

Cuba Partnership Team Meeting
February 16, 2022

Attending: Coco Allison, Michael Armstrong, Danny and Lillian Berrios, Keiko DeLille, Kathy Gatch, Mary Hoffman, Ken Lasseter, Randy Simpson, Mary Van Hook, Pat Zinn
Guest: Marielys Cabrera (IPRC, El Centro Presbytery)

Opened with prayer by Mary Van Hook at 12:04 p.m.

Budget report - No change from August, 2021; we were not copied on any transactions after Nina Wilson Jones left the Presbytery. Currently waiting for meeting with Nancy Cox to reconcile our records with CFP records.

Randy is just back from trip to Cuba for Synod meeting and visit to Sancti Spiritus. He met with Reile Marrero, Marielys Cabrera, and Marlon Irrarragory as well as new PC(USA) regional liaisons for the Caribbean, Jose Manuel Capella-Pratts and VilMarie Cintrón-Olivieri.

The El Centro reps were disappointed that Randy did not bring money for El Centro; it was determined that the request to do so was not sent to Randy. Cuba has not received the wire transfer from 2021; it is still being held up by the international banks (as they try to comply with U.S. regulations). In addition, the special Synod bank account in Cuba (which is required in order to accept wire transfers) has still not been opened, after 3 months trying, because of Cuban government bureaucracy. Randy gave them ~€1500 to repair the large bus.

Motion that Randy contact Bryan Beck (CPN) to try to get back the \$11K waiting for wire transfer so that John Potter can carry it to Cuba on his next trip, after reimbursing Randy for €1500 euros from those funds - **M/S/P**

Motion to allow El Centro to allocate the \$5K for lay leadership and \$6K for transportation as they see fit instead of restricting those amounts to those categories - **M/S/P**

Motion - to use equivalent amount from existing CPT funds for 2022, if we are unable to retrieve the \$11K from CPN - **M/S/P**

The IPRC Synod is strongly encouraging presbyteries and churches to become more self-sustaining. For example, Sancti Spiritus is able to host groups at the church because they have dorm space, and that accounted for 75% of their income in 2019. Such hosting is currently not permitted (because of COVID restrictions?).

Synod is encouraging all churches to charge €40 per night for food and lodging, because food costs have increased so much. Salaries are not keeping pace with inflation. Some pastors are taking second jobs to help make ends meet.

Dora Arce is now General Secretary of Synod; Alison (Matanzas) is Moderator, Ivette is Vice Moderator.

Synod is telling churches that 5% of all funds they receive should go to Synod and 10% to presbytery. Currently, money donated for special purposes is exempt from that. We propose that we let our CFP churches know about that and increase the amount we give to cover that 15%.

Marielys joined us by phone from Cuba, with Danny Berrios translating.

Opening comments - She sent greetings to everyone and thanks for the time together. Marielys is now the Executive Secretary of El Centro, and Reile is Moderator. She mentioned the political and social upheaval going on in Cuba in addition to economic situation. Emigration is affecting every family - many people want to leave Cuba and they are being hampered in their attempts to exit. People can fly to Nicaragua and then make their way through the jungles, risking their lives with cartels, open oceans, etc., and that brings a lot of sadness and pain among the churches.

Ken asked about conditions in Camajuaní and Remedios. Marielys replied that the pandemic situation seems to be improving. Both churches are holding in-person services. They are beginning to open up projects a little at a time - the ones that have the least financial impact on the church. They have not yet opened up Bible study and children's Sunday School, but plan to do so a little at a time. Both churches have suffered deaths of many members over the past 2 years, including 3 elders and other leaders. The church has made it part of its mission to walk alongside the community in their suffering. The sanctuary structure in Remedios is complete and carpenters are now doing their work. It is going very well.

When asked about El Centro's most immediate need, Marielys said that repairs of the bus are the highest priority. Parts cannot be found in Cuba. Marlon has the specifics on the parts. The bus really allows savings on transportation. Gas prices in Cuba have been more or less stable. Randy reiterated that Marlon needs to send the parts list to Ken so he can try to find them.

Marielys said the churches are also looking into different projects that will make them self-sustaining. For example, they would like to open up exercise gyms in Camajuaní and Cabaiguán, and charge a monthly membership fee. If they move forward with that project, then they would need help obtaining equipment. They already have the existing space. Clarification: they can buy the weight equipment in Cuba, but need the money to purchase it. They are open to ideas for other projects, but we may need to help them acquire hardware for those projects.

Marielys said there is a great need for ministry to young people. The vast majority just want to leave Cuba. They are in the planning stages for proposals for ministry to young people, and request prayers for that effort.

Another problem is the lack of infrastructure in the churches: technology is ancient, and is creating problems. She has to take her laptop from home to church each Sunday, and even it is outdated. There is a tremendous need for upgrades to technology. Randy asked if the

technology is available in Cuba? She said yes, but it's through a middle man who sells to a retailer in Cuba, bringing refurbished equipment from the U.S., and prices are prohibitive.

Mike Armstrong asked whether protests are ongoing, and if they are widespread. Randy said that they are not ongoing and not widespread. The government cracked down hard, so open protests have not been happening since last July. Marielys said it is very well controlled.

Marielys signed off the call.

News from Partner Churches - only from Randy and Sancti Spiritus

Randy described new limitations on devices that can be brought into the country, money brought in, airlines only allowing 2 bags to Cuba, etc. Customs duties are inconsistent, questions inconsistent. However, there is currently no limit on OTC meds, and no need to hide them among clothes. It's better to put them all together (in plastic bags) so they can be easily identified. Dora says to declare *everything*. Security machines can identify money, e.g., so it is not good to pretend surprise.

Motion to give \$1000.00 from the Cuba budget (under MDW) to PC(USA) World Mission, specifying the ministry of Jose Manuel Capella and Vilmarie Cintron-Olivieri - **M/S/P**

Motion to send \$150.00 from the Cuba budget to CPN for 2022 dues - **M/S/P**

Potential trips to Cuba were discussed. Randy stressed the need to go as soon as possible and suggested that Ken lead a small group in June. Danny said that he could probably go the last half of June. The emphasis would be on getting bus parts to Cuba. Ken agreed to co-lead the trip and to look for another co-leader. Since we only have a short time to prepare for the trip, it was suggested that we try to recruit people who have already been to Cuba. Ken will contact folks from the past two trips.

Closed with prayer by Danny Berrios at 1:55 p.m.