

◆ The Garcia Gazette

Reaching Mexico and the Nations for Jesus

May 2019



Link International
Ministries



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Reaching Mexico and
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Dear ones,

Our trip to Cuba this April was again amazing! Thank you for walking with us in prayer and your ever faithful support during this trip!

Before we give our report, we thought it would be helpful and interesting for you to learn a little more about this beloved country that we have traveled to for the last 12 years. The following is very condensed information and there are links below each section for further understanding.

Lessons on our beloved Cuba: Politics

In Communist states the First or General Secretary of the Communist Party is typically the de facto leader of the country and a more powerful position than state offices such as President (head of state) or Prime Minister (head of government), when those positions are held by different individuals.

Fidel Castro governed the Republic of Cuba beginning in 1959 until he stepped down in 2008 as President and then again stepping down in 2011 as the Head of the Communist Party Central Committee. Raúl was selected as his successor. Raúl Castro held both positions from 2011-2018. Fidel died on Nov 25, 2016.



The current first secretary is Raúl Castro. And the President of the Republic of Cuba, in its current form established under the Constitution of 2019 is Miguel Diaz-Canel. He was appointed on April 19, 2019. The president is the second most powerful position.



To learn more:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_Cuba

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Secretary_of_the_Communist_Party_of_Cuba

Lessons on our beloved Cuba: The Economy

In April, a few days before we were to return home, it was declared that it was the beginning of a new "special period." Our friends asked us to pray with them against this declaration of economic crisis. Please join us in prayer. The excerpt below confirms what is happening and what we saw.

*By The Associated Press May 11, 2019
HAVANA — The Cuban government has begun widespread rationing of chicken, eggs, rice, beans, soap and other basic products in the face of a grave economic crisis.*

Commerce Minister Betsy Díaz Velázquez told the state-run Cuban News Agency on Friday that the rationing would begin in order to deal with shortages of staple foods...

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/11/world/americas/cuba-rationing-sanctions.html>

For those of you who would like to understand the background of the crisis called the "special period" that is once again hovering over the island as a threat to those living there, please refer to this concise article.

<http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/havana/lperez2.htm>

Lessons on our beloved Cuba: Religion

Cuba's prevailing religion is Roman Catholicism, although in some instances it is profoundly modified and influenced through syncretism. A common syncretic religion is Santería. Santería is a system of beliefs that merges aspects of Yoruba religion brought to the New World by enslaved Yoruba people along with Catholicism and the religions of the

indigenous peoples of the Americas in addition to Cuban Spiritism. The Yoruba people brought in various religious customs, including a trance and divination system for communicating with their ancestors and deities, animal sacrifice, and sacred drumming and dance. The need to preserve their traditions and belief systems in a hostile cultural environment prompted enslaved Africans of various ethnic groups in Cuba, to merge their customs with aspects of Roman Catholicism...

In order to preserve and shield (mask) their traditional beliefs, the Lucumí people syncretized their Orichás with Catholic saints. (As a consequence, the terms "saint" and "orichá" are commonly used interchangeably among practitioners.) Spanish colonial planters who saw the enslaved African people celebrating on saints' days did not know that they were actually performing rituals related to Orichás and assumed that they were showing more interest in Catholic saints than in the Christian God—hence the origin of the term Santería.



The Roman Catholic Church estimates that 60 percent of the population is Catholic, but only 5% of that 60% attends mass regularly, while independent sources estimate that as few 1.5% of the population does so.

Membership in Protestant churches is estimated to be 5 percent and includes Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodists, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and Lutherans. In recent decades, Cuba has seen a rapid growth of Evangelical Protestants: "Cuba's Christians have thrived despite the island's politics and poverty. Their improbable, decades-long revival is often described as being rivaled only by China's. "It's incredible. People just come on their own, looking for God," says a Western Baptist leader. *"Will success spoil Cuba's Revival?" Christianity Today October 26, 2015. Retrieved March 22, 2016.* Other Christian denominations include the Greek Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church. There are also Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in this 5%.

Non-Christian minority religions in Cuba include Hinduism and Chinese folk religion, which each account for 0.2% of the population, as well as the Bahá'í Faith, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam and Neoreligions, which all have non-negligible numbers of followers accounting for less than 0.1% of Cuba's population. In addition to the above, 18.0% of Cubans declared themselves to be agnostic and 5.1% claimed to be atheists.

Although restrictions on religion in Cuba were minimal compared to other communist nations like the Soviet Union or China, the large atheist population was most likely caused by the communist atmosphere of Marxist-Leninist atheism.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Cuba
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santer%C3%ADA>

Santería is something that we see every year and we repeatedly hear testimonies of people who have found Jesus and been transformed completely by His grace.

This year's Cuba Report:

We arrived on Friday the 29th of March and had 2 days of team training. Our Cuban leadership team was amazing. We had the largest national team we have ever had. They led team meetings, directed the conference sessions, taught, facilitated groups, preached and gave testimonies. Pablo was the main translator for Frank Meitz during the general sessions and we both led small facilitation groups. The pastors and leaders divided into groups by church at the end of the week to make an implementation plan for each of their individual churches and mission's sites.



In Pablo's group there was a young man named Idalberto. He was a brand-new Christian – about three weeks old! He is originally from Matanzas and is married. He had been deeply involved in the practice of Santería. Even though the conference was for leaders, pastors, missionaries – he was invited to attend. In his testimony he shared the following words: "Only God knows why I am here, and it is certainly not by coincidence. God wanted me to be here. I am here – not as a pastor or a leader. I am just another "sheep" but I believe that one day I will be here as a leader. Before coming here this week, when the pastor spoke to the congregation, I felt like just another "grain of rice in the bunch" and I didn't know where to go from there... I have learned about biblical principles... I have learned about the sinful nature... What am I going to do with this discipleship now? I am going to ask for grace and help from God that as I learn and grow under my discipler, that I would also hear when God tells me that it is time to disciple someone else."



In Martha's group there was a woman named Magdalena. She said "This week has been a blessing to me and to those of us in our group. The teachers have repeated over and over that the purpose of this learning is to put discipleship into practice in our churches when we leave here. I'm not going to take this as human insistence, but from God because that was the design established by Christ."



After the Discipler Training Conference, we took a breath at the beach with Frank and Jeanette for a couple of days before the "Refreshing Your Marriage Conference"!



This year instead of traveling all over the province for short conferences, they asked us to do a 4-day conference at a campground. The first day and a half of the marriage conference we equipped them for premarital counseling and crisis counseling in their churches. The following two days were a RETREAT! Because those in attendance were pastors and leaders we know that they are always giving to others. Our goal was for them to relax with their spouses and be challenged and ministered to in the conference sessions and have time as a couple for



one on one interaction and conversation away from the demands of the church body and regular responsibilities.

There were 38 couples in attendance, and we held the conference in a government campground that was right at the edge of the sea. We watched couples sit under a tree, at a table or at the edge of the ocean and talk to each other doing homework assignments that provoked deep conversation, laughter and tears... Many of them expressed that they had never had that type of experience before and we give thanks to God that he allowed and provided for our time there.



Quickly our time was up, and it was time to return home. Many of you know that a few days after returning home from Cuba, Pablo's mother passed away. She had been diagnosed with ALS and one of our prayers was that she wouldn't pass while we were out of the country. God was gracious and we were at home with her when she died. The Lord showed Himself faithful over and over, every step of the way. And though our hearts are broken, and we miss her terribly, we are at peace. Thank you for your prayers and for standing with us and with the whole Garcia family with your notes of encouragement and outpouring of love... We are so grateful.



Exciting news! The last few years we have been working with and training up several Mexican youth that are wonderful leaders and who love Jesus with all their hearts. They are the ones who step in when we are gone, who are our right hands when we are here... They have been camp counselors when we have done weekend camps and have helped with teaching and leading worship. They are extraordinary young people.

A little before going to Cuba this April, the Cuban leadership sent us a letter and asked us to consider returning in the summer for a quick, 1-week trip to help with a youth camp. The Cuban youth are saving, saving, saving and will be paying a portion of their expenses. So, a team has been formed and five of us from Mexico are going on a mission's trip to Cuba! They are: Esteban, Yanet, Bibiana – and Pablo and I! We will send another letter in a few days with a small interview from each one of them. We are so excited for this opportunity to minister with them overseas. They have all been on mission trips before – but all within Mexico! This is a brand-new adventure for them and we are so grateful for this opportunity.

For those of you interested in financially supporting this endeavor, here is a list of needs and how you can help!

- ◆ Our tickets are about half paid for. We still need roughly \$1,300 to finish paying for them.
- ◆ We need about \$1,500 to help with the camp and to cover our expenses while there.
- ◆ Please consider "adopting" one of these precious youth that are going to serve.
- ◆ Or if you would prefer to adopt a Cuban camper, it is about \$30 for the week for each of them.



**SUMMER
MISSION**
REACHING PEOPLE, BUILDING LEADERS



Thank you for your faithful partnership in ministry...

Pablo & Martha