

Cuba Current

SEPTEMBER,
2009

Trip to Cuba June 2009, Linda Zelenka

One of the gifts of talking to Cuban Christians is hearing their witness of God's acts in their lives. Stories of miracles, healings, answers to prayer, sudden conversion are common -- not "common" in the sense of everyday, but common in that almost everyone I've spoken to can recount a clear moment when God transformed their lives. That moment becomes a place in time on which they build a spiritual pillar, an engraved memory: This is where it happened, here I met God, and He changed my path forever.

On my trip to Cuba in June I had a number of video interviews which featured these stories of redemption. One particularly touching to me came from a friend, Pedro, who is president of our sister church council.

About 40 years ago when Pedro was about 20, he was walking down a city street

and saw a bent old woman with a big purse and cane slowly crossing the road, unaware of a bus fast closing in on her. She saw the bus, dropped everything, and turned to run, just escaping. Pedro ran toward her, and at the last minute succeeded in grabbing her purse off the street, and running with it. He ran a long way. Sure he would find valuables, at least money, he opened his prize. There was nothing in the purse but a pink plastic heart, a container. He opened that. It held a Bible. On that incident his life turned. I shut off the camera and we just sat there. After some moments Pedro added, "I still have it."

All holy turning points are indelible. "Here I met God." Some are memories alone. Others are marked by a stone, and at least one by a purse and its contents.

August District Meeting at OPUMC

Almost 50 Methodists gave up their Sunday afternoon to attend our Cuba District meeting at Orange Park United Methodist. They heard the latest news on travel to Cuba and information on building our sister church relationships. Dis-

trict Superintendent Tim Smiley delivered our invocation. Linda Zelenka delivered a moving account of her trip to Cuba in June (see above story).

Other speakers included Pastor Joe Allinder



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BIBLE VERSE:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

John 3: 16

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District Meeting (continued from page 1)

George Reed who discussed the importance of building our relationships with our sister churches.

Thanks to Loree Reed and Betty Perez for providing our food, and Pastor Joe and Linda Zelenka for the Cuban coffee.

And thank you for attending!



Cuba District Meeting at OPUMC

New Name: Methodists United in Prayer

Affirming our common bond in Jesus Christ and our historical Wesleyan ties, we, the members of the Methodist Church in Cuba and the Florida Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, propose the "Methodists United in Prayer," as a relationship in Christ with one another. Noting Paul's words to the very diverse community gathering in a house church in Corinth, that "...we are partners in

the work of service to our God..." (1 Cor. 3:9), we acknowledge our partner-

ship for greater service to the mission of God and a stronger witness to the love of

Jesus Christ.

Up until now, the relationship between the Methodist Church in Cuba and the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church was known as the *Cuba/Florida Covenant*.

*Cuba and Florida Bishops
approve new name:
"Methodists United in
Prayer"*

Note to Cuban-Americans

Cuba has eased some of the travel restrictions for Cuban-Americans holding a Cuban passport. And Cuban-Americans with the Cuban passport do not count against our restricted number of allowable travelers. So if you qualify, get your Cuban passport!

Ideas for Cuban Travel

- *Have Spanish Bibles ready (one per traveler)*
- *Get a Treasury License for your church (or make sure it is current)*
- *Have a current U.S. passport*
- *Learn a little Spanish (though not required!)*
- *Exchange signed church banners with your sister church*

More on Supporting Your Sister Church

Last month, we touched on ideas for supporting your sister church relationship. Here are some additional suggestions:

Email regularly. Some Cuba churches do not have access to email, though some have found friends who do and are willing to share their capability. With cellular use apparently becoming more widespread in Cuba, phone calls may soon become a good alternative.

Invite your Cuban pastor to visit your church. This is another lengthy process, but a wonderful way to build our bond with one another. Your District Coordinators together with Glen Drummond will help you with the process.

If your sister church has a major capital project, it is possible to apply for a

Treasury License which will allow you to provide financial support. Again, there is a maze of paperwork; contact your District Coordinators for assistance.

Occasionally there will be open meetings in the District to disseminate information, often including an update from a recent traveler. Attend whenever possible. And if you attended our August meeting, thanks for coming!

Try to keep your church up-to-date by regularly posting photos and sister church information on your church website. When your sister church needs an item, try to get an upcoming traveler from the Dis-

trict to take in a "Care" package (keep them small and lightweight!).

The "downtime" between your trips to Cuba is an excellent time to raise money for assistance and travel. One church has a "Coins for Cuba" offering once a month. Ask your membership to empty their pockets of coins; it adds up quickly.



Staying "connected" requires work.

All relationships require effort. We reap what we sow.

Pastor Joe Allinder shares thoughts for FL pastors

Pastor Joe Allinder of Highlands UMC shared some thoughts for other Florida pastors at our August meeting.

Pastors and lay persons need to travel to Cuba to begin a relationship before inviting their Cuba sister church pastor to visit them. You don't need to know Spanish in order to have meaningful trip to you sister church because a translator will be provided for you.

Pastors can begin communications with their sister church before going because there are congregations in Cuba who have email and will deliver yours.

There are various free programs on the internet to be used in translating your emails as they are exchanged.

Money is available to pastors for CEU's from the Florida Annual Conference each quadrennium of \$750.

There are many needs in Cuba besides money. They need medicine of all types and prescriptions filled for glasses. There is a doctor in Tampa who will fill the prescription for about \$20 a pair.

Pastor Joe provides pastoral leadership for the North East District "Methodists

United in Prayer."



Would you like a speaker?

If your church or small group would like to learn more about building your sister church relationship, we would be happy to come and speak with you.

In particular, if your church has "dropped the ball" by falling out of contact with your Cuba brothers and sisters, we will be glad to meet and discuss how to best get back on track. Just send us an email (see page 4 for

contact information).

You can also communicate with others on our *Facebook* page. Go to www.Facebook.com and Search Groups for "Methodists United in Prayer-North East Florida District."



Methodists United in Prayer

149 South Roscoe Blvd., Ponte Vedra, FL 32082

<http://www.Facebook.com> Search Groups:
"Methodists United in Prayer North East District" and
"United in Prayer—Cuba & Florida Methodists"

<http://www.cubafloridacovenant.org>

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/larednetwork/>

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Cuba Current is published for Methodists in the North East Florida District involved with or interested in "**Methodists United in Prayer.**" "Methodists United in Prayer" facilitates prayer, love, exchange, and mutual support between the Cuba Conference and the Florida Conference. We hope to increase the relationship between sister churches in the two conferences and focus on these priorities:

- **To pray** for one another and develop a common study of Scriptures.
- **To engage** in the interchange of peoples at Cuba and Florida Conferences.
- **To respond** to the priorities of the Methodist Church in Cuba.
- **To build** relationships between the Florida Conference and the Methodist Church in Cuba for mutual support and encouragement.
- **To enable** the training of pastors and lay people for the equipping of Cuban disciples.
- **To mutually share** the history, current events, culture, and spirituality of both Conferences.

Sister Churches



Havana District	NE Florida District
Bauta	Oak Crest
Capdevila	Glynlea Grace Harmony Chapel Spring Glen
Central	Avondale
La Europa	Keystone
Guanabacoa	Mandarin
El Guatao	Highlands Garden City New Life Community Wesley Fellowship
Jaimanitas	Murray Hill
Loma de Cañita	1st UMC Starke
Marianao	CrossRoad
El Mariel	St. Paul
Mayorkin	Middleburg
Playas de Santa Fe	Orange Park
Punta Brava	Isle of Faith
San Antonio de los Baños	Lake Shore
San Antonio de Rio Blanco	Trinity (Palatka)
Santa Cruz del Norte	Swaim Memorial
Santiago de las Vegas	Southside
La Sierra	Ponte Vedra
Tumbadero/Callazo	Macclenny
Martin Pérez	River of Life (pending)
Vedado / University	Lakewood
Artemisa	Community (Lake Como)
The Retirement Home	1st UMC