



THE LEAST OF THESE  
**MINISTRIES**  
MATTHEW 25:40

Sharing **HOPE**  
amidst poverty.

March 2026



## Joy and Flavor in Batey Cuchilla!

### Culinary Competition Strengthens Community

AS WE REPORTED IN OCTOBER'S NEWSLETTER, ministry Manager Ricardo Beltré and his Barahona team have begun offering wellness seminars in the communities they serve. The seminars provide information on health, nutrition, and environmental stewardship.

To add an element of fun to this educational program, Ricardo worked with community leaders in Batey Cuchilla to hold a cooking competition. Five women from the community enthusiastically volunteered to participate in the event. The participants were instructed to create a balanced meal, using MannaPack-Rice as a primary ingredient. Ricardo provided each of the women a MannaPack cookbook, which was developed by Feed My Starving Children (fmsc.org) in conjunction with trained chefs.

The MannaPack product is rice-based and is fortified with vitamins, minerals, and protein. The food is donated by Feed My Starving Children and represents about half of the food distributed through our program. Though the food itself is donated, we do incur shipping costs to send the food to the Dominican Republic.

*"This is something great that unites us more  
as a community and motivates us."*

—Jessica, Cuchilla Community Leader

On the day of the competition, the excitement was contagious. Participants woke up as early as 5 AM, to prepare for the start at 10:30 AM. Jessica, the Cuchilla community leader, told Ricardo, "I have never seen so much enthusiasm and emotion in every participant. The community has come together to witness this competition. It's more than a competition; it's entertainment that has united the community to socialize and have a joyful moment. There's hardly ever anything fun in this community. This is something great that unites us more as a community and motivates us."

The event was opened with prayer and a bible teaching. Wilton Gómez shared a message of hope based on the biblical text from John 16:33: *"I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world."*

Afterward, the contestants took turns sharing their meals with the panel of judges, comprised of Ricardo, Wilton, and Francisco, a local Pastor in Batey Cuchilla. The judges were pleasantly surprised by the care, detail, and passion dedicated to every prepared dish.

Ricardo expressed that the judging was difficult because each of the contestants presented a winning meal.

*[Continued on last page]*



Corina (Center) receives her prizes from Ricardo (L) and Wilton (R). Her winning plate is pictured above.

# SLOWED BY THE STORM...

*This is an excerpt of a mission team journal entry written by Malcolm Stranathan. Used with permission.*

“Our heart plans our way, but the Lord directs our steps.”  
– Proverbs 16:9

“You’ve got to write something in the journal,” Jacki says.  
My reply: “I’ve been trying to think of something to write.”

I reckon that, for me, this week could be titled after that old Yiddish saying: “Man plans, God laughs.”

It was challenging to get folks to commit to an October trip so close to WUMC’s mission trip in April, where we helped build a new home for Renata. That earlier trip came together slowly, with the last couple of folks signing up just a week or so before we left. In the end, we had a good-sized group. I had hoped that a few more people might sign up at the last minute for this trip, but it was not to be. My plan went by the wayside.



I had envisioned completing a lot more work on the ground floor of the Ministry Hub. I thought we’d be putting up walls and assumed the framing would be wood. Instead, it was metal tracks and studs. Thankfully, Jefry was our teacher, patiently explaining the process as we exploded nails into the metal tracks, set studs on 16-inch centers, measured each for plumb, and connected them to the cement walls with three individually handmade brackets.

We completed one interior wall—the entrance and common room—running the length of the building minus the kitchen. I had imagined all four walls up, with an interior wall and doorway between the entrance and common room. It couldn’t happen.

Wednesday morning we visited three bateys to deliver food. We stopped first at Estela’s church in Batey 2 to help distribute the food, then our team split into two groups. Jacki, Mike, and I went to Batey 9. I had hoped to see Renata, the homeowner from April’s mission trip. But with the weather turning, instead of staying to help, we unloaded the Manna Packs and beans and climbed back into the truck bed to return to the Ministry Hub to continue prepping the walls. I missed not seeing Renata.

The plan for that afternoon was to work on the exterior walls, sealing them with waterproof paint before erecting any more metal framing. But before painting, the walls had to be

prepped—bleach-washed to remove any mold or mildew that had formed over the years—and then left to dry. We took care of washing the walls and headed back to camp. By that time, I felt we weren’t getting much accomplished. Tropical Storm Melissa was causing trouble. Would the walls dry overnight? If not, no painting—and no more framing.

That evening, Ricardo laid out a new plan for Thursday: we’d remove a slab of tile and cement where the old office had been, prep the exterior walls if they were dry, and ready them for paint.

Thursday morning we arrived to find the walls dry despite the night’s rain. The jackhammer made quick work of removing the slab and tile, and I scraped and swept the residue away before we started painting. As the paint went up, the gaps and holes in the cement block became obvious. We needed to fill them with mortar—but none was available. The government had shut down businesses because of Melissa, so the hardware stores were closed. That task would have to wait for Friday.

Driving back to the Ministry Hub after lunch at Jacki’s apartment, we passed several hardware stores—all closed, like most of the town. We headed back to camp.

That afternoon and evening were full of changed plans. You can’t change the weather, and you can’t wish Tropical Storm Melissa away. We were at least dry (mostly), and still had Friday. But that evening the government declared the area a red zone, which meant stores would stay closed and no supplies would be available. Best-made plans, reworked or not, all came to nothing.

Friday we returned to the primary mission of the Least of These Ministries—delivering food to two of the furthest bateys, Isabela and San Rafael. The folks there had few resources and couldn’t get to town to buy food, so the Manna Packs and beans we brought were vital. The roads were open, and we made the trip.

We delivered and served the food in Isabela, and then the truck continued on to San Rafael. I didn’t get to visit that one this time, but I remembered being there years ago—it was dry, with limited water and a brackish source that made daily life hard. I remembered curbed streets and a few scattered homes. I had hoped to compare that memory with today’s visit, but that will have to wait for another trip.

Looking back, I reckon God knew that a large team this time would have been a challenge. As God precedes us in all things, I have to say a small team of mostly patient, go-with-the-flow people was exactly what was needed—with the changing projects, the storm, and our dashed plans.

The primary mission was accomplished: people received food to get them through the storm.

One afternoon, while I was lamenting the lack of progress, Marty put things in perspective. He said, “The things we did would have had to be done by someone at some point, so what we did was all helpful.”

Maybe that was what God had planned all along.

## Winter Mission Team

**DESPITE THE SEEMINGLY** slow progress during our Fall Mission Team, much work was accomplished before and during our Winter Team in January.

Prior to the team's arrival, the local construction crew made or enlarged openings in the exterior block walls for the upstairs windows and installed custom-made security covers. Separate crews also finished the block wall that separates the lodging area from the warehouse and installed the main plumbing pipes.



The January 2026 Mission Team

The team of 20 arrived Saturday evening, with team members traveling from Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. After attending church Sunday morning, time was spent making preparations for the work that was before them. Then the group enjoyed an afternoon beach visit.

When work commenced on Monday morning, one group began the process to prepare and apply a waterproofing



Two bathrooms and one bunkroom in the Ministry Hub

## ...BUT MOMENTUM IS BUILDING!

sealer to the roof. Meanwhile, another group began working with our local drywall construction leader to build the framing for the walls that will separate the rooms in the upstairs lodging area. A third group focused on electrical work, first making some repairs to existing wiring and lighting, then beginning the process to run electrical cabling to and through the framing that had been built by another group. A fourth group set out to do the food distribution, followed by painting metal roof panels in the afternoon. Those panels would be used later in the week when team members helped to replace a roof in one of the bateys.



Team members lead a dance during Bible School in Algodón.

By end of day Friday, most of the upstairs framing had been completed, sealing of the roof was completed, electrical repairs had been made and much of the electrical wiring for the upstairs had been installed. The last crew remained at the Ministry Hub until early Friday evening to finish up some tasks. In addition, team members helped to replace a roof on a home in Batey Cuchilla, hosted a Bible School for kids in Batey Algodón, and participated in a family baseball activity in Batey 2!

*Visit our website ([leastofthesemin.org](http://leastofthesemin.org)) for more photos from the Winter Mission Team!*

### How YOU can help with the Ministry Hub:

- ⇒ We need an **ELECTRICIAN** who can lead the effort to continue the work accomplished in January! (Seriously... if this is you, please contact us!)
- ⇒ Join an upcoming team (future dates TBA).
- ⇒ Send a financial gift designated for Ministry Hub Project.

## BUILDING GOD'S KINGDOM

### Annual Banquet

SUNDAY, APRIL 12, 2026

4:00–7:00 PM

Come share a meal and fellowship with us as we celebrate how God is at work in the Dominican Republic communities where we serve!

**Online Registration Now Open!**

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

"...make disciples..."

—Matthew 28:19



Scan this code with your phone's camera to access information & registration on our website!

*Gifts given in Memory of:*

**Jane Anderson**

*by*

James & Otgo Anderson, Mel & Carol Arbaugh,  
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**Ann Hull**

*by* Peter & Sandra Dibbern, Robert & Traci Goodfellow,  
and Jason & Donna Myers

**Barbara & Richard Luckenbaugh**  
*by* Clay & Nancy Matthews

**Alice Philp** *by* Robert & Traci Goodfellow

**Craig, Amy, & Brad Stevens** *by* Ann Hull

**Debbie & Bob Stewart** *by* Joann Bond

**Suncrest UM Church Dominican Volunteers**  
*by* Mr. & Mrs. Forest Bowman

*If you would like to honor or remember a friend or loved one through a donation to The Least of These Ministries, simply provide the tribute information on the enclosed form, or send a note with your gift!*

*"Joy and Flavor" Continued from front page.*

Cuchilla resident Corina won First Place with her meal of MannaPack Mangú (Mangú is a traditional Dominican dish), fried egg, chicken in cream sauce, and orange juice. She was awarded a new cookware set of five pots and pans. Second Place was awarded to Karina for her meal of Moro of MannaPack Rice with black beans (Moro is another traditional Dominican dish), fried chicken, and green salad. Karina received a new pedestal fan.

All five participants received a gift bag of essential grocery items to restock their kitchens.

The activity was a great blessing. Through the competition, our ministry team was able to witness the genuine joy, love, and unity of the Cuchilla community. Every smile reflected the unconditional love of Jesus!

We remain committed to serving and building up these communities where God has placed us, sharing His love and hope to each person along the way.

[Visit our website \(leastofthesemin.org\)](http://leastofthesemin.org) for more photos from the competition!



**The contest judges (L-R):  
Francisco, Ricardo, Wilton**

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