



A team of 13 youth missionaries from Covenant United Methodist Church in Port Orange, Florida left Orlando on June 4th headed for Fiji via Los Angeles. South of the equator and just west of the International Date Line, Fiji is a cluster of charming tropical islands located in the Pacific Ocean. Their mission was to do repair work at a Methodist Boy's School in Navusa.

After a long flight and many time changes, the team arrived in Nadi, Fiji.

Once on the ground and picked up by the hosts for their 5-hour drive to the other side of the island, the team learned that the whole mission and location of the mission had changed. At all mission training sessions we talk about the "gift" of being flexible. This mission, this time...all the training we conducted paid off. We dropped expectations and picked up flexibility.

The new mission was conducting a computer class, painting, and putting on a new metal roof at the principal's home at the Young People's Department in Davuilevu. This is a school that trains future pastors. The word Davuilevu means conch shell. The conch shell was used in times past to call the people together. The students at Davuilevu were being trained to be God's "conch shell", to call His people to Him. A very fitting title.

Many who have been on mission already know that it is a fallacy to think missions are about whom "we" help, rather, it is about our own growth and walk with Christ. This mission was no different. To talk strictly about the project would do disservice to what God's plans and teachings ultimately were. So, leave it to say, we did "project work" but the true richness and blessing of this mission came from the people we worked for and with. Most acutely, the people were our teachers. Their manner, their walk with Christ, their amazing capability to serve and quietly serve with no fanfare, no announcements, no recognition, was truly a lesson in serventhood. It was not unusual for the people at Davuilevu to see a need one of us may have had and just take care of it. There was not much they allowed us to do in our lodging area. They were there for us at every turn to include taking bags to carry for us when we would walk into town for supplies. Washing dishes and meal clean-up was another area of serventhood. After the first day, we realized that we couldn't even "scratch a chair" on the

floor pulling away from the table without a head or two popping in to clear the table and clean-up. It became an unstated but fun mutual game to see how far we could get with the clean up before they realized what we were doing. If they saw us washing our clothes in the primitive sink – they would come right over and say "I do it, I do." There was no arguing and no arguing was expected.

One of the most poignant times was during a service we were invited in one of the villages. We were ushered into the back of a simple four walled, one room church. As custom we took off our shoes. It was raining outside and we left our shoes out there because there was no room inside the door. We were seated behind the lace-covered pulpit and throughout the course of the service; I turned to look towards the door where we were ushered in. I was so humbled to see that all our shoes were lovingly placed inside the door away from the pounding rain. Their shoes had been moved outside. Once the service was over, we were taken out the front door to shake hands with the congregation. There was a long line of wonderful well-wisher, filled with so much gratitude that we were there to "help them." As the long line dwindled, I stood there in my bare feet and looked across the cement footpath to see all our shoes neatly and perfectly lined up, each pair together awaiting their owners. This may seem a simple gesture (putting our shoes inside and lining them up for us) but it spoke volumes of their character. We never saw who did it, no mentions of names were made, and no one ever said it even took place. They just did it. When we commented on how humble, wonderful, and servant-like the Fijians were, one old woman told us that it was God's gift to the people of Fiji. It is how God made them. She told us that it is just who they are and they don't think twice about serving others. It is just what is. Upon thanking one of them for helping, they wouldn't make fanfare; they would just say "Its okay, its okay" or "No problem."

I've seen too many times where people say, "Oh, I am just God's vessel." or "Oh, it wasn't me, it was God." The people of Fiji never said either of those sentences or even alluded to them. They didn't have to because you could tell by their speech and their actions WHOSE they were and WHOM they were working for. They didn't need the accolades of the frail human as they were working for Someone far more important – and you knew it.

Oh, we got the project finished and there is a lot more to be done to help but that isn't important. Relationships are important, the people of Fiji know this and put this above all else. They didn't have much but they gave everything. As it turns out, the mission had changed, but in God's infinite wisdom, the mission was an amazing gift and blessing to the team. We, too, were changed.

