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Faith in Action International training pastors in Haiti

By Pam Mettler

Tom Braak, executive director and founder of Faith in Action International (FAI), based in Verrettes, Haiti, has several reasons to celebrate in 2011.

Braak, whose great-grandfather started Braak's Bakery in Spring Lake a number of years ago, has been living and working for the past 11 years in Haiti. Tom's duties include training and working alongside Haitian villagers in the mountainous region just outside Port-Au-Prince.

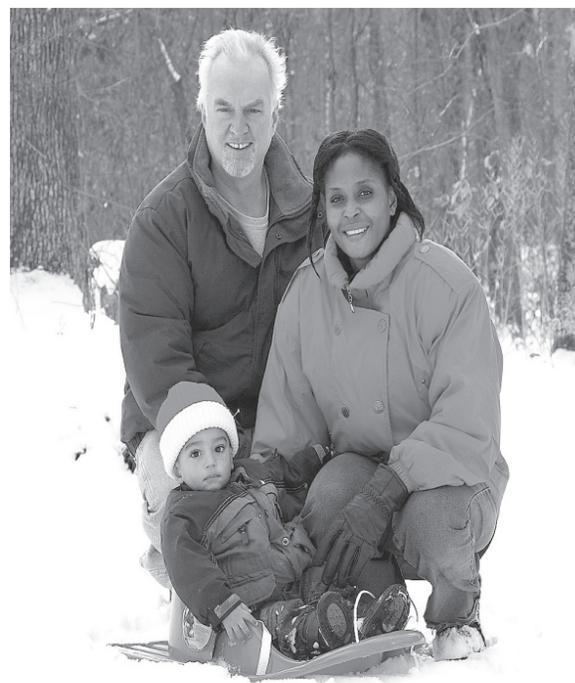
Tom and his volunteer army recently sponsored a pastoral training seminar that served 25 pastors and 25 lay leaders in and around Verrettes. Part of the funding for this program came from donations FIAI received from various churches and individuals around west Michigan and the greater United States.

"The purpose of our pastors' event was to train pastors to be good Christian examples to their communities," said Braak. "Faith in Action International was pleased to provide the meals, gift Bibles, and hymnals, and to work in partnership with Haitian pastors to put on the event for the people and by the people."

Tom visits churches in the Tri-Cities area describing first-hand what life is like in the poorest country in the western hemisphere that has, in the last two years, suffered from several floods, an earthquake, a hurricane, and is currently facing a cholera pandemic, in addition to extreme poverty.

He also describes what people in America are not hearing about: The problems stemming from a lack of water filtration systems. "People are still dying in the mountains near Verrettes because of the cholera pandemic," said Tom. "Clean water remains the highest need for the immediate future and because of that we need hundreds and hundreds of water filters shipped over to Haiti to stem the tide of the epidemic that is devastating the country. These water filters cost us about \$45 apiece to buy, prepare, install, educate and follow up with the villagers."

Tom and his team in Haiti are planning to build a Faith in Action International compound in Verrettes. The compound plans include demonstration gardens to show Haitian villagers how to terrace the soil, a tree nursery with 30,000 fruit trees, fish ponds, a guest house



Tom Braak, his wife Ficitla, and son, Ryan

for mission trips, a school for children, a community center for meetings and Bible study, plus housing for teachers and corrals for goats, chickens and pigs.

Tom will be returning to Grand Haven on April 16 and will stay in the area until May 3 when he and his family will return to Haiti. Anyone who would like to schedule Tom for a speaking engagement can call (616) 402-3144, or email Tom directly at tombraak@yahoo.com.



Old Scratch revisited

by Al Schneider

This is not my first foray into the realm of Old Scratch, a name I rather like for the Devil. It was while gleaning some of my old files that I came across a piece that I had written on the same subject. We owe that name to Washington Irving who used it in his classic short story, *The Devil and Tom Walker*.

The Deceiver goes by many names, of course, among them Satan, Mephistopheles, and Prince of the Air. There are images, as well, one of the most graphic being that of a roaring lion, going to and fro to see whom "he can devour." That one still has me looking over my shoulder from time to time to see whether the ferocious kitty is anywhere in sight. I thoroughly dislike that image. There are also more poetic names like Lucifer, Belial, and Beelzebub. So many to choose from. "Old Scratch" remains among the more sufferable.

In *The Devil and Tom Walker*, Irving reveals a trait of Old Scratch that is quite different from that of the devouring lion. Here, the Devil is portrayed as one ready to exploit man's weakness. Whatever a man's sin preference, Old Scratch will "scratch up" the soil around it to enhance its growth. Tom Walker's weakness happened to be a passion for wealth. So Tom is eager to make a deal with Old Scratch to amass still more. Poor Tom. Alas, he discovers his plight too late.

Like it or not, we too can be tempted to negotiate deals with Old Scratch. Such enticements can come to us in a variety of ways and often from unexpected sources. Scratch is a sly one who seems to know all of our weaknesses and vulnerabilities. This requires that we be constantly vigilant.

But, like Tom, we also have principles. We would never harm a family member, for instance. Nor would we allow ourselves to be complicit in a homicide or robbery. But making a few bucks at the expense of another? Well, maybe.

Or, consider when our government is in one of its handout modes to those who "qualify." Yeah, why not? Or for us who engage in writing, how about a little plagiarism? And while we're at it, maybe some marital infidelity along the way? So many temptations Old Scratch is able to send our way. He's everywhere and arranges everything. Before long, we rather enjoy having the old Devil around. It's actually fun.

But then will come the day of reckoning. Look at me. I find myself alone as I stand in the presence of my maker. He reminds me that I was created a person like no other. I was given guidelines for living. I was gifted with talents that I was to use while on my journey. What have I done with them? I am uneasy. I look around. Where are the others who marched with me? Not one in sight. I see no agent from the government to come to my aid. Wasn't I a loyal supporter? No sign, even of Old Scratch, except that I can hear his shrill laughter which, I fear, will echo far into the night. And so I stand there, guilt ridden, forlorn and without hope.

But you needn't be concerned about any of this. It won't happen to you.



It's really all we need

by Al Wezeman

God made us in His image and put a physical body around it. We live in this physical/natural body in a physical natural world in an endless universe.

Jesus said we must worship our Creator in spirit and truth. Because we were made in God's image we can do that. We spoiled that image and became dead in our sins. So the human being hungers and thirsts for the spiritual, no knowing what we hunger for. In our desperate longing to be satisfied, we cram all kinds of physical things into our lives, hurting ourselves in the process. We find nothing physical that will fill that awful void. We decide life is meaningless. That's when we seek to deaden the pain or end the physical life.

God's Word, called the Holy Bible, is actually God's message to us to tell us the actual truth of what's going on. From the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation, all sixty-six (66) books are telling the story about God and what He did and will do and what He is doing now for this world and us.

When Jesus was on this earth/in the world. He fulfilled God the Father's purpose. That purpose was to bring us back to Himself. Jesus made all that possible through what He did.

Jesus, the Son of God, fulfilled God's way of salvation/redemption. Jesus told how we do that. He told how we again have rebirth of the image of God. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and righteousness and judgment. We humble ourselves before God and seek His face (prayer) and turn from our wicked ways. We no longer seek to fill our spiritual longing with physical things. We are no longer dead in our sins.

As we see Jesus as the key to all of God's purposes, then we become a follower of Jesus and find our joy and peace in obeying all the teachings of Jesus found in the Holy Bible.

The Holy Bible is full of promises for those who trust in God. There is eager anticipation for the children of God and what He has in store for them.

As was outlined above, noted that, in the message of the Holy Bible is our answer to the question of life and our longing for fulfillment in our spiritual lives. There really isn't any other way. God wants all people to come back to Him. God has given the way to us. We need to read, study and meditate on the Word of God because (really) it's all we need. To fill in the outline above, read through the Holy Bible.