

February 17, 2016 - NOTE - We cannot send out the Weekly Pastoral Letter in its usual format due to computer problems at the office, as well as Lori Doyal, who prepares the newsletter, being home sick with a case of double pneumonia. Please keep Lori in your prayers. Below is a summary of our recent trip to Cuba. There will be more details and reflections in the weeks to come.

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### Florida Presbyteries Gather in Cuba



Last week, the Presbyteries of Tropical Florida, Tampa Bay and Peace River traveled to Cuba for a meeting with the leadership of the Presbyterian Reform Church of Cuba Synod and the three Presbyteries (El Centro, Havana and Matanzas). This was the first meeting of these presbyteries since the 1960 US embargo on Cuba. The two day meeting was held at the Matanzas [Seminario Evangélico de Teología](#) and was organized by the GA World Mission Latin America and Caribbean Area Coordinator, Rev. Dr. Valdir Franca and Mission Co-Worker Rev. Jo Ella Holman. The meeting was to begin new relationships and to learn about each other's churches, struggles and ministry. The Synod Executive, Rev. Daniel Izquierdo, and the Seminary

President, Rev. Dr. Carlos Emilio Ham, spoke about this being a historic event; that it has been a deeply held desire to reconnect to South Florida's presbyteries. Adding to the significance of the meeting, we were visited by Rev. Dr. Ofelia Miriam Ortega Suarez, a longtime missionary and elected member of the Cuban Parliament.



The three Florida Presbyteries returned with plans to prayerfully discern our next steps. We will be joining the Cuba Partner's Network, which is currently supported by the Presbyteries of Long Island, Central Florida, Baltimore, Chicago and others. We learned that is very important that we work through this organization and World Missions. Currently, Americans cannot travel directly there unless on a specific visa; we were on a religious visa that required we stay in the seminary. In the months ahead, the three Florida Presbyteries will be providing congregations more information.

For now, keep our brothers and sisters in prayer. They have vibrant ministries with active churches and have created new

worshipping communities. They are a witness to the call to serve, a witness of courage, faithfulness and hope. Also, pray for the recently arrived PCUSA missionaries, Rev. Dr. David Cortes-Fuentes and Elder Josey Saez Acevedo; they are the first missionaries since the late 1950's, they will be serving at the Seminary.



Other Meeting Attendees include: Synod: Francisco Marrero, Moderator and Dean of Seminary; Rev. Dr. Ary Fernandez, President of Council. Presb. Havana: Rev. Abel Mirabal, Executive Secretary; Rev. Izett Sama, Moderator; Elder Ana Regina Garcia, Vice- Moderator. Presb. Matanzas: Rev. Leticia Ramos, Executive Secretary; Rev. Reina Villalonga, Moderator. Presb. El Centro: Rev Edelberto Valdes, Executive Secretary; Elder Norma Correa, International Relations. Tropical Florida: Rev. Amalie Ash, Transitional Presbyter; Rev. Dr. Doug Hood, Moderator; Rev. Dr. Dennis Andrews, Chair of Council, Rev. Dr. Eve Tolly, Chair of COM, Rev. Jose Manual Capella-Pratts, Moderator Hispanic Caucus. Tampa Bay: Elder Patrice Hatley,

Executive Head of Staff; Elder Marsha Ryberg, Moderator.  
Peace River: Rev. Graham Hart, General Presbyter; Rev.  
Winston Lawson, Pastor, First Pres. Lehigh Acres; Rev. Clinton  
Cottrell, previous stated Clerk/Pastor Cypress Lake PC, Ft  
Meyers. In the coming weeks the Weekly Pastoral Letter will post  
stories about this special meeting. (adapted from Tropical Florida Weekly Letter)