

REV. WALTER RIES - DOMINICAN REPUBLIC  
\$52,500



*Palmar Aribba evangelism visits.  
Walter reading some scripture.*



*Walter Ries playing music at the beginning of a class. Music is an important part of Dominican culture.*



*Rev. Walter Ries*



*Walter Ries with vicars Willy Gaspar  
and Joseph de la Cruz.*



*Palmar Aribba Sunday School  
The older kids get further Bible  
instruction from the missionaries.*



## REV. WALTER RIES

The Dominican Republic shares the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, and this island is located between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. The land area, covered with rugged highlands and fertile valleys interspersed, is equal to twice the size of the state of New Hampshire. Home to 8.5 million people nationwide, the capital city of Santo Domingo was the first European-founded city in the Americas, and today 3.6 million people reside there. Possibly an additional 1 million Haitian illegal immigrants make their home in Dominican Republic. Nearly 85 percent of Dominicans are Hispanic, of Afro-Caribbean or Euro-American descent. Another 14 percent are French Creole speaking Haitians. Spanish is the official language of the land.

The island of Hispaniola was first explored and claimed for Spain by Columbus in 1492. Later, in 1697, Spain recognized French control of the western third of the island, and in 1804 Haiti itself became an independent nation. The Dominican Republic achieved its independence four separate times: twice from Spain in 1821 and 1865, from Haiti in 1844, and finally from the U.S. in 1924. In the years following, a repressive dictatorship ruled the land. It ended in 1961, but instability and civil war followed for five years. From 1966 democratic governments served the nation, but they were predominately corrupt and left many in society disenfranchised. Since 1996, regular competitive elections have begun to stabilize the political system.

Economically, the Dominican Republic has had one of the fastest growth rates in the hemisphere over the past decade. The growth of the early 1970's was followed by the devastating effects of world recessions, an over-sized bureaucracy, and wide-spread corruption. Later in the 1990's, improvements came with light industry, tourism, and regional free trade zones. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth from 1998 to 2000 was seven percent. Today, there is marked income inequality, as 40 percent of people live in deep poverty, unemployment is near 28 percent, and the average annual income per person is \$1,600, or six percent of the U.S. average. The Dominican Republic also serves as a site for money-laundering activities and as a narcotics transshipment point.

Catholicism is the state religion and the church holds particular privileges and clout throughout the Dominican Republic. There is freedom of religion, with basic rights for non-Catholics. Ninety-five percent of the Dominican population is Roman Catholic, 2.5 percent describe themselves as non-religious or atheist, and 2.2 percent are spiritists. In the face of national corruption and crime, the development of Christian ethics is needed for Christian institutions in society. Leadership for the churches is a constant challenge, as many of the gifted and successful Dominicans emigrate to Puerto Rico and the U.S. People are also needed to serve in the poorer, rural areas and to the under-class.

LCMS World Mission began work in the Dominican Republic in 2004 in partnership with other LCMS groups. This unique partnership strives to plant the first congregation of a new church and also address the plight of people there with developmental disabilities. This is an example of a variety of people coming together in partnership to share the Gospel message and to help improve some terrible, inhumane conditions.

LCMS World Mission, LCMS World Relief and Human Care, Bethesda Lutheran Homes and Services, Inc., and the Central American Lutheran Mission Society (CALMS) signed a partnership agreement in the fall of 2004 and have placed both a missionary and an outreach worker in the Dominican Republic.

The missionary is the first posted by LCMS World Mission in that Caribbean country.

St. Michael Lutheran Church, an LCMS congregation in Fort Myers, Fla., raised awareness of the needs in the Dominican Republic when members began mission trips to their Dominican sister city, Santiago, several years ago. Troubled by the dismal lack of services for people with developmental disabilities, St. Michael started financial and volunteer support for the Home of New Hope—a small, privately funded residential care facility.

Jeff Dinkel, chairman of St. Michael's Board of Missions, who has made mission trips to the Dominican Republic since 1999, shared media reports of children with developmental disabilities locked in rooms and chained to trees while their parents were at work. They also related accounts of people with developmental disabilities living behind bars and in cages.

According to the staff of Bethesda, an LCMS recognized service organization that serves people with developmental disabilities and their families, the neglect takes place because the people have no knowledge of better ways to handle situations.

Bethesda began providing training and resources for the Home of New Hope after a request from St. Michael. Now, that effort is expanding because of the four-pronged partnership.

In addition to the Home of New Hope project, the partners are working with the Genesis School, a Christian elementary school in Santiago. The students are children who otherwise would not attend school, because many of the students lack a required birth certificate. There is also a Lutheran school, which does some social work focused on people with disabilities. They connect the school's ministry with the church, and great missionary opportunities result.

The Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB) partners with LCMS World Mission in sending a missionary to the Dominican Republic. Brazilian Rev. Walter Ries and his wife, Ana, live in Santiago, Dominican Republic and serve in several capacities on the mission field. In light of the recent earthquake crisis in Haiti, he is indispensable. Rev. Ries also works in Palmar Arriba and teaches confirmation, theological courses, and serves as pastor in the congregations until a national leader can be trained. He is currently training two Dominican vicars to serve in the national church in the years to come.

Even though the Lutheran church is new to the country, there are many evangelistic opportunities because the Dominican people are interested in knowing more about the church. Some of the most interested people are already influential leaders in their communities.

Your partnership with LCMS World Mission and the Lutheran Church of Brazil will break new ground in evangelistic outreach in the Dominican Republic and plant the seeds of the Gospel among people who have never heard it before.

Funding will be used for:

Funding for this project will provide support for Pastor Ries and his wife as they minister to the people of the Dominican Republic and train leaders who will serve in the national church in the years to come.

Prayer needs:

- Pray for the theological education ministry that Rev. Ries is leading. Ask the Lord to strengthen the faith and understanding of those who are training to become pastors, as well as for those who are studying for confirmation in the developing Lutheran faith communities.
- Pray for the two vicars who are studying for full-time pastoral ministry and serving in their communities, Willy Gaspar and Joseph de la Cruz. Ask the Lord to bless their hands-on experience during their vicarage and to continue to grant them peace and assurance that He has called them to serve as shepherds. Pray also for Ricardo Santos, who is just beginning his pastoral studies.
- Pray for the congregation in Santo Domingo. The congregation is changing its place of worship to meet in Vicar Joseph's home. They will reach out to the community where he lives and continue with theological education classes there as well.