

TODEE PRESBYTERIAN MISSION SHIPMENT – 2011

(We Have to Do What?)

by Dick Szymanski & Mary van Son

The Bush Hill Church Community collected and shipped goods to the Todee Mission School in 2007 and 2009.

In 2007, Jay Belding, a member of Doylestown Presbyterian Church, PA, and the owner of a packing and shipping business, did the bulk of the work with his staff; and Bush Hill collected items, brought them to Pennsylvania, and handled the paperwork.

In 2009, we did the whole job ourselves and survived to take on the task another day.

In 2010, Dick Szymanski worked with St. Andrew's Presbyterian in Purcellville, handling the paperwork for the medical supply shipment that accompanied their pastor, Dave Milam, and his team to Todee to assess the needs of the school and do training for teachers and provide expertise in agricultural development, as well as assess the health and nutrition needs of the students, which are considerable.

International shipping is not a task to be undertaken by the naïve and faint hearted! But we were ready for the task ... sort of! We had the guidance and support of the Holy Spirit, but we weren't expecting the bonus lessons in patience and perseverance we apparently also needed to learn.

Donated items flowed in! Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, VA was happy to have us haul away mattresses, beds, dressers, dorm desks and chairs, and even three oak wardrobes they no longer used. St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School in Alexandria, so generous with donations of classroom furniture in 2009, again donated furniture. BHPC member, Anne Hedley, on staff there, spread the word and the staff did a thorough year-end clear out into boxes for us to send to Todee. We never dreamed to have such a collection of textbooks, workbooks, art supplies, writing implements, paper, math teaching tools, and teachers' instructional materials—even a sewing machine! Good thing Anne's van holds a lot!

The group from St. Andrew's Church packed up medical supplies, school supplies, rain gear, shoes, clothing, and agricultural tools, as well as new school desks, still boxes. Pastor Milam and his congregation's connections with the Rotary Club in the area, as well as Loudon County schools and hospital, secured items and financial support for shipping. They are an invaluable ally in this cause.

And ... as always, our Bush Hill family poured out their support, and that support was packed into boxes provided by our very own Bush Hill "box lady," Brenda Dolan! Week after week the Todee donation box in the narthex was filled to overflowing. We found sports equipment, including a dozen new soccer balls from the Rudebusches and a brand new volleyball set given by the Schumachers in memory of Sandy's uncle. There were lots of school supplies, teaching materials, games, shoes, clothing, office supplies, furniture, mattresses, several beds, bedding, hand garden tools, book shelves, kitchen items, towels, desks, paper, several dressers; and for fear of forgetting something, there is a copy of the inventory list on the Todee table in the corner of the narthex, should anyone care to peruse it.



Critical was the loan of pick-up trucks by Kent Goodrich and Greg Scott for hauling all this "stuff" to and fro. An anonymous donor covered costs for truck rental to haul things from Purcellville, St. Stephen's & St. Agnes, and Mary Baldwin College to our storage units in Kingstowne.

When all was collected, it wasn't going anywhere without the financial donations for shipping. The folks in Purcellville kicked in, Betsy Kurtz's church in Missouri nearly doubled the funds we had available, and Bush Hill Church members donated enough to make it all happen. We were packed and ready to roll!

Oh yes ... the lessons of patience and perseverance were just beginning. It must have been confusing for the congregation. We planned to load the container on July 17. Then, we couldn't. Maybe the next Saturday? Nope. The rules of the game had changed since 2009. *Now* we needed to have each item coded to satisfy regulations for goods even touching the water in a European Union port—6-digit codes painstakingly pried from a website with guidance from Jacqueline den Otter. Ready to go? Nope.

This time an inspection of the goods as they were being packed was required. This meant we had to have a more exact count of how many of each item were in the boxes of mixed goods. We had to have expiration dates for over-the-counter medications, and countless confused communications and mysterious numbers were required by folks in Houston who never answer their phones and take a lot of time off! The word “BIVAC,” the name of the inspection company we were forced to deal with, will forever elicit instant head pain!



After battling via phone and e-mail all day on August 2nd, we were blessed with the assignment of an angel of a man to inspect our loading on August 4th! Mr. John Aldredge did his preliminary inspection at 9:00 AM; and when the container arrived at 10:00 AM, we had a big crew gathering to do the job under cloudy skies and intolerable temperatures, bolstered by the coffee and goodies provided by Bridget Smiley. Bush Hill Church has a lot of collective muscle!

But without the guidance of “super packer,” Kirk Szymanski (Dick's nephew), our container would never have held as much, been loaded as fast, or been packed tightly enough to prevent the blender effect on the high seas. Kirk even brought along his two children, Heather and John, to help.

As always, we have so much to be thankful for! The container is on its way and should arrive by mid-September. We have to extend a huge “THANK YOU” to everyone who donated, to Dick Szymanski's “schlepping team”: Gary Waitschies and John Watson; and to the huge group that rearranged their lives at the last minute to load 540 pieces into a container in under 5 hours: Andrea Parker and Gary Waitschies; Neil Sampson; Bridget, Laura, & Sean Smiley; Glenn Shannon; Carl Rush; Jacqueline den Otter; Mike Broderick; Austin and Alexander Bring; Tom, Carl, and George Rudebusch; Neil Jacob; Ken, Trevor, and Cayman Hatton; Paul and Ian van Son; Bill Knight; and Andrew and Ian Samuelson. If anyone has been omitted, please forgive us and chalk it up to brain overload, not lack of appreciation!

God is good. He presented us with an important challenge, and we did our best to accomplish it. I am sure He is smiling on the ship that is carrying our donations, love, and prayers to Todee!

