

Report on April 2017 trip to Cuba

We are praising the Lord for a fruitful trip to Cuba from April 5-14. My roundtrip flight to Havana originating in Nashville only cost a little over \$300. I met up with missionary Ron Maggard and evangelist David Smeltz in Ft. Lauderdale for the short flight into Havana. We had no issues with Customs or Immigration upon our arrival in Havana. We rented a car and drove to Pinar del Río, about 1.5 hours away.



Beautiful scene near Pinar del Río

The following day we visited two local pastors and their house church facilities. The first one was in deplorable condition, with many of the boards in the walls missing, the concrete platform crumbling, the pulpit propped up by a rock, and benches weakened by termite damage. After each service, they have to unscrew the light bulbs and take them home in order to prevent them from being stolen. The second church was in somewhat better shape but with many holes in ceiling that forces worshippers to sit in a scattered fashion during times of rain. That evening I interpreted for Brother Smeltz in a service at our host church. Five visitors that lived next door and across the street from the church came forward during the invitation to accept Christ as Saviour. Praise the Lord! The following morning we had training sessions with several pastors from the area. All the preachers were provided with literature which they highly appreciated. The pastor of the host church, who is also a lawyer, shared with us the good news that after several years of legal wrangling, they were able to obtain a clear title for the church property in the name of the church without being associated with a convention.

On Saturday morning we had a conference in a church that meets in the third floor of an apartment. The apartment door facing the stairway was left open so the neighbors could hear the gospel. The pastor has a serious



National pastor in pulpit of apartment church with kitchen behind him



Charter members signing membership rolls of newly constituted church

lung disease and may not have much longer to live. That afternoon we stopped at a church halfway between Pinar del Río and Havana to check whether any literature remained since our last printing run. They had run out of literature, but the pastor assured me we can use his facilities to store literature when we make more printing arrangements during our next trip. That evening we arrived at a house church that meets on a farm about 45 minutes from the outskirts of Havana. We spent time going over the procedures for the formal organizing of the church, and the pastor's ordination scheduled for the following morning. Although we were willing to make other arrangements, the pastor's family gave up their beds for us that night.

On Sunday close to 50 attended the special service in which the church was formally organized. Around 20 signed as charter members, agreeing to the constitution and bylaws of the church. After a meal on the grounds, we held an ordination council and the pastor and a deacon were ordained.

On Monday we drove to Ciego de Ávila, about a 6-hour drive. On Tuesday we held training sessions with nine preachers who attended. We drove two of the pastors home afterwards and toured their humble house church facilities. On Wednesday we drove with a national pastor about two hours to Camaguey and had a meal with a pastor and his family. Two other pastors were visited on the way back. At one point, we found out that the national pastor accompanying us recently had shingles and still had rashes that were causing a lot of discomfort. We gave him more than enough money to see a doctor and purchase medicine. On the last day visiting pastors, I gave away most of my clothes and donated the remaining over-the-counter medications and Christian literature I had brought to give away. On Thursday we drove the six hours to Havana in time to explore parts of the old city and find a place to stay before our flight the next morning.

We observed and confirmed that there seems to be more religious freedom in Cuba now than any other recent time under Communism. However, missionaries and foreign Christian workers are still not allowed to establish residence. Thankfully, the doors remain open to go on trips to help train preachers and preach the Gospel with some precautions.



Preachers who attended second training session