Cuba Leadership Team Meeting Minutes

Wekiva Presbyterian Church, February 15, 2017

Attendees: Danny Berrios, Iris Campbell, Rell Etner, Mary Hoffman, Paul Jones, Barbara Joyce, Ken Lasseter, Gary Lowther, Drew and Suzi Marshall, Bucky and Maybelle Pratt, Randy Simpson, Laura Viau, Dan Williams, John Yust, Pat Zinn

Called to order at 12:15 p.m. by Ken Lasseter, co-chair

Devotional shared from Su Voz by Pat Zinn, co-chair

**Motion** to approve minutes from November 2016 meeting - **M/S/P**

Pat reminded everyone to coordinate trips with both the CLT and Cuba Partner Network (CPN); the CPN contact is Jack Kern, jackckern@sbcglobal.net Jack maintains the visit calendar for CPN. You can see the calendar on the CPN Facebook page or from the CPN DropBox (contact Jack for permission to either of these.) The 2017 El Centro schedule is attached.

Church to Church Relationship Reports

First Vero - 3 people are going to Cabaguan Feb. 24-27 to build relationships

North Lake - Becky Bros sent a written report of the North Lake trip to Caibarién in January. Ten members helped with the lunch program, visited in homes, participated in the Sunday worship service, helped serve communion, and attended a Quinceañera (birthday celebration for a 15-year old girl, similar to a “coming out” party in the US). The NL team also visited the mission in Camagüey (a 4-1/2 hr ride each way), where they visited with members and celebrated communion. Among the gifts taken to Caibarién were 2 suitcases of OTC medicines, 1 of fabric and thread, 1 of art supplies for the children, a VBS program in Spanish with accompanying finger and hand puppets, items for the church kitchen, a wheel chair for the outreach program and a laptop for the church office. They also took socks for the teens, which was a big hit.

Port Orange - Randy talked to Calvin Gittner in December. Communication lines have been re-opened between Port Orange and Placetas, and some folks from Port Orange are committed to moving forward to develop a relationship with Placetas.

Christ Presbyterian - Mission team hasn’t met since the January CFP trip; Rell is looking to pursue relationships with Calabazar de Saugua and possibly Placetas. Christ Pres has provided some financial support to both churches.

First Kissimmee - A fully executed agreement with Encrucijada has been signed by both sessions. Encrucijada now has a refrigerator for feeding program; it cost more than First K expected and took a long time to get, but Baltimore provided some additional money. A letter from Dalia was read. Brandon will have a presentation for First K in March or April.

Grace Way - Lots of excitement about the Youth mission trip to Sancti Spiritus scheduled for June 21-26 (10-12 youth and 3 chaperones). The Partnership agreement was signed last year and the Grace Way congregation is really embracing it. They plan to invite Liudmila again this year for a September visit, around the time of the Presbytery meeting; Randy wants to contact a congressman to see if he can help with the visa.

**Motion** - to extend an invitation to Liudmila from not just Grace Way, but also from CFP CLT and request concurrence from Council - **M/S/P**

**Motion** - to send a letter to St. Augustine Presbytery offering to share in the cost of Edelberto’s visit in April-May, 2017 - **M/S/P**

Pineda - Presentation on the January mission trip will be made to the congregation tonight (2/15) at a church-wide dinner. Partnership documents for Iguará and Meneses have not been developed yet, but Pat brought back ideas for inclusion from both Cuban churches. The Pineda congregation is supportive. A trip in October is being explored.

Wekiva - The partnership agreement with Remedios was signed in Jan. It does not include a monetary agreement, just to support each other in prayer and friendship.

Maitland - The group from Maitland will meet with the Maitland Mission Team in March.

DeLand - The group met with the DeLand Mission committee, and are very early in the process. DeLand visited 2 churches (Sagua La Grande and Taguasco) and members have different opinions on which church to support. The team is doing a Minute for Mission this Sunday for a dinner and presentation in March.

South Lake - The Mission committee is interested in Camajuaní; Danny and Lillian have a couple-to-couple relationship with Jesús and Marielys. South Lake sent a chest of tools to Jesús and he was very grateful for it.

Report on January 2017 Mission Trip

Summary: Twenty-one people from 10 CFP churches visited 13 El Centro churches, January 18-26. The additional day was helpful, and allowed us to spend all day Sunday with our churches instead of making it a travel day (to Sancti Spiritus).

Medical insurance: We need to research this for next time. It is included in the price of the airline tickets, and airline web site says we need to retain boarding passes as proof of coverage. (This became an issue when Harlan got sick in Taguasco.) Pastors are well-insured by the Board of Pensions, including provisions for medical evacuation, if needed. It is very important to work with our hosts and coordinate with the El Centro staff; we were warned that it is possible for medical officials to quarantine the entire team until they know what is causing an illness.

Lessons Learned:

 Passport expiration date - be sure to check it before the trip

 “Emergency contact” phone calls while in Cuba - When Liudmila or a mission team leader needs to contact a team member, it’s important to leave a message explaining why so that the person receiving the message knows whether or not it is an emergency call. This will prevent undue anxiety on the part of the recipient.

 Each Cuban church hosting CFP participants should have a “what to do in case of illness and in need of a doctor” instruction prepared in advance.

 Be sensitive about what you say in discussions or casual conversations, especially in front of our hosts. Do not harp on hardships like no air conditioning, cold water, lack of toilet paper and toilet seats, etc. - even as a joke. Remember that the Cubans are giving us their best, and that sometimes means that they may go without.

 Delete sensitive information before posting

 Provide clearer instructions on packing OTC meds and other donations. Before we leave our home churches, the Mission Team should obtain a count and weight of the full suitcases dedicated to Presbytery/church supplies each trip participant is bringing, as well as any space/weight available in personal/trip baggage. That will prevent bringing large amounts of loose items (material, etc.) hoping that others can make room for them. Some rearrangement is expected, but we don’t want to have to leave several filled suitcases behind because of the luggage limit. Non-liquid OTC meds should be removed from their boxes for more efficient packing. Be sure to clearly label any personal medications in plastic bags so they don’t get mixed in with the OTC meds for Cuba.

Meeting with El Centro Council: See attached report

Human Trafficking Awareness Event: Jill conducted a workshop at Sancti Spiritus, which was attended by people from Sancti Spiritus, Cabaiguán, and Taguasco, as well as by El Centro Council and our mission team members (about 40 in total). In the morning session, Jill presented an explanation of trafficking, including some of her experiences and work with the Lifeboat Project. After lunch, the participants were divided into 6 smaller groups for discussion of 3 specific questions. Following the small group sessions, each group reported back to the entire group. The workshop was very well received, and we were pleased with the open discussion by our Cuba brothers and sisters of this very sensitive topic. See attached report.

Laura and Amy are setting up the (mission trip) photo site on Google and will send out instructions when it is ready for use.

Database

Please send your updates to Ken. We’ve received lots of compliments on our database from other presbyteries, and we want to keep it up to date.

El Centro Transportation Needs

We took $10K this trip to support transportation needs. El Centro is currently using the money for maintenance and repair of vehicles. This may change as new seminarians graduate, become pastors and need vehicles. The CLT has a goal of raising another $16K over 2 years. El Centro has turned transportation into a profit center. They rent the two buses (with drivers) to other organizations, and use the profits to purchase fuel, pay for repairs, etc.

El Centro Lay Leadership Training

We gave El Centro Council $2,500 and encouraged them to talk to the Outreach Foundation for help. We also asked them to send us reports on how the funds are used - so we can raise more. We had hoped to raise $3,000 for the year, so we did well, especially considering the short time frame.

\*\*\*We need to make a push in the August-September time period to ask the churches to put money to fund these projects into their budgets for 2018.

Pastor Support Project

Moving forward. Marielys will research cost and a place for the retreat; the planning team is targeting January, 2018. Danny and Laura are working to identify pastors in the US to partner with the Cuban pastors, and to start building those relationships now. Randy will talk to Deb Milcarek of Baltimore and connect their point person with Danny and Lillian.

2017 Goals

We agreed to continue building on the existing goals, noting that we need to talk about tactics in order to solidify the goals and keep moving forward. Goals are listed below.

1. Ongoing CLT goal (set in 2015) - Develop one relationship with each church in El Centro within 5 years. Progress - Relationships developed with 7 of the 13 churches, and explorations ongoing with several others.

2. Continue supporting transportation and lay leadership training projects by raising funds, and pastor support project by joint planning with El Centro and raising funds

3. Bring visitors here (dependent upon visas being granted)

4. Create a mission trip template.

5. Plan the 2018 Cuba Mission Trip

Potential Visits from Cuba

Edelberto will be visiting St. Augustine Presbytery and First Presbyterian Church Clinton (SC) in April and May. We will invite him to spend part of his time in Central Florida and share the cost. North Lake definitely wants to host him. Others are invited to do so.

Baltimore Presbytery is inviting Liudmila to come in September, pending receipt of a visa. Again, we would like to host her for a week. Baltimore Presbytery is making the arrangements (visa, etc.) and we will share the cost.

2018 CFP Mission Trip

We’d like to look at February, 2018. Things to consider:

 Synod of Cuba usually meets in early February and we need to avoid those dates

 Lent starts 2/14/18 (impacts pastors); some may be willing to travel after Ash Wed.

 Palm Sunday is March 25th and Easter is April 1st

 Presidents’ Day is February 19 (extra day off for many)

 Pastors’ retreat talked about for January; need Danny and Laura to keep us informed

March 4 Presbytery meeting

We asked for 10 minutes for the Cuba Partnership; Mary and Ken will present. Plan is to show some pictures from the January trip, photos of the items taken (OTC meds, material, tools), and talk about the HT awareness event. Brandon’s video will not be ready in time for this meeting.

Other Business

BIRP Living Waters Update: John Yust provided an update about the Living Waters system for Paraiso Obrero. which was funded and installed by BIRP in May, 2016. LWW is part of the Synod of Living Waters (MS,AL,LA). About 12-13 churches in BIRP (Brevard-Indian River Presbyterians) funded the system, which was installed May 2016. It has been operating since early June. The LWW systems need a yearly followup visit; John and Ken are working with Marlon to set it up as a one-day trip in late April or early May. John and Ken are planning to go; others are invited, if interested. They offered to carry additional items with them.

Highlights of Report from February Meeting of Synod of Cuba: The report included a history of the Synod and a discussion of the impact this year from elimination of the “wet-foot dry-foot” policy and the death of Fidel Castro. In the U.S., we think “wet-foot dry foot” changes are having a big impact, but Cuba is seeing no impact at all on stemming the flow of immigrants. They will continue to come. The Synod issued a call to the (IPRC) church to begin working with the government on things that are internal to Cuba - to put develop an environment to stop people from leaving. They are working to get the government to recognize the IPRC as a religious organization.

Several El Centro members were elected to positions of responsibility in the Synod:

 Edelberto - General Secretary of the Synod (Synod Executive)

 Liudmila - Department of Programs and Mission

 Marielys and Xiomara - Synod Permanent Commissions

Next Meeting - May 17 at noon at Wekiva

Closed in prayer at 2:15 p.m. by Drew Marshall

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Zinn

Attachments:

2017 Mission Trip Debrief

2017 Mission Trip Meeting with El Centro Council

2017 Mission Trip Human Trafficking Awareness Workshop

2017 El Centro Schedule