

# Divine intervention

By Peter Chakerian\*

**P**astor Ray Ake of **Henrietta United Methodist Church** (Firelands District) in Amherst and Pryde Bass of **Werner United Methodist Church** (North Coast District) in Cleveland had a chance meeting last fall at a People Reaching People training day.

The result? The duo came to a working relationship epiphany: a Farmer-To-Farmer ministry project.

What if like-minded farmers, parishioners and residents in the East Ohio Conference were to recondition under-utilized or discarded farm equipment – and then donate them to a farm family on the other side of the planet in Liberia?

What if those individuals also collected seeds, tools, implements and the like until there was an entire shipping container full of beneficial farming provisions?

What if these items “rode for free across the ocean in the ships of Firestone Natural Rubber Co,” which usually return to Liberia empty before collecting another load of raw rubber?

What if an idea hatched between two men could change the course of an entire community in the African republic? And, in the process help to put behind struggles complicated by a 13-year-long devastating civil war?

“I’m convinced that Pastor Ray and I met by arrangement of God that day,” says Bass, a Liberian who is active at Werner UMC.

“I’m always trying to figure out ways to help people back in Liberia - the civil war over there devastated the country - and find new ways to assist them and give them hope based on the 3C’s Initiative [Churches, Clinics and Classrooms],” Bass said.

“This idea seemed like a perfect way to do it, to move people forward, but I was stuck and didn’t know how to move. I rely on God to guide me and that’s how I met Pastor Ray.”



“Pryde was sharing how back home in Liberia with subsistence farming and agriculture they are struggling to cultivate the land by hoe or machete and without electricity,” Ake said.

“The economy there is devastated, but farmers (here) have big hearts and know what it’s like when crops don’t come in.

“In my area, most farms are 1,000-acre grain or specialty niche farms so the possibility of these local farmers and church members having equipment they may never use again was there,” Ake said. “If it’s just sitting in a shed and not appropriate for current crops, or for Ohio, why not donate it?”

Ake and Bass met with a group of farmers and they “drove him [Pryde] nuts asking questions about what was needed,” Ake said with a laugh. “They wanted specifics about farming, climate, crops, what the land and soil was like ... basically technical questions that only farmers would understand!”

Since last fall, Ake and Bass have been gathering equipment, seeds, implements and other items – including an old Ford 400 tractor that is being refurbished. The hope is that crops resulting from the donations will meet the needs of the local community, “but can be sold at market and help bring in income for residents, enabling the people to address the basic needs for themselves,” Ake said.

The pair also located a 20-foot ocean-going shipping container, which will hold the tractor and all the items. “The hope is it could be a storage shed or garage for repairing things ... a resource for the com-

munity once the goods are delivered.”

Ake and Bass are hoping their plan to donate modernized farming equipment will spread to other churches, as well as transform the everyday lives of the people of the St John’s River District of Liberia. The district is home to St. John United Methodist Church – founded in 1895 by Connecticut native Alexander Harris.

The duo also is working, as part of its endeavor, to aid St. John UMC. The place of worship is in desperate need of repair and updating and its leader is in need of assistance in spreading the gospel.

“The pastor in Harrisburg walks three and a half hours to preach and does so in both directions,” Ake said.

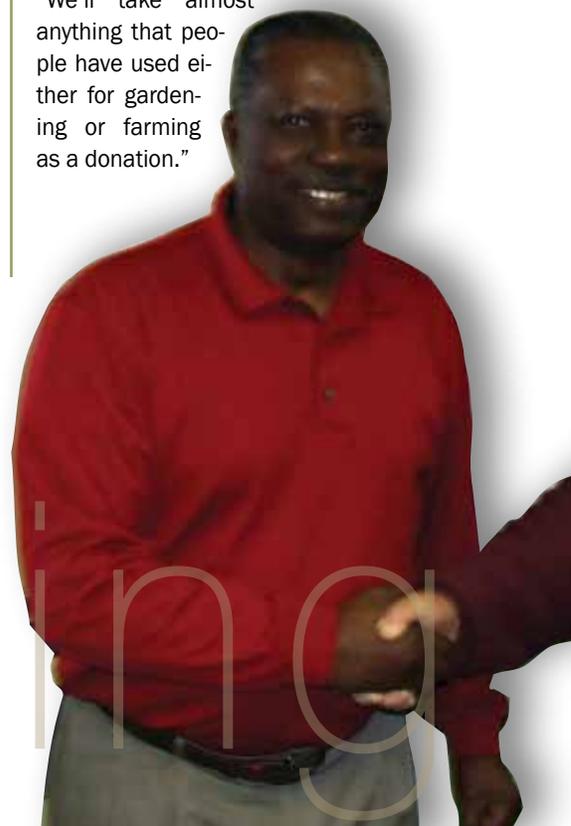
“Here’s a man walking seven hours to do this. We have a commitment for a simple little gas scooter, so he can ride back and forth to church and maintain his commitment. Helping him with transportation, knowing his (current) means of travel, seemed like an important commitment for us as well,” Ake added.

“That’s always the concept,” Bass said. “Talking about rethinking church, this is rethinking missions, empowering people to help themselves. Helping is empowering. We’re gonna work night and day to help give those people some hope.”

Are items still being collected?

“Yes,” says Ake, unequivocally.

“We’ll take almost anything that people have used either for gardening or farming as a donation.”





## Appealing to inner city youth

By Peter Chakerian

The Farmer-to-Farmer ministry program is only the beginning of the work and Good News being spread by **Werner United Methodist Church** (North Coast District).

The Cleveland-based church, led by Rev. Dogba Bass\*\*, believes that children are the future. To that end, Bass and the church are spreading the gospel throughout the inner city by mentoring students on the athletic field and working with them in the classroom to help improve scholastics.

Werner UMC has teamed over the last several years with neighboring Cleveland schools, introducing kids to soccer, basketball, and track and field.

"We've had about 100 kids come through our [soccer] program, which works with fourth- and fifth- graders," says Bass.

"We don't have a gym, so we use the gyms or cafeterias of the schools, help teach them the game and teamwork, buy them uniforms with funds from our church and from small grants we have written, and we've involved them in the Nothing But Nets soccer and basketball program in Akron and Green."

Werner UMC has taken local children to play in soccer tournaments in Euclid and Akron, and helped them prepare on the track to qualify for the national Hershey Track and

Field race held each August in Hershey, PA.

"We want to sponsor

*Pryde Bass, Werner UMC and Pastor Ray Ake, Henrietta UMC pair to create the Farmer-to-Farmer ministry program.*



the local races as a first level of competition and help inspire the winners to move on to the state race in Columbus in July, then on to Hershey," Bass says.

"After four years of sponsoring the local race, it's a whole lot bigger this year – we now have the backing and support of the City of Cleveland Parks & Recreation Department, so it should be a bigger race and hopefully will attract some of the stronger jumpers and throwers. We're the only church [regionally] that does something like this on the sports side."

Winners from the Columbus race get an all-expense paid trip to run the Hershey race. "We have not had anyone win at that level to qualify, but we're working on it," Bass says.

In terms of scholastics, Bass is working with local schools to try to get kids feeling good about education and to strive for excellence.

"In that regard, we've written small grants to help put together an Academic Challenge [game show program] for local cable access television," Bass says.

"The program puts kids on teams and helps them work through questions that – as the basis for

the quiz – is information found on the Ohio Achievement Assessment [OAA] and Ohio Graduation Test [OGT/OGE]."

"Werner UMC resources help tutor the students, with the reward of being on a pilot show being produced by Cuyahoga Community College," Bass said. What's the grand prize?

"The person in each grade level who answers the most questions will win a mini laptop, purchased with a grant from the Neighborhood Connections local arm of The Cleveland Foundation," Bass said. "The grant really allows us to do whatever it takes to get kids excited about learning."

"Kids sometimes shy away from being sports stars and gravitate toward academics, but those that do are sometimes teased by other kids – called names like 'weird' and 'bookworm.' We're trying to say, 'it's smart to be smart.' Even if no one else is in their corner, we are."



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*\*\*Rev. Dogba Bass and Pryde Bass of Werner UMC are brothers.*

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