

## **Cuba: Seminary students take city by Storm**

Interview with Dr. Fernando Ortiz

### **What was the main goal the mission trip?**

Equip. Inspire. Evangelize.

That's why this was more than a mission trip. It was a study tour with a heavy component of evangelism. Students who went on the tour took classes on personal and public evangelism beforehand and the whole experience was meant to equip them to obtain an evangelistic mindset and to enlarge their worldview.

By immersing in the world of the local church, participants were able to learn valuable lessons on how the Cuban church do evangelism the "New Testament way" and how they have been so successful despite the repressive communist system. We wanted both locals and students to be inspired to live a life of witnessing.

The idea was to take the city by storm. We chose five different sites, each one holding their own evangelistic meeting. Pr. Dwight Nelson, PMC Pastor, preached at one site, but our seminary students led the meetings in the other four.

Another goal was to give local workers the resources necessary for evangelism. We do this through *Care for Cuba* ([careforcuba.org](http://careforcuba.org)), a project to collect funds to buy much needed resources for Cuban workers. This year, we were able to buy 100 bicycles, 23 laptops, 10 tablets, 4 video projectors, 4 horses, and two mission outposts that will house three missionaries in remote villages in the Cuban mountains and also serve as house churches for the newly planted congregations.

### **Why did you choose to go to Cuba?**

When we first began our trips to Cuba in 1998, no groups, study tours or mission trips were going there, perhaps because it was a "closed" country. But precisely because it was a closed country we sought ways to "open" paths to communicate the gospel to them and to bring hope to a discouraged nation. People there in many ways are hopeless. They have nothing in terms of personal possessions or property and listening to the gospel gives them an incredible amount of hope. That's why this year's meetings were entitled "New Hope in Christ". Churches filled to capacity, and for people coming from the United States, it feels incredible to experience a vibrating church ready to grow. In essence, we wanted to provide a fresh and vigorous venue for seminary students, and we found that in Cuba!

### **What part of Cuba were you in?**

Santiago de Cuba, which is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in Cuba with almost one million inhabitants. This city has a lot of *Santeria*, which is a form of witchcraft with hundreds of thousands of followers. We were able to work with families who made the decision to leave their "saints" or "idols" behind and embrace Jesus as their personal Savior.

### **How many people attended the mission trip?**

31 participants, including 3 faculty.

### **Can you share a cool experience/story from the trip?**

During our scouting trip, in October, we met by chance an accomplished pianist who worked at a prestigious hotel in Santiago. When she played a Christian hymn in a secular setting, we decided to invite her to our March meetings. When we returned for the actual evangelism, she surprised us by inviting us to her Pentecostal church... to preach! When she asked permission to her pastor, he said "It simply feels right, and if it feels right, it must come from God!" So, up we went to the Pentecostal church on a hot Sunday morning where Dwight Nelson preached a powerful message of hope in the cross. After that it was our turn to invite the whole congregation to our meetings. We were pleased to see some of the members attending a few of our meetings. So, was all of this a coincidence? No. Providence & a Divine appointment? For sure!

### **How did you see Jesus the most during the week?**

- I saw Jesus working in our AU students working side by side with Cuban Bible workers, going door to door and being transformed as they shared their own faith.
- I saw Jesus in Miguel who has only one leg. His house was destroyed by hurricane Sandy in 2012 and counts himself "rich" now that he heard about Jesus. When our AU students gave him a Bible, he came the next day with the Bible so underlined you would think he has had it for years. A veteran for his country, now he has turned into a soldier for Jesus.
- I saw Jesus in Liuska's mother, who, as a *Santera*, had many idols, but surrendered them to follow her newfound faith.
- I saw Jesus in a man who was bed-ridden for 37 years and when AU students went to visit him, he started singing so beautiful, that he rather ministered and encouraged our students and gave them a much-needed boost of joy, strength and hope.

### **How did the people respond to your mission work?**

Extremely well. They were open, cheerful, excited, and happy to come to the meetings. Each one of the five sites was packed to capacity each night. After each meeting, dozens came forward to altar calls. Some of them decided to accept Jesus as their personal Savior for the first time. As a result, 277 people were baptized on the last Sabbath, and another 50 are preparing to get baptized in the next month or so.

### **What is one thing you will always remember about your trip?**

I will always remember Isaac a 17 year-old who is the pathfinder leader at this church and who studies the bible with 16 persons. When he arrives home from school every day, his priority are his Bible studies, and if there is time, he says "I'll do my homework." He is an A student. But more than anything he is an "A" soul winner.

**Anything else?**

The doors are opening in Cuba! Visit [CareforCuba.org](http://CareforCuba.org) and be part of this movement! Let's help usher a new era of gospel preaching by being the protagonists of an unprecedented event that mirrors what the Lord did in Russia in the 80's.

-- Interview with Dr. Fernando Ortiz, DMin.

Director of the Master of Divinity Program and Cuba Study Tour Leader.