The village residents were praying for a miracle, that a church could be built in which to worship. They kept expressing their thanks for Andrews Academy's part in answering their prayer. The final miracle of the trip was the safe return home in the midst of the worst snowstorm of the season.

SOW participants had a base camp from which they walked to the job site. The girls were in cabins, and the guys stayed in a larger cabin with separate rooms.

While one crew worked on the job site, another part of the group went to the church they rented and offered a vacation Bible school from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. They sang songs, told and acted out Bible stories, taught crafts,

and then played a traditional children's game of Duck, Duck, Goose. Memories were made, and the children left their imprints on participants' hearts. Most of the VBS meetings had close to and sometimes more than 100 children.

The evening included a second VBS program. On the first night, attendees learned about Miriam and the importance of brushing their teeth. Every child went home with a shiny new toothbrush. Students preached for the adults in the church, too. They did such a great job! The rented church did not have electric lighting outside. With sundown occurring near 6:30 p.m., the program had to be held outside in the dark! Students were rather creative as they came up with some forms of lighting and modified the program to accommodate this unexpected variable.

"SOW Safari mission trip was literally the best two weeks of my life," commented one student. "I've gotten to know so many awesome people. The kids there are so adorable, and their outlook on life is so pure, without very many worldly distractions. If anyone is considering going on the next one, I would highly suggest it."

Another student commented, "I had an amazing time in the Dominican Republic these past two weeks. We finished the church, which we didn't think was possible. We got to know the people there and the kids. Also, had lots of fun with everyone that went. ... God did great things."

Steven Atkins, Biology and Earth Science teacher, Andrews Academy



Steven Atkins

After laying the last block for the church, SOW Safari participants Jonika Scott (senior, left) and Amber Benjamin (freshman, right) and others reflected on the many miracles God worked to make this structure a reality for residents of the Nueva Esperanza village in the Dominican Republic.