



Rennae de Freitas calls a community to Christ.



# Dominican Republic

*From here to the world*

By Tim Schirman

Digging into a plate of rice and beans and fried plantains, I'm grinning like a kid with a Happy Meal. On the island of Hispaniola people call this peasant food. But my friends, missionaries Nelson and Rennae de Freitas, know these are some of my favorite dishes. I grew up on this island years ago.

The Dominican Republic, where the de Freitases live and minister, takes up the eastern two-thirds of Hispaniola; Haiti takes up the other one-third. I spent most of my formative years in Haiti as a missionary kid, but the Dominican Republic is close enough that I feel right at home.

While we are eating, the de Freitases fill me in on the progress of their ministry, and we make plans for the photography I hope to shoot on this trip. As they talk, I silently try to figure out when I will have time to charge my camera batteries and sleep. But I can't complain. I knew what I was getting into when I chose to come. I met the de Freitases on a prior filming trip more than a decade ago, and I know ministry is their full-time passion.

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A young boy's interest is captured by a street outreach.



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### Ministry through mentoring

The slow crawl of traffic through Santo Domingo, the nation's capital, is an amusing contrast to the flurry of activity inside the de Freitases' Speed the Light truck. Beside me, Nelson is talking on a cell phone with a ministry team leader as they coordinate an evangelistic event to be held later this afternoon. Behind me, Rennae is talking on a cell phone with a national pastor, working out logistics of another outreach tomorrow. Listening, I'm amazed at how many people are involved in this ministry.

Closing his cell phone, Nelson explains, "When Rennae and I first arrived, we traveled to different locations on the island to conduct children's crusades and minister in local churches. Soon we realized the best use of our time was to invest in others."

The de Freitases began discipling Dominicans and training them to work with children and lead them to Christ. Now they work alongside those they have trained.

"Although we continue to do evangelistic outreaches," Nelson

says, “we’re also reaching people for Christ through these trained workers.”

As Nelson grabs another call, I think back over the years and how the de Freitases have implemented their philosophy of mentoring in the Dominican Republic. As a result they are bearing extraordinary fruit in ministry.

The mentoring process is a core value of effective missions work. “Ultimately, this ministry has nothing to do with Nelson and me,” says Rennae. “It has everything to do with the national church here. We’re raising up leaders to take this ministry and go. They are part of a generation that believes in children’s ministry, youth ministry and missions outreach.”

### **The team in action**

As we drive up to a street-side outreach already in progress, I see about 100 people gathered on the street. They are standing directly in front of the ministry “warriors,” a team of believers who sing and preach about the message of salvation.

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Nelson de Freitas mentors future missionaries.



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The music is loud and their ministry definitely has captured the attention of almost everyone in the neighborhood. Looking at the surrounding houses, I see entire families watching from balconies. Grandmas and children peer from windows.

“We want to create an environment in which we can hit people with the gospel message,” Nelson explains. “We’re trying to knock down all the barriers or resistance people often put up when someone comes in with a typical evangelical campaign. We like to build relationships with people in the crowd while working alongside the pastor of the local church. That way, a congregation is ready to follow up on those who accept Christ.”

The connection with a church is almost literal at this event. The local Assemblies of God church is directly across the street, and the pastor is participating in the outreach.

I ask Rennae why she and Nelson place so much emphasis on the connection to a local church.

“If the evangelistic event is not tied to a local church,” she says, “then we’re just scattering seed. We don’t know if those who come to Christ will grow in their faith and be disciplined. For that to happen, it’s

absolutely necessary for every event to be tied to a pastor and a local church.”

### **Building the church**

Sunday is my favorite day of every trip. As a missions videographer, my goal is to shoot video or photography in as many church services as I can. I go to the earliest service I can find and then drive quickly to the next one. It’s always a tight schedule, and for my plan to work I must stick to it closely.

Today, I have visited two services when Nelson suggests stopping at a church that isn’t on my schedule. I’m tempted to say, “Let’s skip it.” But later, as I watch an incredible move of God take place, I’m glad we came. I can’t see tongues of fire, but I think I can feel them. As Nelson and Rennae lay hands on people gathered at the front of the packed church and pray for them, God’s presence is indisputable.

The ministry I see and film in the Dominican Republic is not about building large churches or boasting about the numbers in attendance. It

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This church is one of many that are spiritual centers of a unique move of God.



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is about building powerful spiritual centers where people are seeking the move of God that is needed on this island and throughout the world.

What the de Freitas hope to do in the Dominican Republic is accelerate the growth and maturity of a national church. This process leads naturally to the next stage of growth — gaining a vision for world missions.

### **Caribbean Institute for Missions Advancement**

On my last day in Santo Domingo, I walk the grounds where the new Caribbean Institute for Missions Advancement is being built. As I think about its purpose as a place to train missionaries, I remember Maria\* and her husband.

In 2004 I traveled to a Central Eurasian country to photograph and record stories of missionaries working there. To my surprise, I met Maria and her husband from Latin America — a significant part of the team.

After talking to them about their work in that sensitive nation, I asked Maria if she had a message to direct to the church in Latin

America. In rapid-fire Spanish, she talked about the call of God. Her words were passionate (and convicting).

“The call of God is for EVERYONE to make disciples everywhere,” she said. “There are no exceptions, rich or poor.”

While the idea of Third World missions was not new to me, that was the first time I personally had seen it in action in such an effective and committed way. I felt I was witnessing the beginning of a new era in missions.

The Caribbean Institute for Missions Advancement is being built in the hills above Santo Domingo on property acquired through a series of miracles.

Nelson explains the need for this facility. “For so long Latin America has been a place where missionaries have gone, but now the church has come full circle. The challenge to Latin America is to be a *sending* agency as well. The DNA of the Assemblies of God, which has been a missions sending agency since its beginning, is taking hold in many Latin American countries, including the Dominican Republic. We feel our primary role here is to see Dominicans sent as missionaries around the world.”

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Spirit-filled services like this one are birthing a missions heart in Dominican believers.



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As I walk across the property with Rennae, she explains why they have taken on this overwhelming project. “We’re absolutely passionate about seeing a missionary generation raised up in the Dominican Republic. God didn’t call only Americans to fulfill the Great Commission. He meant for every Christian to go into all the world and preach the gospel. Dominicans can go to places where Americans can’t go. Many who have endured suffering and poverty can cope with more difficult living conditions. It is so exciting to see God raising up a new generation of young people who want to respond to that call.”

As I board the plane to head home to the States, I remember the apostle Peter’s instruction that God is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9). The challenge of reaching a lost world is big enough to include everyone. Surely the idea of sending missionaries from every nation to every nation was part of God’s plan all along. **tpe**

\*Not her real name.

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