

Cuba Partnership Team

Meeting Minutes

December 11, 2019

Attendees: Keiko DeLille, Ed Gray, Mary Hoffmann, Paul Jones, Ken Lasseter, Randy Simpson, Pat Zinn

Called to Order at 12:15 p.m. with opening prayer by Pat Zinn

Motion to approve minutes of August 21, 2019 meeting - M/S/P

Budget and Finance - Pat is working with Nina Wilson Jones in the Presbytery office to reconcile our records with the Presbytery's new reporting system.

Report on "Encuentro" (Business Meeting) Nov. 18 -21

Randy - It was an excellent meeting with representation from CFP, Baltimore, South Kansas, plus El Centro. South Kansas has not signed a formal agreement with El Centro, but anticipate doing so in 2020. They move more slowly than we did. The staff person from Baltimore knows the Exec of Mission Pres and will call her to see how committed Mission is to partnership.

Lot of discussion about changes in environment, especially fuel shortages. Cubans have difficulty finding fuel and it is growing increasingly more difficult. A significant portion of the fuel they purchased in the past was on the black market because they could get it more cheaply. The gov't has become aware of that and has cracked down tremendously, so can't get cheaper fuel and can only buy from official gov't stations. It is the same with food and other staples. Randy told of 100-150 people waiting outside a gov't store in Cabaiguán for soap in response to a rumor that it was available. The Cubans emphasized that they want us to come - don't worry about being a burden. They absolutely want to continue to develop the relationships. They don't want to hear excuses from us that it is more difficult to come because we have to fly to Havana. They want to see the partnerships continue to grow and flourish.

Edelberto confirmed that Taguasco is still a top priority of the synod, which is working with El Centro on this project. Only one church in Sancti Spiritus province (Cabaiguán) has an installed pastor. Three people are graduating from seminary in May, and Edelberto said they will be assigned to El Centro.

Randy and Ken brought back an updated list of partnerships and relationships. What's new as result of this meeting is that international partnerships have been added. Randy encourages churches to talk with other churches that have partnerships. They are working to add contact information for the other partnerships.

Edelberto always talks about working together more closely, not a paternal relationship. Lot of discussion about a leadership training program that Cubans could lead down there. Current proposal is to hold it the 2nd or 3rd week of July. A group of young adults from US and Cuba (ages ~18-23) would meet at CANIP for about 5 days (~July 12-19) for a leadership training event. Each of the U.S. presbyteries with relationships would send 5-7 people down plus a leader from the presbytery. Cuban pastors would take leadership role. Cuba would choose an equal number of their youth to participate. Edelberto and Marlon agreed to develop initial plans. We need those plans as soon as possible for an event in July. (We would need names by early April for visas.) The intent

is to also involve the leaders who are traveling from each presbytery so that they can take an active role in the training program.

The pastors' retreat will not happen by May 2020; October 2020 might be more realistic. The pastors in Cuba really want to see this. They volunteered to take the lead for it and develop a budget, find a place and people to lead, and then send us the information.

Edelberto is really trying to expand their leadership training. He is looking at more ways to do so at both presbytery and synod level. In particular, he wants to focus on training people at the churches w/out pastors.

On renewing our CFP partnership with El Centro - they are going to provide ideas as to whether changes are needed to both the CFP and Baltimore agreements. The current documents aren't very specific because that's what the Cubans wanted. Randy has a copy of Baltimore agreement. (John McLauren drafted CFP agreement.)

Conditions in Cuba and the U.S. - Cuba is experiencing shortages, but they don't like to talk about it. Jesús reported chicken shortages in the summer, Ken saw crowds of people waiting for soap in Cabaiguán and for prescriptions in Camajuaní. They are experiencing a loss of income due to cancellation of medical contracts by Brazil. They had plenty of food for us in November, and want us to come.

JetBlue asked us about car parts in November, and said they are not allowed to carry cargo. We need to check into American and Southwest to see if they will carry those parts; at least we could ship to Havana that way. Paul suggested looking at airlines from other nations like flying from Canada or Bahamas or even Dominican Republic. Aero Cuba flies from Havana to Santa Clara. Paul's wife is looking into options for future trips.

Ken reported that El Centro's big yellow bus is breaking down a lot. It is urgent for them to get an oil pump. Ken is working on finding the pump. He will try to contact First, Springfield (for 12/28) or Baltimore for a trip about that time. Paul said First, NY is going down early January.

Report on 2020 Cuba Partnership Trip

Dates are Feb. 13 – 21; we have 15 people from 4 CFL churches visiting 5 Cuban churches; group; flying into and out of Havana because of U.S. gov't ban on commercial flights to other cities, effective Dec. 2019

Fund Raising: We are seeking \$3000 for Transportation and \$5000 for Lay Leadership Training (5K). Ken handed out copies of flyers and urged people to take them back to churches to ask for funds. Asking is the only way we'll get them. These funds are vital for the El Centro presbytery.

Keiko talked about fundraising in her home church in Brooklyn. They hold an annual Cuba Night (catered by a local restaurant) which raises \$3,000 or more. It's a fun event dinner to expose people to Cuban culture. They may have a roving guitar player, opportunity to talk, info about the various programs they support. People donate at different levels, according to what they want to support. Entrance fee covers everything, based on your level. Levels: students \$25; working adults \$50, \$75, \$100, \$150, \$250. They have more non-church members coming to learn about Cuba.

How to communicate information about Cuba more effectively with our churches.

Ken has copy of nice brochure from Baltimore about their partnership. We'd like to do something same thing for CFP.

Ideas for improving communications: First DeLand paid to set up a wireless network at Taguasco and is supporting the cost of that. (Kathy Mills and Coco Allison have been part of that.) They provided the church with access in Lori's name because it can't be in the name of the church. They took down a wifi signal enhancer from NY, but Cuban Customs stopped them and said it had to be approved by Ministry of Communications; it was disapproved it because Cuban ministry said it would enhance cell phone coverage, and that was not allowed. The team was able to retrieve it on the way out, after paying storage charges. Sorrell Ann will try again in January; she said there is no reason it should not have been allowed. They also keep Cuba in front of congregation with photos, etc. They read a letter from Taguasco (about the trip) to FPD session.

First, DeLand prepared and served a traditional Thanksgiving dinner for the Taguasco church. Customs confiscated the frozen turkey that DeLand took down (only canned meat allowed to be brought in). So, they used chickens instead on the barbecue. They also had to bake pumpkin pies on the barbecue.

Church to Church relationships

First Vero – Cabaiguan - Michael York and a few others are going down in late Feb or March

North Lake – Caibarien - Cindy Hannum reported by email that North Lake cancelled their planned trip in January (due to new airport restrictions), but was able to send 3 suitcases to Caibarién with the group traveling in January. Cindy corresponds daily with a husband and wife through What's App.

First Deland/Glenwood – Taguasco - Six went down in November for successful trip. Church in Taguasco continues to be very active and involved. They had activities with children, including making thanksgiving turkeys for table decorations for the dinner; served traditional Thanksgiving Day dinner (with chicken) instead of turkey. Harland Merriam (retired military chaplain) gave sermon at worship; it was translated into Spanish and was well-received.

First Kissimmee – Encrucijada - Per Frank Allen phone call with Randy, they are still interested but having difficulty communicating, and Randy passed that on at the business meeting. Some of the people who might be interested in going from First K. are younger people (30s) who work, so a summer trip would be better for them. Randy will convey that information to Edelberto and Marlon. The interest is there; Randy will try to help raise the level. Encrucijada is now Jesús' second church. Ken went there with Jesús in November for their 90th celebration. Bucky and Maybelle Pratt sent an email with the sorry news that Brandon King (2017 trip) passed away last month from his long illness and asked us to share that information with those who need to know. They hope we have a wonderful trip coming up. They have fond memories of their trip with the group to Cuba (2015) and continue to pray for the Encrucijada church.

Graceway – Sancti Spiritus - Ten people went down in Nov. for 5 days. It was a great visit, and Randy was excited because 4 people were 2nd timers. All came back very energized about advancing the partnership. They gave a presentation at Advent soup/supper last week to about 100 people. Sancti Spiritus is struggling w/ out a pastor, but a much stronger session is coming on; it will be 5 elders and had been 3.

Pineda – Meneses & Iguara - Two people visited in Nov. They took Christmas craft activities for the children and adults, and another activity for the children to accompany a Bible lesson about the fruit of the spirit. Both churches loved the Christmas cards sent by Pineda and First, Palm Bay. The relationships are strong. Communication between trips continues sporadically, depending on internet access and available minutes, but has increased over the years.

El Rendentor – Camajuaní - Ken emailed Danny Berrios for news, but no response. (Lillian had been ill) The church has added 2 bedrooms so they can now host people in the church. They had a separate building in a former pastor's name, but when he died his children claimed the property, so the church lost it. They are still having filtration problems with the water system.

Wekiva – Remedios - Ken visited Jesús and Marielys in November. Remedios is active and alive; there were more people there on Sunday than in past trips and the town also seems to be more active and well. Ken was disappointed to find out that nothing has been done on the sanctuary roof; they are still having a hard time getting materials. Edelberto said another factor is that it is much harder to get building a permit in Santa Clara province than in other places.

Winter Park – Santa Clara - Mary Van Horn reported (via email): In terms of communication between US churches and Cuba, we try to keep up regular communication thanks to e mail (when it works). For example, Reile just sent a lovely advent message to our church and I arranged for an English translation of it to be placed in our bulletin. I will ask our pastor to give me one to send to them. Our pastors pray regularly for our partners in Cuba and we place the pictures and words that Reile sends us in our church newsletter. We also have a special bulletin board in the fellowship hall devoted to our Cuba partners. We will arrange for church members to have the opportunity to donate items for the next trip after all our various collections at Christmas time are over. We are sending our funds to the transportation and lay education funds (\$500 for each fund).

Others - none

Next Presbytery Meeting is March 7, 2020. We need to ask Cheryl to put fundraising notices in her weekly/monthly reports.

Motion to elect Ken Lasseter and Kathy Mills as Co-Leaders for 2020 - M/S/P

Other Business - none

Next Meeting - Feb. 26th (Ash Wednesday)

Closed in prayer at 2:15 by Ken