

# OPEN HANDS

Christ-Centered Economic Opportunities for the Poor



If there be among you a poor man... thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need. DEUTERONOMY 15:7-8

## OPEN HANDS NEW DEVELOPMENTS

*Merle Burkholder*

There are some exciting new developments planned in 2015 for *Open Hands*.

First, we are pleased to welcome Darin Hershberger from LaGrange, Indiana to our staff team. Darin will be joining the *Open Hands* staff team in February of 2015. Darin has previous mission experience in Mexico and Central America. He is fluent in Spanish, which will be a tremendous asset to the work of *Open Hands*.

Secondly, we are pleased to announce that the *Open Hands* board has approved

the beginning of a new savings group program in Guatemala. This program will be a partnership between *Open Hands* and Mennonite Air Missions. Lyndon Swarey and Darin Hershberger will travel to Guatemala from March 16 – 23 to launch the program there. They will hire a Guatemalan facilitator and train him to form savings groups. We will begin with savings groups in the Quiche and the Oratorio areas.

Thirdly, the *Open Hands* board has also approved the beginning of a savings group program in Mexico. This program will be a partnership between *Open Hands* and *DestiNATIONS International*. The savings group program will be located in Choix, Mexico. Lyndon Swarey and Darin Hershberger will be in Mexico from April 13 – 20 to launch this program. We will begin savings groups in both the

Choix and San Pedro areas of Mexico.

Lastly, the savings group program in Hyderabad, India was begun in July of 2014. In 2015 we hope to see growth and maturity in this program. This program is being operated in partnership with Good Life Ministries. We are pleased to have six Indian staff working in the program. They are currently forming groups and providing training to the group leaders. We expect to see major growth in this program in 2015.

Thank you for your support for *Open Hands*. We are pleased to provide Christ-Centered economic opportunities for the poor. May God bless you for your prayer support and your financial gifts.

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*A New Member* ◆ *Beginnings in Guatemala and Mexico* ◆ *Growth in India*



## REFLECTIONS AND HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

Lyndon Swarey

2014 is rapidly drawing to a close. It seems as if just a short time ago it was January 2014, and I was getting ready to go back to Haiti. For me, this year has been busy with feasibility studies in Guatemala and Mexico and program visits to Kenya and India. In August, I returned to the states for about 5 months to take another semester of college.

Spending between two and three weeks in India was a highlight for me. I had been to India in 2007, and it felt

good to go back again even though it was to a different place. The savings program in India is the biggest program that *Open Hands* has, and it was a blessing for me to spend time with the staff. One of the things that stands out to me about the savings program in India is how it has been used as a ministry tool, and savings groups have become a place where group members can find spiritual help. I asked some of the members what the biggest impact was that the savings group has had on their lives. Usually, they would mention how the group has helped them grow spiritually. Also, some of the members were able to start small business.

While I was in India, I stayed with Lanka and his wife. They treated me as one of their family members, which included being a part of a midnight

birthday party, eating out together and going shopping. I also tried eating food with my hands, Indian-style. This usually took me longer to eat. I left India earlier than what I had planned due to my visa expiring and not being able to get it renewed.

In July, Merle and I traveled to Kenya. I arrived a few days before he did and was able to go to the Masai Mara. I spent a wonderful time out on the Masai Mara and I was able to observe lions, cheetahs, leopards and other animals in God's creation that I do not see very often. The Masai Mara trip was one of the highlights on this trip. Another highlight was spending time with the two facilitators in a joint meeting and listening to them share about how savings groups have impacted members as well as hearing about how they would like to see the program grow in the future. I hope that we can implement some their ideas and visions they shared. It was the first time that all of us were together, and I felt that we were able to bond as a team.

I want to thank all of you who read this newsletter and pray for the work of *Open Hands* and the staff. Also you can pray that God would give us wisdom as we make plans for 2015, and for the savings programs that will be started next year. It is my desire that God's name would be lifted up and people's lives would be changed for eternity in 2015. ♦♦♦



In July, Lyndon Swarey and Merle Burkholder met with Ken and Thomas, the two facilitators from Kenya. They conducted a program review and made plans for the next several years of the savings group program in Kenya.





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## MICRO-BUSINESS CURRICULUM

*Joe Kuepfer*

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In August of this year, we introduced the first booklet of the *Open Hands* micro-business curriculum into our Haiti program. After all the hard work by the development committee and translators, it is exciting to see it being rolled out. This curriculum is an important step in *Open Hands'* mission of providing Christ-centered economic development for the poor. It is a tool crafted with the intent of giving knowledge as a way to empower people to work with their hands in order to provide for themselves and others. We believe that this curriculum will be a vital part of giving group members the necessary tools to work their way out of poverty.

This micro-business curriculum is targeted toward those who would like to start a small business, as well as those who are wishing to improve their current business. In Haiti, similar to other developing countries, most people are not able to find formal employment. Many need to rely on farming and small business as a way to survive.

The curriculum is composed of 5 booklets, two of which are completed and the third is currently being

developed. The first booklet, "Planning a Business" is the booklet that we have been working to teach in the savings groups here in Haiti. It teaches what good reasons are to have a business, how to choose a business that fits the skills and interests of the person planning the business, and how to identify the needs for specific goods and services in a community. It also provides teaching on seeking God's will, and how to choose a good location. In the second half of the booklet, a simple budget is introduced and explained. This is a new concept for most people here, but using a budget while planning a business is important in order to forecast profitability. It also gives a picture of which expenses could

potentially be reduced. The curriculum contains a lot of scripture and teaches from a Biblical perspective. The last chapter in this booklet focuses on how character can help or hurt a business.

In Haiti, there are currently around 200 savings groups. We are introducing this curriculum into groups which have already finished teaching another document that was written by The Chalmers Center for Economic Development. This other document focuses on teaching principles and Biblical truths that aid members to have strong, functional savings groups. Once a group finishes this Chalmers curriculum, we feel they are ready for the business curriculum. Our current



Jean Marc teaches the *Open Hands* business curriculum in Haiti. The material assists the participants in planning a new business start up. It also teaches effective business management skills.

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method for rolling out the business curriculum is for the **Open Hands** teacher, Jean Marc, to teach the first lesson directly to the group as a form of introduction. After that, if the group is still interested, we ask the group leaders to send three capable members to a training where we give them the tools to deliver the rest of the lessons to the others in their group. So far, all of the groups that have been introduced to the curriculum have been interested in continuing to study it. Toward the end of September, we did a training for 21 group teachers. Now we are in the process of introducing the curriculum to new groups. Jean Marc also has the

task of visiting the groups who have received the training of teachers, in order to evaluate how well the teachers are doing, and to provide support and correction as needed. The groups seem to be doing well with teaching the booklet on their own.

Thank you for your interest in this work. We ask for prayer that this curriculum would impact many people in a positive way, drawing them to renewed relationships with God, others, themselves, and creation. Our hope is that this curriculum will be an integral part of assisting many out of poverty as they create jobs for themselves and provide necessary goods and services to



others in their communities. Also, please pray for the ongoing development process of the remaining booklets in this series. It is exciting to see the progress, but there is still a lot of work to be done. Your partnership with us in this Kingdom work is truly appreciated. ♦♦♦

## OPPORTUNITY TO SUPPORT THE WORK...

**Open Hands** supports conservative Anabaptist mission work by providing a Christ-based curriculum, financial teaching, and savings groups. While **Open Hands** does not provide money for loans, there are expenses for curriculum, paying the facilitators, and overseeing the program. If you endorse the work and vision of **Open Hands**, we invite you to partner with us. Your gift will help us expand the program and reach more people. Contributions are tax-deductible. Please make your check payable to **Open Hands**.

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