



# THE DOMINICAN DEVELOPMENT GROUP

COMPANIONS IN MISSION

## Diocese of Southwest Florida Episcopal Church Women Santo Tomás Children's Bible Study & Nutrition Program



**Santo Tomás Children's Nutrition Center**

Florida decided to support the Santo Tomás Children's Nutrition Program at the rate of \$200 per month, and support started coming in. The first \$2000 was transferred in May of 2011. That support has continued and allowed the program to expand. This Support has been enhanced through ECW donation collection programs collecting much needed school supplies and undergarments. The program has even received support from other Diocesan ECWs, Rotary and individuals who have visited or heard about the program.

Concurrently, the Venice Deanery joined with the DR Diocese to build a new community building adjacent to Santo Tomás church that would house Santo Tomás Children's Nutrition Program. The building was finished in 2012 with special contributions from the ECW, Venice Deanery, and UTO.

**Background:** The Santo Tomás Children's Bible Study and Nutrition Program in Gautier began as a grassroots effort by the church women of Santo Tomás Episcopal Church. On their own and without any outside support in 2009 on Saturdays they began holding a mid-morning Bible study for younger children and providing a hot noon meal for those who attended. The women cooked the food in their kitchens. This grew such that by March of 2011 they were serving 50 to 60 children every Saturday.

In 2011 the ECW of Southwest



**The women with some of the children on a Saturday morning.**





**Local ladies preparing the Saturday meal.**

community first, before the use of the donated funds. This is good, for it means that the outside funding has not taken the program “ownership” away from the women. This being the case, Fr. Sandino was authorized to use some of the funds to purchase cooking utensils, plates, cups, silverware, and other kitchen items, as well as assist other extremely needy persons with food needs. Fr. Sandino reports that he used some money to pay for food costs for two elderly and one disabled community members. The Santo Tomás program is known around the diocese and many other communities aspire to start similar programs to serve the needy in their communities.

**Gautier** is a small, rural village just outside of the Santo Domingo metropolitan area. Unemployment is very high. To find work, villagers commute via public transportation to work in the tourist hotels or as domestics in Boca Chica. Others travel the 30 miles or so into Santo Domingo for similar work, or to the industrial zone on the way into Santo Domingo to work in factories along the main highway. Others find employment in odd jobs or construction. A few still work part-time as sugar cane cutters during the season. Recently a new cement factory has opened in the area and has helped the unemployment in the community.



The Children’s Nutrition Program has increased the number of children it serves feeding some 95-120 children each Saturday. A new “Homework Helper” program provides a supervised study hall every afternoon for children to work on their homework. In November of 2015 because of several very generous donations, Fr. Sandino was able to install a computer lab in the Santo Tomás building. Both of these programs use a similar grass roots approach using local resources and volunteers with outside support. Many of these volunteers are teachers from the local public school who recognized the need for additional educational support for these children.

Priest in charge, Fr. Sandino Sánchez says the project still uses the donations of the

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