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"Preserving–Sharing–Caring"

Crossroads

Special Issue: Methodists in Cuba

Map of Cuba. Public domain. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Cuba#/media/File:La2-demis-cuba.png.

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"Everything They Do Is Dedicated to the Glory of God": Our Sister Church in Cuba

Presented by Samuel Rogers, Sr. and Summarized by Pamela C. Crosby

This article is a summary of "Mission in Cuba," presented on April 21, 2021, as part of a series on "Global Missions" at Trinity's Lay Academy. Due to the pandemic, the presentation was aired on Zoom. Persons can watch the video at https://www.tumct.org/lay-academy-global-missions/. For more information on Lay Academy programs, including this one, please go to https://www.tumct.org/grow/lay-academy/.

Sam Rogers, Sr., who has served for two decades as the point-person for Trinity's sister church in Fomento, Cuba, shared with his Lay Academy audience his "perspective on Cuba" and that of his wife and fellow traveler, **Mary Margaret,** on ways the Cuban members of the sister church at Fomento have come to mean to both of them "as a matter of faith."

(*cont. on p. 2*)

(cont. from p. 1)

"The difference between the time we first went and the time Wayne and I were there the last time was like night and day. The whole tenor of the country has changed since then—I think for the better."

— Sam Rogers, Sr.

Fomento's Geography

Fomento is located in the center of Cuba in the foothills of the Escambray Mountains. According to the Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas, Cuba, its population was 31,788 in 2020.[1]

The people raise tobacco and sugarcane in this farming community. The produce is shipped to other areas of the island by means of a commercial railroad that runs through the center of town. Many people also work in the town's sugar mill, which Sam described as a considerably "back-breaking" job.

Sam compared Fomento's town to small farming communities of the early 1900s in South Georgia. Transportation is for the most part by means of foot and horse and wagon. Those who own cars are generally individuals who are members of the Communist Party.

A New Beginning

After the Revolution in 1959 and its subsequent repression of religious expression, many priests and pastors left Cuba, with the government converting church structures into government buildings.

At first all professions and practices of religious faith were prohibited by the country's constitution until **Pope John Paul II** came to Cuba in 1998. The Pope's visit was an extraordinary event; thousands of Cubans, who were "yelling and screaming praises," greeted the Pope in the Revolution Plaza in Havana's downtown. For the first time since 1959, Christmas was recognized as a national holiday. Fidel Castro would allow churches to openly organize again if they did not establish new churches in addition to those existing at the time just prior to the Revolution.

Trinity Has a Second Home

Shortly after **The Rev. John Willis** assumed his appointment as Trinity's senior pastor in 1999,[2] he called up Sam, announcing some surprising news, saying, "I have signed you and Mary Margaret up to go to Cuba with Pat and me for a week to visit our sister church at Fomento."

Sam's first reaction to this news was that John must have thought he could serve as a translator because he had been studying Spanish. But Sam protested, explaining, "If you need a translator, I ain't your guy. I'm only a student of Spanish, and I can't carry on a conversation in Spanish...."

But John, not the least bit discouraged, responded with simply, "So I'll take that as a 'yes!'" And Sam and Mary Margaret would soon be on their way to Fomento, Cuba.

Times of Change

So 2003 would be the year when Sam and Mary Margaret would make the first of two trips together (so far) to Fomento, returning to the Cuban town for the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the church known as "Iglesia San Pablo Metodista de Fomento," in 2008, and then in 2017, Sam would travel there with **The Rev. Dr. Wayne Wyatt.** For Sam, times had changed dramatically in Cuba from his first introduction to the island in contrast to his last trip. He recalled,

> The difference between the time we first went and the time Wayne and I were there the last time was like night and day. The whole tenor of the country has changed since then—I think for the better.

"A Little Bit Unsettling"

Sam, Mary Margaret, John, and Pat arrived in

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Cuba in 2003. After their landing at the José Martí International Airport in Havana, the plane taxied "to a building way off to the side" instead of to an airport gate.

When they exited the plane, military guards were posted "all over the place," armed with AK-47s. The guards "herded" them into a room where they sat for two hours while their luggage was searched.

Some of the medicine they had brought with them for the people in the church was confiscated. Sam recalled that this episode was their first experience there, "and it was kind of a little bit unsettling" seeing so many guns in one place.

John was scheduled to preach a sermon to the church on that first evening in Cuba, which made for a tense experience as Sam described,

> One of the things that I think directly affected John while we were down there [was that] John had to have permission to present his sermon the first night we were there, and it was getting on toward the time for the sermon to go, and the written permission slip had not arrived . . . .
>
> John said, "The heck with that I'm going out there and preach. I don't care whether they give me permission or not." Well, everybody started scurrying around worried about that, and finally they came up about 15 minutes before he was scheduled to go on with the permission so he could speak, and he did a stem-winder, too!

During this same 2003 trip, Sam and Mary Margaret were driven in private cars to Cabaiguan, a nearby town, to a *residence church*, (where a congregation worships in a private home). **Pastor Martinez o**f Iglesia San Pablo made sure that they were parked a couple of blocks or so away because residence (or *house churches*) "were not allowed at that time." And there was concern that "drivers of the car. . .might report us to local Communist Party."

(cont. on p. 4)

Rev. Dr. Wayne Wiatt in the sanctuary of Iglesia San Pablo Metodista de Fomento, February 2017. Sam described Dr. Wiatt as

> one more talented guy. That guitar that he's playing he borrowed and then re-strung it to his way of thinking. He started playing that guitar and singing—believe it or not—in Spanish. He had the Spanish language before him of "How Great Thou Art," and . . . he went through it the first time and then in English. He said, "Everybody join me!," and everybody in the room joined him in singing. . . . It was really to me an emotional time, and it gave me new respect for Wayne and his talents . . . .

(*cont. from p. 3*)

"A Great Emotional Experience for All of Us"

There were other types of experiences that had been heretofore unfamiliar to Sam as a U.S. citizen regarding limitations on freedom of religion that happened in these earlier times he was there. Sam noted that when persons traveled in Cuba, they had to be cautious not only about what they did, but also what they said because there may have been persons who were listening for any anti-government remarks that later might be reported to authorities. At one encounter during his 2008 trip, he had been prepared:

> When we got to to Fomento, . . . a new member of the church latched on to me for some reason and ... he'd get me off by himself, and he would say, "Tell me about free enterprise. Tell me about America. Tell me what's going on." He said, "I've tried to get information . . but every time I go to the library, they send me to Sancti Spiritus"—that's another town there—"or they tell me, 'All you need to know about is Marx and Marxism and Leninism....'" And I had already been prompted that we were not to talk politics with them—either our politics or theirs.

Later Sam learned that the individual asking him all those questions had been placed in the church by the Communist Party. Following Sam's leaving the country, he heard that the inquisitive person had been promoted from teacher to principal in a high school.

Iglesia San Pablo Metodista de Fomento. February 2017. Sound and light technicians at the church get ready for Dr. Wayne Wiatt to preach on the first night Sam and Dr. Wayne are in Cuba.

Fomento, Cuba. February 2017. This is a common means of transportation in the farming community.

On an occasion when the church at Fomento needed repair parts for equipment, persons from the church went to Havana only to have the hardware store refuse to sell them the needed parts because the needed repairs were for a religious body.

It was during this second trip that the church's music director, **Zoila Garcia-Glez**, asked Sam and others from the U.S. to sing "Amazing Grace" to the accompaniment of her piano and the church's band. It was a moment of powerful inspiration:

> There were about six or seven of us down there, including Larry Benson—Larry is not with us any more—but the whole group of us got up on the stage . . . and we said, "We can't—we don't know Spanish!" She [Zoila Garcia-Glez] said, "That's all right—sing it in English four times. There's four verses." So we sang "Amazing Grace" four times, . . and at the end, . . it broke the house up. . . . It was a great emotional experience for all of us. . . .

One of the remarkable changes that Sam saw on his trip in 2017 with Dr. Wiatt was when the U.S. flag was included in a procession at one of the church services:

> There were about 150 people in . . . the sanctuary of that little church. In comes the procession of the choir. Followed by the choir was the Christian flag followed by . . . the Cuban national flag, and, guess what! The flag bringing up the rear was "Old Glory."

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The Growth of Methodism

Currently, persons can participate in religious services on "a limited basis." For example, the pastor must have the government's permission to speak in church, and any information that persons receive is filtered and carefully "fed" to individuals "by the government."

But religious faith in Cuba is strong and growing. In 2003, Iglesia San Pablo had 50 members when Sam and his fellow travelers visited, and today it has 150. There are 50 to 75 children who attend Sunday school, where they also get a meal.

Rev. John Willis had helped to establish a church in Cabaiguan, but also there are five resident churches that are connected to Iglesia San Pablo, which Sam and others have visited during their last trip. At the time that they visited the resident church in Cabaiguan (mentioned earlier), there were as few as eight or ten individuals who were meeting in the home church, but now their membership has grown to 75.

Sam told his Lay Academy audience that more than 500 Methodist Churches in Cuba, totaling 65,000 members and friends of the church, are now active in Cuba. Among other active denominations are Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Church of God.

Many contrasts in the U.S. and its neighbor country exist relating to freedom and independence. The government controls the education of children, and there is considerable government indoctrination where the aim is to make God and religious faith "irrelevant," while the Cuban president is presented as someone who will take care of all their wants and needs.

Children of parents who are members of the Communist Party who want and have the qualifications to attend college may do so. Those who are not party members are ordered to pursue careers that the party chooses for them.

At some point Cuban/U.S. relations were improving. In 2014, President Barack Obama opened a U.S. embassy in Havana, and Cuba opened one in Washington. There was hope that interactions between the two countries would become more amicable. However, President Donald Trump canceled policies for improved open relations, and according to Sam, relations have deteriorated since then.

Yet in recent years, people in Cuba have had access to the internet, they have had cell phones, and they have been able to call persons in the United States—a big difference than what John and Sam saw when they first visited.

"Everything They Do. . . ."

Sam emphasized that he grew in his own faith by experiencing how the people of Fomento view and practice their faith:

> Their faith in God is palpable. Everything they do is dedicated to the glory of God, and the church is the center of daily life down there. They don't meet just on Sundays. They have three services on Sundays, and they also meet on Wednesday night and meet on Thursday and sometimes meet on Friday night. They don't meet for an hour, but they meet for hours.

Sam also stressed that persons who live in the U. S. have "everything," but in Cuba, they have so little "yet their faith is much deeper than the American faith."

(cont. on p. 6)

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— Sam Rogers, Sr.

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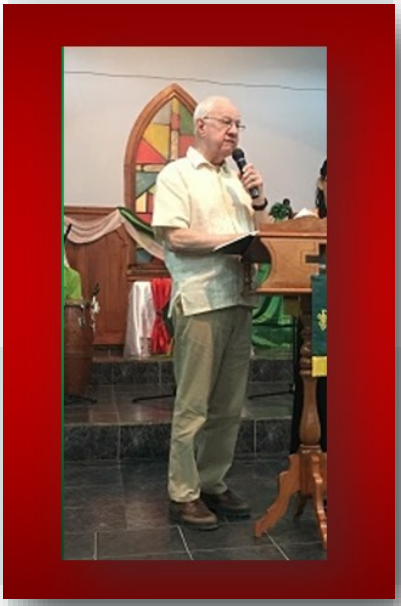

Sam Rogers, Sr. in the sanctuary of Iglesia San Pablo Metodista de Fomento, February 2017. Sam described the photo in this way:

> They asked me to say a few words that night, and I did in halting Spanish, and if you'll note the outfit I had on is called a Cuban *guayabera*. When you wear one of those, you are a dressed-up guy. They gave me that [shirt] that night to wear to show that I was a Cuban.

Friends and Church Community

Through their trips and experiences, Sam and Mary Margaret have made close friends with their Cuban church brothers and sisters. **Davis Colina**, for example, is a stone mason who plays the saxophone in a small band called "The Ark." Davis speaks a little English, and Sam speaks a little Spanish—together they can communicate pretty well with each other. Davis is married to **Maide,** whose twin sister is **Maite**. Davis and Maya named their first son *Samuel* ("Sam" in Spanish) after Sam. Maide and Maite's mother is Zoila Garcia-Glez, the music director and accomplished pianist mentioned earlier.

Sam and Mary Margaret also consider themselves members of Iglesia San Pablo Metodista de Fomento, in addition to their membership to Trinity. Their devotion to the church includes sending each year an offering that provides a roast pork dinner for their Christmas Day dinner. Sam considers himself a *guajiro*, ("country boy") and also an "American Cuban."

The Future of Cuba

In his April 2021 presentation Sam talked about Cuba's future now that the Castros were gone. He explained that there is uncertainty about how the new government and president will function. As he described the situation, there has been some "limited enterprise." He continued,

> For example, if you . . . know how to repair appliances, you can open a little business and repair appliances and make a little money for that—that's permitted. You're permitted by the government now to have a restaurant—what they call "home restaurants" to serve a limited number of meals in homes, and they make a little money on that, and I don't think the Cubans are going to give that up in the future.

A Future with Our Fomento Family

Since Sam has been the coordinator of Trinity's partnership with the Cuban church, there have been at least two pastors who have come to Trinity, spending a week in Tallahassee and speaking at the church. Sam shared in his talk that he would like to see that "we either set up a meeting for a pastoral visit up here from their current pastor or that we send a delegation down there to keep that relationship going. . . ."

And the future also means for Sam and Mary Margaret continued relationships with persons from Fomento now living in the U.S. As Sam remembered fondly,

> Mary Margaret and I stayed with a family down there. Their last name was Rodriguez, and they have since immigrated under a Cuban national lottery [Special Cuban Migration Program] to the United States—their whole family has—and they live in Houston now, and they're still good friends of ours; in fact, their son, a guy by the name of Papo and his wife Isabelle are living in Houston. They came through Tallahassee a couple or three years ago and spent a weekend with us on their way to Miami. . . . One of Papo and Isabelle's daughters is named *Ruth Maria* after Mary Margaret, and you know that just shows you the connection and the feeling that we have for those friends of ours down there.

It is most likely that Sam would say that he is awfully glad that The Rev. John Willis "signed" him and "Mary Margaret up to go to Cuba" one fateful day in 2003—and many persons in Fomento must surely feel the same![3]

Readers can learn more about sister church relationships with our Methodist neighbors at https://www.cubaministry.org/about-1

Acknowledgement

I want to express my appreciation to Sam and Mary Margaret Rogers, John and Pat Willis, Dr. Wayne Wiatt, and Lay Academy planners for this opportunity to learn about Cuba's wonderful people!

Notes

1. https://www.citypopulation.de/en/cuba/admin/sancti_sp%C3%ADritus/2805__fomento/

2. The Rev. Barbara Hynes commented during this Lay Academy presentation that "the very beginning [of the relationship] of the sister church . . . [in Cuba] started in a Lay Academy class...."Larry Rankin (see the article referring to him in this issue) and Bishop (James Lloyd) Knox participated in this session during the time of Rev. David Horton's (1988-1999) pastorate at Trinity.

3. Sam read "A Sincere Man Am I," a poem by the Cuban patriot José Martí. Because of copyright restriction, we cannot publish the poem here. But you can read it at https://www.best-poems.net/jos-mart/a-sincere-man-am-i-verse-i.html.

Making History: Quarterly News from Trinity's Historical Society and Preservation of Church History Committee

Updated History of Trinity UMC

The Historical Society is grateful to **Marti Chumbler** for her planning for, and work on, an updated history of Trinity United Methodist Church. The monograph will be a revised version of *Trinity United Methodist Church: Tallahassee's First Church 1824-1999*, edited by **Linda Yates.**

At the September 2021 meeting of the history committee, Marti, as editor of the updated publication, shared her goals for the project. One of the goals is to research Trinity's history with a more sensitive and comprehensive view of past events dealing with underrepresented populations.

The publication date is set for 2024, the year of Trinity's 200th celebration of the founding of the church.

Volunteers for Inputting Data

Mary Margaret Rogers has contributed extensively to the church membership records by imputing data from baptism and death records. There is a considerable need for volunteers to carry on the project of inputting data so that we meet historical as well as UMC requirements. Contact **Pam Crosby** at pcrosby@tumct.org if you have interest in working with this church membership records project.

Timeline Project

Plans to add to the wall display timeline in the Yates Center are still in place with ongoing prioritizing of past church events leading to the 200th anniversary. **Rhonda Work** and **Linda Yates** are overseeing this initiative.

Call for Submissions of Stories of Women Leaders

Help *Crossroads* bring into balance the published narratives of the work and leadership of women in Trinity's past so that readers, researchers, young people growing up in the church, and others can appreciate in a more comprehensive way the significant impact that women have made in the history of our church.

Write to Pam Crosby (pcrosby@tumct.org) to send along your suggestions and submissions that help to answer the question, "What women leaders have influenced Trinity United Methodist Church?"

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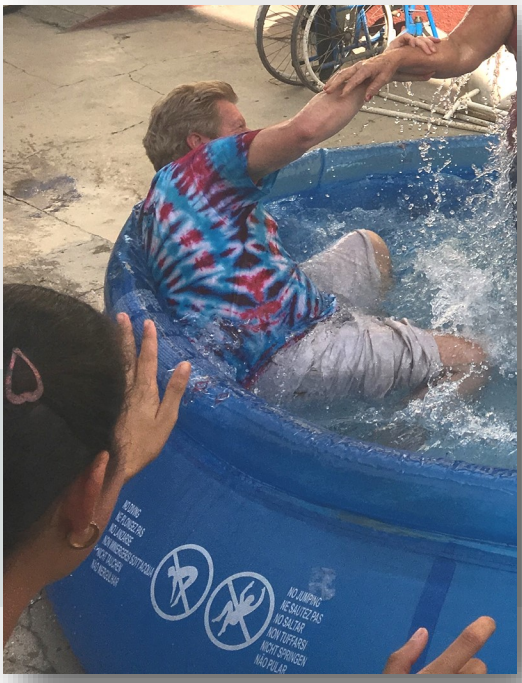
Reflections on Cuba

By Rev. Dr. Wayne. D. Wiatt

My connection with Cuba began in 1996. Shortly after my appointment as the senior pastor of Southside United Methodist Church in Jacksonville, FL, I met **The Rev. Carl and Bette Shafer**, retired missionaries to Cuba. They had moved to Jacksonville and made my new congregation their church home. They immediately began encouraging me to visit Cuba as part of the Florida Conference Cuba Covenant, now known as Methodists United in Prayer (https://www.cubaministry.org).

I began to make plans to travel through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to work on building a youth camp near Santa Clara, Cuba. Little did I know at the time that the Shafers would help arrange for me to visit the church they served near Havana Cuba called Santiago de las Vegas, and we would soon adopt that exact congregation through the Cuba Florida Covenant. From that point on, we became lifelong friends, and they continued to support my ministry at both Southside and while serving on the Cabinet of the Florida Conference.

"Mr. and Mrs. Carl D. Shafer."1948. Mission Photograph Album - Portraits #8, p. 0067, I.D. C18615. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.



The Rev. Dr. Wayne Wiatt. Iglesia San Pablo Metodista de Fomento, Fomento, Cuba. February 2017. Dr. Wiatt assisted with the church's baptizing ceremonies of eight church members. The camera caught the moment just when Dr. Wiatt lost his balance in the baptismal font (child's swimming pool) and in doing so, also baptized himself! He and the newly baptized church member were fortunately not hurt, and the scene elicited good-hearted laughter to those attending this blessed occasion.

I learned that The Rev. Carl and Bette Shafer were sent in 1952 by the Board of Missions (of the then Methodist Church) to the Methodist Church of Cuba, which at that time was part of the Florida Conference. Initially, Carl started at the Vedado University Church as the associate pastor, where he and Bette also studied Spanish.

In 1953, he was appointed as pastor of Santiago de las Vegas, and within three years there were six house churches formed, with five of them becoming churches (most continue in service to this day). He and Bette partnered together to raise the funds to convert an old bat-infested tobacco facility into Colegio Wesley School with more than 500 students consisting of both primary and secondary education.

In 1956, while continuing to develop the church and school, Carl was invited to teach Christian education at the Ecumenical Seminary in Matanzas. Having experienced Carl's passion for teaching, the seminary leadership sent him to the United States in pursuit of his Ph.D.

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"Matanzas—The Campus of Union Theological Seminary." 1950s. Mission Photograph Album - Cuba #01, p. 0034, I.D. F35434. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

Suffice it to say that Carl and Bette Shafer were heroes of the early Methodist Church in Cuba and heroes of mine for their faithful evangelistic work in Cuba and beyond.

In the spring of 1960, Carl and Bette took their family to Boston University with the burning desire to return to Cuba and live out their passion to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the mission field. This of course was paused because of the Cuban Revolution. Carl and Bette never stopped praying for the Methodist Church of Cuba and their many colleagues and friends. They were privileged to return to Cuba in November 1998 for the 100th Anniversary of Missionaries to Cuba Celebration, where they renewed many friendships and re-engaged with their passion to spread the Good News in Cuba. With this trip, their spirits were enlivened to bring greater awareness of the plight of Cuban people and the opportunity to spread social holiness to thousands through the work of the Methodist Church of Cuba.

I was able to return to Cuba in 2002 as the superintendent of the East Central District in Orlando and share in a District Conference with the Holguin District in Southern Cuba. During each visit I was able to build new relationships and see evidence of the church growth in Cuba through a direct result of faithful missionaries like Carl and Bette Shafer.

My last trip to Cuba was with Sam Rogers, Sr. shortly after my arrival at Trinity, and as Sam has shared in a previous article, the relationships continue, even with the difficulties of the current political climate in Cuba and the challenges faced in the midst of the pandemic.

The Rev. Dr. Rini Hernandez, our Florida Conference director of Latino/a Ministry, has asked all United Methodists to do four things. These four things are described in a statement (see below) by the Methodists United in Prayer, which echoed the words of the Methodist Church in Cuba and condemns all violence against the people of Cuba. They called upon churches in Florida and across our nation to act.

My hope is that the Methodist Church in Cuba will continue to grow and that they will be able to experience the freedom to worship and share the gospel of Jesus Christ in fruitful ways in the midst of difficult circumstances. May the legacies of faithful servants and missionaries like Carl and Bette Shafer continue in Cuba for years to come.

(Special Thanks to The Rev. Dr. Thom Shafer, son of Carl and Bette Shafer and district superintendent of the South Central District, Florida Conference for historical information on his parents' ministry in Cuba).

Methodists United in Prayer

1. FAST and PRAY for the people of Cuba. "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?" – Isaiah 58:6

2. Lift up a SHARED PRAYER on Sunday Worship for the people of Cuba. "Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses." – Psalm 107:2

3. GIVE towards relief for the people of Cuba through the Methodist Church in Cuba. "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" – 1 John 3:17

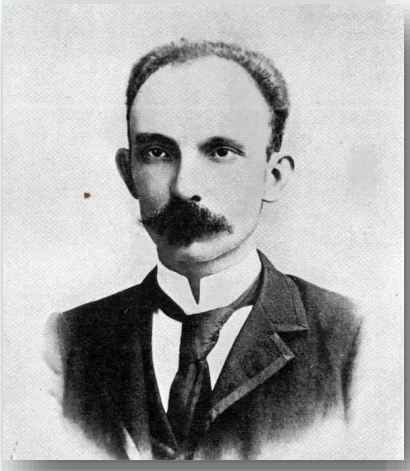
4. Send LETTERS to our nation's leaders: the President, the Senate, and the House of Representatives. "Save, Lord! May the King answer us when we call." – Psalm 20:9

The Methodist Presence in Cuba: U.S. Missionaries and Cuban Pioneers of the Gospel

By Pamela C. Crosby

In 1883, the Florida Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS) sent Cuban Methodists **Enrique Someillán** and **Aurelio Silvera** to organize Cuba's first Methodist church with a congregation of 194 members in Havana. Both men had been living in Florida. Someillán returned to the U.S., where he collaborated with Cuban poet and activist **José Martí** to make provisions for war against Spain in Cuba's quest for independence. Martí would later be killed at the age of 42 (1895) in a clash with Spanish forces, just a few weeks after his return to Cuba (World Methodist Council, n.d.; Berges, 2013, p. 584; Lecuona, 1991, p. 53).

It was only after the Spanish-American War of 1898, which ended Spain's hold on Cuba as a colony, that American missionaries were sent to the island for the first time. Their July 1898 arrival began in the "company of an army of conquest" and initiated a series of "waves" of missionaries while the American military occupied the region (World Methodist Council, n.d.; Pérez, Jr., 1992, p. 105).



José Martí retrato más conocido Jamaica 1892. Author: Cuba. Secretaría de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes. From Iconografía del apóstol José Martí. La Habana : Imp. El siglo XX, 1925. Public Domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jos%C3%A9_Mart%C3%AD_retrato_m%C3%A1s_conocido_Jamaica_1892.jpg

Envisioning the wide scope of opportunities for missionary work, MECS sent missionaries to Cuba and the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) sent missionaries to Puerto Rico, another former Spanish colony. In November 1898, a few months after the Spanish-American War ended, **Bishop Warren Akin Candler** of the MECS came to Havana with the "**Revs. John James Ransom, Walter Russell Lambuth,** presiding elder of the Tampa District, and **The Rev. Dr. David Carter**, missionary to Mexico." Bishop Candler requested that Rev. Carter survey the island to determine sites for Methodist missions. (Finesurrey, 2008, p. 200; Rankin, 1959, p. 6; (World Methodist Council, n.d.).

Portrait of Warren Akin Candler (1857–1941) from The *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, Volume I*, 1893, page 521. January 1, 1893. Public Domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Warren_Akin_Candler_(1857%E2%80%931941).png

Soon the MECS would conduct the first missionary work in Cuba. Following the Methodists, missionaries of other Protestant denominations quickly descended on the island. As the years progressed, the Cuban Methodist movement became more organized with the Cuban Mission organizing in 1907; Cuban Mission Conference organizing in 1919, and Cuban Annual Conference organizing in 1923 (Berges, 2013, p. 584; Pérez, Jr., 1992, pp. 105-107; World Methodist Council, n.d).

American Hegemony

Before the Spanish-American War and subsequent American military occupation, Cuba's Methodist Church had been a "national church" with support of the MECS. After 1898, with the presence of the missionaries, "Americanization" of the island and the Methodist faith began. For example, although Bishop Candler praised **The Rev. Isidoro Barredo** for his work throughout the

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Upper text reads (in old Catalan): "Uncle Sam's craving (by M. Moliné)." Text below reads: "Saving the island so it won't get lost." "La Campana de Gràcia." May 23, 1896. Author: Manuel Moliné. Satirizing USA's intentions about Cuba. Public Domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_fallera_de_l%27oncle_Sam.JPG

war as pastor of the Havana mission, within a few days of Candler's visit to Cuba, U.S. missionaries replaced the Cuban pastors with Americans; the former pastors were relegated to assistants (Rankin, 1959, p. 6).

According to Cuba scholar, **Louis A. Pérez, Jr.,** of the University of South Florida, Tampa in "Protestant Missionaries in Cuba,"

> The U.S. purpose was thus defined early and clearly: to reshape Cuban attitudes, refashion Cuban behaviors, and restructure Cuban institutions in ways that would make Cuban nationality compatible with U.S. sovereignty. The undertaking was formulated in the idiom of progress and uplift to which U.S. citizens in Cuba subscribed and from which they derived orientation. (1992, p. 107)

In 1900, American **Leonard Wood,** military governor of Cuba, said that the Cubans were

> a race that has steadily been going down for a hundred years, and into which we have to infuse new life, new principles, and new methods of doing things. (quoted in Pérez, Jr., 1992, p. 107)

U.S. domination functioned in various ways, ranging from owning property to influencing politics. Success was defined as compliance with U.S. hegemony. Pérez pointed out that

> Protestant missionaries played a central role in this process, supporting from within the normative structures on which U.S. hegemony in Cuba rested. They situated themselves throughout strategic points of Cuban society, places from which to transmit ideological constructs, behavioral norms, and cultural forms across class lines, among all racial groups, and to men and women alike. Cubans were thus socialized to view as normal, and to succeed in, an environment shaped by the primacy of U. S. needs. But they could obtain access to this environment only after acquiring the appropriate language skills, work habits, and political values. It was a world in which being born again promised salvation that was immediate as well as eternal. (Pérez, Jr., 1992, pp. 107-108)

Looking back at the initial involvement of U.S. Methodists, **Rev. Armando Rodriguez**, who was to become Cuba's first active Methodist Bishop, stated that the plans and thoughts of the Cuban natives who had first organized the Methodist Church in Cuba were ignored by the first missionaries. Although he thought that the plans of the missionaries were "well-intentioned" and "supported by the approval and the money of their boards," the "longing, the fervor, the dreams, and the great ideals of the Cuban pioneers of the gospel, who had the zeal to share with their fellow citizens the message of the liberating power and eternal salvation" were never seriously taken into account (Rodriguez, quoted in Rankin, 1959, p. 7).

After Rev. Someillan, who had been appointed to Santiago de Cuba, was denied financial support to build a social hall for his congregation as well as turned down for other requests, he left the Methodist Church to join the Congregational Church. Unfortunately, Rev. Somellian was never officially acknowledged for establishing the Havana Church nor for his service as a district superintendent in Cuba, Key West, and Tampa. There was so much disenchantment with the way American religious leaders treated these "Cuban pioneers of the gospel," other Cuban ministers left the church in protest (Rankin, 1959, p. 6).

"Mercenaries"

Not willing to be silent, Cuban pastors expressed their displeasure by means of a national petition that stated their discontent to the Southern Methodist Board of Missions. On *(cont. on p. 12)*

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October 4, 1909, **Rev. E. E. Clements,** who served Matanzas, reported to Bishop Candler in a letter citing reasons why the Board could not agree to the requests of the pastors. These included

> 1. The present salary scale sets a high and difficult standard for the self supporting the church in the future.
> 2. The present scale puts our native ministry in better condition than our (US) membership.
> 3. ... The present scale of the Cuban ministry is in as good a shape as the average ministry at home... Yet the ministry at home continues to sacrifice, and collect money to help the Cubans preach the gospel to their own people. (Emory University Archives, quoted in Rankin, 1959, p. 8)

Clements went on to criticize the Cuban ministers:

> I believe that [if] our native brethren really felt the great need of their own people they would gladly accept and uncomplainingly the help we are giving." (Emory University Archives, quoted in Rankin, 1959, p. 8)

After Rev. Clements called the Cuban pastors "mercenaries," who only cared for money and not "to save souls," the Cuban Ministers' Committee expressed their hurt and disappointment: "We beg of the Board and of Mr. Clements the proof of any such statement" (Rankin, 1959, p. 8).

Influence of Anglo-Americans

According to Cuban history scholar, **Samuel Roger Finesurrey**, the patronizing of Protestant-administered institutions by Anglo-American leaders presented obstacles to Cubans' own spiritual growth. Missionaries in charge of these institutions garnered much influence, having ties to powerful outsiders as well as powerful leaders in Cuba (2018, p. 187).

John Merle Davis, who would serve on the International Missionary Council, lamented that many Cubans could easily see the contrast of salaries of American missionaries and even the missionaries' household appliances—though modest—with those of their own, making Cuban natives feel a sense of injustice while they, themselves, struggled economically (Finesurrey, 2018, p. 185).

Mission boards in the U.S.—being far removed from the field—tended to understate the importance and influence of Cuban leadership in their own churches. Bishop Rodríguez argued that Methodists in positions of power wielded authority over their missionaries because they "controlled the church's capital." In fact, North American Protestant denominations in general acted in ways that reflected their desire to maintain control over Cuba's churches. As he reflected on the situation of the power dynamics, **Edgar Nesman**, lay Methodist missionary, said he thought that the problem all along had been that the older missionaries had not wanted to create autonomous churches for fear of losing their jobs (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 190, 186, 182).

"[The Rev. Dr.] Glenn Edgar Nesman." 1950s. Mission Photograph Album - Portraits #07, p. 0051, I.D. C15277. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

Yet, change was on the horizon as the relationship between the Cuban Church and U.S. missionaries improved in later years. With the unification of three U.S. Methodist denominations in 1939, the commitment of the Methodist Church of Cuba would shift to the Board of Missions of the MEC rather than with the MECS, and this shift brought about a more "global theology towards missions" (Rankin, 1959, pp. 9-10). Thus this union in 1939 of the Methodist Episcopal Church; the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; and the Methodist Protestant Church brought about a new excitement for mission work in Cuba (Finesurrey, 2018, p. 200).

According to **Larry Rankin,** former director of the Florida Conference's Global Mission and Justice Ministries, "Pastors and lay leaders were regarded as partners in ministry" as the years of service progressed into the late 40s and on into the

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Left: "Mrs. Victor [Kathleen] Rankin." 1950s. Mission Photograph Album - Portraits #07, p. 0001, I.D. C13963. Right: "Mr. Victor Rankin." "1950s." Mission Photograph Album - Portraits #07, p. 0001, I.D. C13962. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

50s (1959, p. 10). Rev. Rankin's parents were **The Rev. Victor and Kathleen Rankin,** who were Methodist missionaries with the Board of Missions. His father told him that

> in the late 40s and into the 50s, Methodist missionary candidates were trained at Scarritt College, Nashville, Tennessee. We were "to work ourselves out of a job." The goal was to train Cubans, while eliminating dependency, promoting financial independence, and self sufficiency. (Rankin, 1959, p. 10)

The ultimate goal, therefore, was to commission women and men of the island as lay leaders and pastors in order that they serve and make decisions for their own congregations (Rankin, 1959, p. 10).

The Influence of Rural Missionaries

Protestant missionaries responded to the extensive need of the Cuban people from the very beginning of their involvement on the island—from education, to English language instruction, to agriculture, to vocational and industrial training, to health, and to overseeing and implementing "orphanages, dispensaries, clinics, and hospitals" (Pérez, Jr., 1992, p. 107).

Methodists increasingly became sympathetic to the needs of Cuban residents who lived in poverty in the rural areas of Eastern Cuba, and their relationships were more of a nature of equal partnership in a community setting. Until the momentous 1939 union, the presence of Southern Methodists in the rural areas had been on the whole restricted (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 200-201).

In contrast to missionaries in Havana, rural missionaries usually did not support policies that excluded Cuban church leaders. Working closely with communities of laborers in the sugar and mining industries provided insight into the suffering of those in poverty so that rural missionaries from the U.S. were able to see firsthand the poorest of Cuban communities. As a result of these contrasting situations, the purposes of the rural and urban missionaries differed considerably (Finesurrey, 2018, p. 192).

Many corporate and political leaders depended upon the missionaries to step in where there was little government presence to offset the adverse effects in regions where the economies were dominated by "foreign capital." In turn, the lives, goals, worldviews, priorities, and actions of the rural missionaries underwent radical transformations as a result of their experiences with those in dire need. Most of the children in rural areas, for example, did not attend school and suffered from intestinal parasites. Many of rural laborers could not read and write. Most houses did not have plumbing, and those who worked in agriculture were not employed year-round (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 187, 192-194; McGuire & Frankel, 2005, pp. 101-2).

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"Physics Laboratory Candler College Havana." 1950s.Mission Photograph Album - Cuba #01, p. 0019, I.D. F145. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

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Urban VS Rural Life

In contrast to American missionaries in rural settings, Anglo-American residents in Havana (in the years between 1952 and 1961) were not on the whole aware of the destructive effects of a "monocrop economy," dominated by "foreign capital" on Cuban farmworkers. Instead, the exposure to rural life for Havana Anglo-American residents was often restricted to going on such outings as golfing trips to "Hershey" or company picnics (Finesurrey, 2018, p. 193).

In turn, many of the experiences of working-class Cubans with Havana's Anglo-Americans were as their servants or as employees in some other type of service capacity. Furthermore, rural missionaries, unlike Anglo-Americans in Havana, were not around upper-class, educated Cubans as their urban counter-parts; despite interacting with many different social and economic classes during the day, urban missionaries were able to retreat to Anglo-American communities in the city at night. Thus a higher standard of living was possible for Havana Anglo-Americans as well as Cubans where there was better opportunities for health care, greater access to educational opportunities, and more chance for social mobility (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 192-193).

"Missionary Carroll English." 1950s. Mission Photograph Album - Cuba #01, p. 0071, I.D. F3808. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

Women Missionaries

Among Americans who had considerable effect on Cuban leaders were single women missionaries, who served for the most part in rural regions. Their influence was far-reaching in that they motivated many young Cuban natives to become pastors as well as professionals. Under their guidance and leadership, these women founded schools and chapels, clinics and community centers. Practically minded and equipped to perform myriad tasks, they were nurses and mechanics, teachers and chaplains—bringing social services to the rural people by means of their administrative and practical skills, with their active involvement propelled by immense dedication and compassion (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 206-208).

Because women generally were not allowed to deliver sermons from behind the pulpit, female missionaries drove social programs; male missionaries served as pastors. In contrast to the men, therefore, women's experiences with the people were characterized by personal interactions through the implementation of social services. Although they could not preach, they did at times have considerable autonomy over institutions they organized. The Woman's Divisions in the Methodist Church administered their own "finances, property, and buildings" (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 206-207).

According to Finesurrey:

> More than other denominations, Methodist women missionaries enjoyed an autonomy that enabled them to form stable and independent rural schools, clinics and churches. The isolation of rural women missionaries positioned them for power and influence secured by few North American women of the time. (2018, p. 207)

So in these remote areas, women missionaries lived with the persons they served—having very few Anglo-American residents in the regions; they sympathized with their suffering, their needs, their hopes, and dreams (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 207-208).

The Rev. Eulalia Cook-González

One notable female missionary in the story of Methodism in Cuba was **The Rev. Eulalia Cook-González,** who was originally from South Carolina and served in the Eastern Cuban city of Báguanos. Her immense influence went well beyond the borders of Cuba as a writer and literacy activist/pioneer, but it was in Cuba in 1940 that she began her long and prestigious mission work (Rankin, 1959, p. 10; "Eulalia Cook-Gonzales," 2001).

Rev. Cook-González graduated from Columbia

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"Miss [The Rev.] Eulallia Cook reading to a Cuban family." 1050s. Mission Photograph Album - Cuba #01, p. 0074, I.D. F3843. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

College in Columbia, SC. She earned an advanced degree from Scarritt College for Christian Workers in Nashville, TN, after several years of teaching in South Carolina's public schools. Her further education included post-graduate courses at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University, Vanderbilt University, Scarritt, and Candler School of Theology (Finesurrey, 2018, p. 190n; "Eulalia Cook-Gonzales," 2001).

At Scarritt College the topic of her thesis was the "Good Neighbor Policy," which **President Franklin Roosevelt** had advocated. Her studies of international cooperation and trade made her reluctant to work in a place that was dominated by the foreign industrialists who controlled Cuba's economy through policies of "American imperialism." In fact, she said she would much rather work in a region where the Cuban people could freely run their own government even if their administration might be imperfect than to work in any area controlled by colonial autocracy no matter how "benevolent" the "despotism" (Finesurrey, 2018, p. 170).

In the community she served, she was called *la mujer loca* (translation: "that crazy woman"), and she wore trousers as she rode horseback throughout the town. She valued her experience serving those who were affected by Cuba's sugar enterprise in order that she could learn how sugar production impacted all concerns of Cuban rural life (Rankin, 1959, p. 10; Finesurrey, 2018, p. 171).

While serving in Cuba, Cook attributed the success of the missionary work in areas controlled by the sugar trade at Báguanos to the refusal of the missionaries to

> carry through any set program, but rather to meet the needs of the community as they have arisen.... There has been a conscious effort from the beginning to have the people help plan all activities and to take responsibility. (Cook, quoted in Finesurrey, 2018, p. 205)

These missionaries in Báguanos—including Cook—focused on the people's economic, social, and moral experiences confronting them as residents in areas dominated by the sugar trade. Their goals contrasted markedly with those in Havana, whose goal was to prepare Cuban young people for leadership. Because at Báguanos, Cook did not serve with male missionaries, she was allowed to preach to her congregation. While it was the case that women could not be ordained in the Methodist Church at the time, Cook's being a rural missionary qualified her as an

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exception, making her the first ordained woman in the South Carolina conference (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 205-207).

In 1957 at the Union Seminary in Matanzas, Cook was appointed head of the Department of the Rural Church. She served in Cuba until 1960, where she worked to expand the Christian faith and eliminate illiteracy while founding churches, Sunday schools, and day schools, and leading her church community as pastor. In 1961 she became one of the founders of Alfalit International, which began as a non-denominational ministry that sought to eliminate distress caused by illiteracy. Currently the organization serves 15 countries (Finesurrey, 2018, p. 190n; https://www.alfalit.org/alfalit-history/).

The Methodist Agricultural and Industrial School

Even though rural missionaries had strikingly different aims, they were forced to rely on the Anglo-American corporate social and economic systems in place in addition to powerful Cuban leaders and their resources. It was a mutually beneficial partnership because the nation's government actors profited from the reputations and images reflective of the success of social services enacted by Protestants in sugar mill communities. Reluctantly, missionaries secured agreements with foreign capitalists to assist in educational, health, and other benefits for the Cuban residents in these communities (Finesurrey, 2018, p. 173).

Conflict of Loyalties

Feelings of conflicting loyalties, for example, continually haunted the director of the Methodist Agricultural and Industrial School, **Dr. Richard Milk**. With the United Fruit and Sugar Company (UFSC) holding corporate sponsorship of the school, it had the right to choose its location, which was in Playa Manteca. UFSC was most willing to donate the grounds because the land had not produced high yields for the company due to costly limitations such as heavy erosion, rolling hills, and poor soil (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 174-175, 202).

On July 20, 1946, the school (nicknamed *la granja,* "the farm") began its operation with a 99-year lease for minimal cost with the UFSC. It was difficult at times for Milk, according to his son, **Robert Milk**

"Richard G. Milk." 1940s to 1950s. Mission Photograph Album - Portraits #06, p. 098, I.D. C12203. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

> United Fruit did not reflect the values that he [Richard Milk] would want his children to pursue. [Milk] believed in a life of service...not about how can I make the most money in the world. (Quoted in Finesurrey, 2018, p. 175)

Dr. Milk felt the stress of trying to maintain a balance among the requests of different groups who were involved in the project: Cuban Methodist leaders; the U.S. Mission Board; teachers, students, and parents of the school; and, of course, the UFSC (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 174, 178).

The corporate leaders of the sugar and mining industries of the U.S. looked at *la granja* as a means to train semi-skilled workers so that they could do the low wages work. However, the missionaries who lived in the communities saw the school as a means to improve the well-being of the students, themselves, so that they would be able to go to school, learn skills such as better farming

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methods, and return to their home settings to share their knowledge in their communities with their own people. It was a way to improve their lives and their communities in an ongoing sustainable way, not just to fill corporate pockets and satisfy their financial interests (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 178, 203-204).

Yet, the school could not survive without the ongoing support of the USFC, who furnished the means for "water, electricity, telephones, roads, railroad service, building materials, technical workers, and capital to compensate the teachers." The school's staff members—and, with exceptions, the students—had access to hospital care. Employees of UFSC and Cuban business leaders donated money and time to the school. Wealthy Americans living in and outside Cuba donated items such as tractors, a corn planter, and cattle to the school (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 176-177).

"Havana—Rev and Mrs. Charles Shulhafer and Mr. Dover J. Condon, Lay Leader, University Church." Mission Photograph Album - Cuba #01, p. 0026, I.D. F3445; C19619. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

Learning from the Farmers

Teachers such as **Edgar Nesman**, who from 1950-1960 taught agriculture and mechanics at the school, discovered that knowledge of sophisticated farm methods did not often translate practically to the poor Cuban farmers because of geographical differences and costs. Nesman sought the wisdom of local farmers and was pleased to learn that his interactions among missionaries and Cuban farmers made his teaching more relevant to the needs of his students. He deemed his relationships as partnerships that helped him to adjust scientific practices he had learned in graduate school in new ways that took advantage of the accumulated knowledge of the native farmers ("Edgar Glenn Nesman,"2016.; Finesurrey, 2018, p. 202).

Trinity's Support of Cuba Missions in the 1950s

North Americans proclaimed themselves to be guardians of the free world following World War II, and this prevalent worldview propelled rural projects in the developing regions of the world. In Cuba, there were more Methodist missionaries than missionaries of any other Protestant denomination in the 1950s (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 200-201).

Trinity undoubtedly shared the excitement of Methodist involvement in Cuba in the 1950s. Cuba was still at that point a part of the Florida Annual Conference. In February 1951, **The Rev. Clare M. Cotton**, Trinity pastor, and **The Rev. Joe A. Tolle**, district superintendent, were part of an 18-minister group conducting an "evangelistic mission" there, with **Bishop Roy H. Short** leading the entourage of religious leaders ("Two Local Ministers...," 1951, p. 18).

At the end of that year, five young people from Trinity traveled to Cuba on a special nine-day tour of part of the island, led by director of education, **Harold Patrick.** Those who went on the trip were **Edwina Larson**, **Patricia Ott, Sandy Proctor, James Davis**, and **Robert Pope**. While they were there, they stayed at the Week End Club near Havana on Santa Fe Beach, taking in swimming in "the surf and in the club's pool...." They attended worship services in Havana where **The Rev. Charles Shulhafer** served as a special missionary sponsored by Trinity as well as the church's pastor. They also found time to visit the "Capitol, City Hall, Columbus Cathedral Cabana Fortress, El Templete and Mono Castle

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"Chicken Raising Instruction Agricultural Industrial." 1950s. Mission Photograph Album - Cuba #01, p. 0072, I.D. F3815. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

"Baking Bread Agricultural Industrial Preston." 1950s. Mission Photograph Album - Cuba #01, p. 0073, I.D F3823. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

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"Selecting Seed Corn at the Agricultural Industrial School Preston." 1950s. Mission Photograph Album - Cuba #01, p. 0070, I.D. F3796. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

"Dining Room at the Agricultural and Industrial School at Preston." 1950s. Mission Photograph Album - Cuba #01, p. 0069, I.D. F3790. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

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("Methodist Young...," 1952, p. 18; "Hear the Rev....," 1953, p.3).

Other events the young people experienced were Cuban and Spanish performances, a circus performance, a bike trip through the countryside, and dinner in the home of a prominent Cuban family, where they feasted on the island's delicacy, "roast pig." At another point in the trip, they visited the sugar mill and gardens at Hershey ("Methodist Young...," 1952, p. 18).

A February 1952 article in the *Tallahassee Democrat* described a special evening when Education Director Patrick was to present at Trinity a documentary entitled "Cross at the Crossroads" he had produced to show the need for "mission work in Cuba today," that included "scenes of the work of Trinity's 'Parish Abroad' in Havana." The film concluded with scenes of the youth from their "get-acquainted tour" of the island and also with scenes of the mission work being done at the church. There is no mention in the article of the youth serving rural Cubans who were laborers of the sugar mill although that may have been part of the trip. The film highlighted the work of **The Rev.** and **Mrs. Shulhofer,** who, according to the article, had influenced "the lives of key persons in the Anglo-American colony in Cuba" ("Trinity Methodist...," 1952, p. 18).

In February 1952, Rev. Shulhafer was scheduled to give a talk at Trinity as part of a week-long Florida Conference-supported event promoting "evangelistic activity." The topic of his sermon was the work in Cuba of the "Parish Abroad of Trinity Church." Invited speakers would be coming to over 350 churches across the Conference as congregations marked the occasion (Methodist Churches...,"1952, p. 19).

In November 1957, **The Rev. Dr. Glen C. James's** sermon topic was "Eucharisto." The sermon was the occasion for a special offering called "The Cuba Special" for the Agricultural and Industrial School's director, Dr. Richard Milk, and his family. Trinity had set a goal to raise $3,600 as support for the school, designating $3,000 to assist the finances for Milk's salary and expenses and $600 for scholarships for two youth (Ward, 1957, p. 6; "Trinity Sets...,"1957, p. 10).

Thanks to contributions of Trinity in the 1950s, a dispensary at the school was housed in a building known as "The Tallahassee Building," according to the *Democrat*. Contributions from Trinity during these years also helped to pay half the salary of Dr. Milk. One goal was to generate support of the building of a "dairy barn, complete a boys' dormitory, provide irrigation equipment or furnish a flock of laying birds" ("Trinity to Receive...," 1958, 3).

In November 1959, **The Rev. M.S. Robinson**, missionary in Mayari, Cuba, spoke at Trinity. In Mayari, he was serving as pastor, and his wife was directing a Methodist Church-sponsored medical dispensary. Money from the offering helped to continue the support of salary and scholarships at the Agricultural and Industrial School ("Trinity Hears...,"1959, p. 3).

Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista in March 1957, standing next to a map of the Sierra Maestra mountains where Fidel Castro's rebels were held up. March 1957. Source: Museo de la Revolución, en La Habana, Cuba. It appeared in *Life Magazine* on March 1957. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BatistaMarch1957.jpg

Batista Seizes Power

Cuba made front page headlines on March 10, 1952, when **Fulgencio Batista,** with army-forced backing, seized power of the Cuban government (Meyer, 1952, p. 1).

The following years proved to bring considerable hardships for those living in rural communities, including for the missionaries who keenly

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felt the consequences of conflict between Batista's government leaders and supporters, and those of the Communist rebels. Rebels burned cane fields with the goal of sabotaging Cuba's economy, while fear paralyzed sugar workers from both sides of the political conflict. Cane-cutters were frightened to go to the fields because of rebel attacks; yet at the same time the state's army threatened to kill anyone who refused to do their work. The result, the laborers hid from both sides. This fear to carry on their work brought about dire consequences including starvation of families (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 209-210).

A report in 1956-57 of a University of Havana study reflected how times were continually difficult in the 1950s for the rural people. The report claimed that 34 percent of Cuban workers labored in rural agriculture; yet they earned only 10 percent of the nation's income with 69 percent of their income going to food. Foreign missionaries in the countryside began to realize in the years 1956 to 1958 or so that they were living in a "war zone"—an experience not shared by other Anglo-Americans in Cuba. Such things as interruptions of mail delivery, unreplenished company stores, and a scarcity of medical supplies produced a climate of desperation for those the missionaries served and with whose suffering they empathized (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 194, 223).

The location of the Agricultural and Industrial School made the situation for students, teachers, and administrators especially tragic. The school was situated in what became "rebel territory" at night while being "Army territory" in the day from 1956 to the beginning of 1959. Boys at the school were often arrested, and then some "disappeared." Not only were teachers and students against Batista's government while often being sympathetic with the rebel movement, rural missionaries were also sympathetic with the rebels' struggles. The missionaries had served and worked side-by-side with the rebels. Seeing the sorrows that the rural citizens endured, the missionaries first concluded that the revolutionaries' goals were on the whole "noble" (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 223, 215).

As a result, the foreign missionaries would "embrace" the revolutionary movement in its initial years (Finesurrey, p. 220). And in their embrace they were able as "privileged outsiders" to help protect the rebels from the terror of Batista governmental forces. Their identification with the revolutionary movement provided the aims of the rebels with a measure of credibility that

> rejected the narrative forwarded by Batista, foreign corporations, and counter-revolutionary forces that framed the revolution as illegitimate and communistic. (Finesurrey, 2018, p. 215)

Many of those who opposed Batista used missionaries' support in their cause and benefitted from such advocacy in ways such as a "letter-writing campaign." Their advocacy put them in considerable risk. But the risk of the Americans was significantly less than those of students and parishioners who opposed Batista's forces. Missionary **Rev. Victor Rankin** admitted that his sermons might seem to be an act of "courage," but because Batista wanted "American favor," revenge would be carried out against the Cuban church members, not the American missionaries (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 244, 227).

Revolution

The Cuban Revolutionaries overturned the Batista government on January 1, 1959. With Batista fleeing, the situation changed quickly. Many of those who were pleased with the goals that were promised such as "land reform, education, and health care for all" looked forward to a transformed nation (Rankin, 1959, p. 12; Wingeier-Rayo, 2018, p.1).

Church membership had grown enormously by that time—so that by 1959, there were "54 U.S. missionaries, 108 churches, and 51 Cuban pastors with 9,209 members of the Methodist Church" (Wingeier-Rayo, 2018, p. 1).

Yet the change in leadership of the country made the earlier conflicts in values of the rural missionaries and those of U.S. corporations on whom they relied for support much more pronounced. The ambition of the missionaries was to "spread the Gospel" and improve the lives of the

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people; for the corporations it was ongoing profits (Finesurrey, 2018, p. 173).

And soon the conflicts missionaries confronted would not be limited to U.S. private interests.

Leaving the Land They Loved

Three months before Castro described the Revolution as a socialist movement just prior to the Bay of Pigs invasion (April 17, 1961), the U. S. dissolved diplomatic relations, enacting an "economic embargo." The revolutionary government confiscated Methodist schools and universities, clinics, and a campground. During this time, with the rise of nationalism as well as anti-American reactions, Cuba Methodists were accused of being supporters of U.S. interests (Wingeier-Rayo, 2018, p.1).

While some Cuban Methodist leaders were brought together in work camps with others who were deemed "anti-socials," such as gay persons and anti-revolutionaries, so they could be re-trained or "re-oriented," some Cuban pastors escaped with the help of missionaries to the U.S. At one point, only eight Cuban pastors—three of them ordained elders—were left to serve over 100 churches (Wingeier-Rayo, 2018, p. 1).

Bishop Visits Cuba

In 1962, **Bishop James W. Henley** of the Florida and Cuba Conference described his recent visit to Cuba in an open letter in the *Florida Methodist* newsletter. He had left for Havana on July 19, 1962, and greeting him at the airport when he arrived were six superintendents of six districts of the Conference, representing the six Cuban provinces. One of those was Rev. Armando Rodriquez, superintendent of the Holguin district, who had braved a 550-mile trip by train to meet him. Bishop Henley and his entourage left for Harrell Memorial Church in Havana (built by the Western North Carolina Conference and named for Methodist **Bishop Costen Jordan Harrell**) to hold a cabinet meeting about the upcoming days of the visit (Henley, 1962, p. 2; Carroll, 1988, p. 41).

"Mr. and Mrs. Angel Fuster in Study." 1950s. Mission Photograph Album - Cuba #01, p. 0016, I.D. F120. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

The Rev. Dr. and Mrs. Angel E. Fuster, were his guides and drivers. He stayed in their home that night in Santa Clara before traveling to Santiago de Cuba the next day. Santiago was decorated in preparation for the arrival of Fidel Castro, who would speak at the celebration of the national holiday on July 26 (Henley, 1962, p. 2).

Other stops included Holguin, where he lunched with ministers and lay preachers and attended a service at Branscomb Memorial Methodist Church (named for **Bishop John Branscomb**). Those at the church included individuals from the Salvation Army, Masons, and the Baptist Church. The bishop recounted a story he had heard of how 54 young people had gone on a evangelical trip all through the province, leaving Christian literature, selling Bibles and having prayer (Henley, 1962, p. 2).

Later while the visitors traveled to Camaguey, they noticed that there were workers decorating telephones and markers all along the highway with palm branches preparing for the national celebration and holiday. Bishop Henley commented that he had been surprised at the number of trucks (224) on the highway that they passed on their trip, all manufactured in Czechoslovakia and bearing "the names of various towns and communities to which they were apparently going to bring pilgrims to Santiago for the national holiday" (Henley, 1962, p. 2).

After convening with Camaguey District ministers and lay workers, the group attended a service in the St. Paul Methodist Church, located on the

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"Classroom Scene—E. Bowman School." 1950s. Mission Photograph Album - Cuba #01, p. 0054, I.D. F3616. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

same block as Pinson College, a once educational institution operated by the Methodist Church but now government controlled. The following evening they were back in Santa Clara, visiting the church modeled after Scarritt Chapel in Nashville, with clergy and lay ministers reporting their activities at a scheduled meeting. Later that evening some people had even traveled 40 miles to attend service. Adjacent to the church were facilities that had once housed a Methodist parochial school but had since been taken over by the government so that the Sunday school met in the church sanctuary (Henley, 1962, pp. 2-3).

The next morning they visited in Cienfuegos and observed the school grounds of the Eliza Bowman School. Bowman had been a woman greatly admired by fellow women Methodists in Texas. She had led a life of devotion energized by her enthusiasm for missions. Once in high demand with "a long list of applicants," the school, now state-run, had been named in honor of Bowman's life-long contributions (Henley, 1962, p. 3; Haskins, 1923, pp. 163-165).

Another important stop on the trip was the Matanzas Seminary in Matanzas. The setting of the seminary is on a hill with a view overlooking the bay. When Bishop Henley visited there in 1962, there were 22 Methodist students enrolled for the fall ([Henley, 1962, p. 3]; at the time of the publication of this article [2021], the seminary is celebrating its 75th year and is sponsored by Presbyterian and Episcopalians as well as Methodists [http://www.setcuba.org/]).

At midnight on July 25, back in Havana, Bishop Henley and his fellow travelers were alerted to loud sounds coming from loud speakers (attached to telephone poles all though the city) with the playing of "The Communist Internationale," along with speeches and marching music broadcast until late in the night. All the radio and television time was devoted to Santiago's festivities of the celebration on July 26 (Henley, 1962, p. 3).

Concluding his trip on July 29, Bishop Henley delivered a morning sermon at Havana's Central Methodist Church before leaving for the airport.

In his letter, he reflected on the Cuban people and their resiliency:

> I came away feeling that the Cuban church is alive and undismayed. I saw loyalty and courage and faith exemplified in the lives of the ministry and their people. It was a great experience for me, and I have come back with a greater determination to serve our Lord more steadfastly. (Henley, 1962, p. 3)

A New Social Order

Despite Bishop Henley's optimism expressed in his open letter in the *Florida Methodist* newsletter, North American Protestant missionaries had lost their power and influence in the Cuban social order now that Cuban nationalism was prevailing following the Revolution. Missionaries had been directed to return to the U.S. by the Board of Missions to avoid jeopardizing the immense accomplishments that they had done on the island as well as to insure their safety (Finesurrey, 2018, p. 182; Wingeier-Rayo, 2018, p. 1).

Trinity Welcomes Exiled Missionaries

For example, Dr. Milk, the founder and devoted leader of the Methodist Agricultural and Industrial School, had been forced to leave Cuba and his beloved school in 1961. In February 1962, a few months before Bishop Henley's trip, Dr. Milk was scheduled to speak at Trinity on events going on in Latin American countries during *(cont. on p. 24)*

(cont. from p. 23)
this time of turmoil ("Juliet C. Milk," 2013; "Jordan, 1962, p. 3).

During this year, Trinity welcomed other missionaries who had served in Cuba; for example, The Rev. Dr. Victor Rankin was scheduled to speak at Trinity's Sunday services in November on his 10 years as a missionary on the island. It was announced that he and his family would be moving to Buenos Aires to lead an English-speaking congregation ("Missionary...," 1962, p. 3.)

The Florida Conference Continues Support

The Florida Conference kept close contact with those in Cuba even with ongoing obstacles. In June 1963, **The Rev. Dr. George A. Foster** presented exiled Cuban ministers to those who were in attendance at the Florida Annual Conference in Lakeland, FL. Dr. Angel Fuster sent the conference a note of greetings from Cuba, which Bishop Henley read to the audience ("Second Day," 1963, p. 113; "Fourth Day," 1963, p. 118).

Bishop Henley reported that the following year's budget was to include

> $50,000 collected from Florida's churches with $25,000... needed for the theological Seminary at Matanzas and an additional $15,000... needed for the "Advance-of-the-Church-in Cuba." (Henley, 1963, p. 158)

The Women's Society of Christian Service and Wesleyan Service Guild reported that many Cuban children had left their country without their parents and were living in The Group Foster Home in Miami. The goal was to find permanent homes for them in the U.S. The Board of Missions reported on the Latin Centers in Tampa and Miami, where Cuban refugees were supported through the National and World Advance collection of offerings. (Thurman, 1963, p. 170; Pendergrass & Harper, 1963, p. 186).

Yet even with the pledge of support from Floridian Methodists, the Methodist churches in Cuba would increasingly face hardships. While American missionaries could be justifiably praised for their sacrifice and contributions all of those years before, they had not adequately prepared the Cuban religious leaders to succeed them as clergy leaders (Finesurrey, 2018, p. 186).

Problems existed beyond the fact that pastors lacked theological training; there was significant emigration of Cuban Methodist members and leaders; many people remaining in Cuba left the church in support of the Revolution or for better chance of living conditions; and there was an increased anti-religious climate encouraged by the government (Wingeier-Rayo, 2018, p. 2).

Rev. Rodriguez with the foresight for seeing the need for skilled lay leaders, had provided leadership training for young people to step in as lay leaders early on when he was district superintendent of Oriente. These young people were the faithful few who had stayed on, working in their churches, "often living on the premises, thus protecting church property from vandalism and confiscation" (Wingeier-Rayo, 2018, p. 2).

Because diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba became more tense, Florida's bishop was unable to travel to Cuba in 1963 to oversee the annual conference. Dr. Fuster, the superintendent of Cuba, made all appointments in the absence of Bishop Henley. To add to the consequences of the loss of members and leadership for Cuban Methodists, they also struggled with financial loss. Before the Revolution, 70 percent of their monetary support came from the U.S. with additional money coming from Methodist educational institutions. With the U.S embargo of Cuba, the money sent from the States could not be "disbursed" (Wingeier-Rayo, 2018, pp. 2-3).

Reacting to the overwhelming hardship, the Cuban's ruling cabinet suggested three options:

> 1) lay off half the pastors (those who enjoyed less seniority), 2) ask the revolutionary government for compensation for the nationalized properties, or 3) request the local churches to send apportionments to the national church. (Wingeier-Rayo, 2018, p. 3)

Cuban leaders responded by choosing the third proposal and asked members of local churches to

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rally behind them with their financial support. The outcome was stunning. Thousands of individual members committed their financial assistance. The outpour of enthusiasm in saving the church from financial disaster moved Cuban Methodists closer to their goal for autonomy (Wingeier-Rayo, 2018, p. 3).

The Path to Autonomy

Though Cuban Methodists were facing tragic consequences, it was also a time of advancement in the Methodist Church in Cuba, when real opportunities for autonomy were set in motion. Methodist leaders in Cuba had instigated conversations with the Methodist Mission Board before 1960, but the requests for independence had always been denied on the basis that the Cuban religious leaders were "not ready." Since 1923 when the Cuban Annual Conference was organized, Cuba's presiding bishop was Florida's bishop (Wingeier-Rayo, 2018, p. 2).

At last, the General Conference of the Methodist Church passed an "enabling act" that gave permission to the Methodist Church in Cuba to choose autonomy. On February 2, 1968, the Cuban Methodist Church became autonomous (World Methodist Council, n. d.).

Unfortunately, Cuban Superintendent Fuster had died in a car accident in 1967, visiting his son in Lakeland, FL, and Rev. Armando Rodriquez was appointed first acting bishop in 1968, while Supt. Fuster was recognized as Cuba's first Methodist bishop posthumously (Berges, 2013, p. 585; "Crash...," 1967, p. 15-A).

Bishop Rodríguez would comment that Cuba's longed-for autonomy could not have come at a worse time. The government's actions to undermine religious leaders included promoting socialism as the path to true liberation with "science" not religion as the key to improved living conditions. Pastors were targeted as enemies who were alleged to collude with the CIA in attempts to overthrow Castro's government, causing a mass exodus of Cuban Methodist leaders (90 percent of Cuban Methodist pastors left) and a decrease in persons identifying as Protestants. The contrast in numbers of Cuban Methodists from 1959 to 1968 was drastic: from 11,000 to 3,000 (Finesurrey, 2018, pp. 241-242).

Although Cuban Methodists were finally independent and sovereign, problems continued to mount because their beliefs and values were perceived to be aligned with those of the North Americans. What was once seen as advantageous, that is, being allies to Anglo-American missionaries, was now a liability (2018, pp. 243-245).

Faith and Celebration

Although the Methodist Church in Cuba declined considerably in the 1960s-1980s because the Castro government repressed most religious expression, according to Phil Wingeier-Rayo, dean and professor of missiology and Methodist studies at Wesley Theological Seminary, it is thriving today (Wingeier-Rayo, 2018, p. 4).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, religious liberty took a dramatic turn. The Communist Party in 1991 no longer required a profession of atheism for party membership. A year later, the Cuban government amended the constitution, referring to itself as a *secular* instead of an *atheist* state (Goldenziel, 2009, p. 179).

In 1999, a *Los Angeles Times* article reported that 100,000 Cuban Protestants chanted "Cristo Vive!" ("Christ Lives!") at Havana's Revolution Square, attended by the Cuban Presi-

(cont. on p. 26)

"Matanzas Union Theological Seminary." 1950s. Mission Photograph Album - Cuba #01, p. 0034, I.D. F3545, C19667. Permission granted from UMC Digital Galleries, General Conference Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

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(cont. from p. 25

Sign promoting the government of Fidel Castro. February 2017, Fomento, Cuba. *Hasta la Victoria Siempre* ("Ever Onward to Victory").

dent. The location of this "Cuban Evangelical Celebration" was the same place that 500,000 people had participated in a Catholic Mass led by Pope John Paul II in 1998. The evangelical gathering proclaimed a "religious reinvigoration" that expanded beyond the Catholic faith communities to other denominations. Organized by Cuba's 49 Protestant denominations, it was broadcast by the state-run media. Although house churches still had to be "registered with the government," and "new church construction" was restricted, it was possible that the government had become "more humanized in acceptance and tolerance by giving space to the churches," said an Assemblies of God spokesman (Ramirez, & Garcia, 1999).

Trinity also took advantage of the opportunity for stronger religious ties to Cuba. On October 16, 1999, a Cuban Food Fest was planned at the church to provide financial assistance for a March 2000 mission trip of Trinity members to the island ("Cuban food...," 1999, p. 1-D).

In his presentation at Trinity's Lay Academy on global missions and Cuba in April 2021, **Sam Rogers, Sr.**, coordinator of a partnership with Iglesia San Pablo Metodista de Fomento, presented a talk on his three trips to Cuba, beginning in 2003, that is the feature story of this issue (Rogers & Crosby, 2021).

A 2005 article in the *Democrat* praised the work of Trinity member **Amy Peebles,** who was recognized for a service award in the religion category. She was lauded for "taking medical supplies, eyeglasses and first-aid equipment to Cuba as part of a mission trip with her church, Trinity Methodist" (Clark, 2005, p. 2B).

Wingeier-Rayo wrote in 2018 on the 50th anniversary of The Methodist Church in Cuba that

> Today the Methodist Church in Cuba retains its affiliated autonomous relationship to the UMC and has approximately 43,000 members, which is more than four times its 1959 membership and has 400 churches with 1,000 other mission sites. (Wingeier-Rayo, 2018, p. 4)

Postlude

According to The Methodists United in Prayer (MUIP) Cuba Ministry,

> The Methodist Church in Cuba is:
> - Transforming people's lives in Cuba with the Gospel of Jesus Christ
> - Growing at around 10% each year and has been for 20+ years
> - One of the largest and fastest growing denominations in Cuba with now over 450 churches
> - Poised for continued growth with over 1300 "missions" where future churches are being planted in under-reached areas ("About, n.d.)

Yet, conflicts among the people continue. In July 2021, reports came out of Cuba of persons protesting a lack of food and medicine during the COVID crisis. Reacting to the demonstrations, the Cuban government cut off internet, creating obstacles to communication; and also in response to the opposition, soldiers used violence against the resisters (Henderson, 2021).

Still, according to **Rev. Dr. Rini Hernandez,** director of Latino/a Ministries for the Florida Conference and senior pastor at Cape Coral UMC in Florida, the will of the Cuban people to keep resisting has remained strong:

> people have been able to find what they call tunnels. They use VPN to send messages. I've been able to talk to pastors in Cuba....It's hard, though. The majority of people don't have access to the internet. (Henderson, 2021)

Dr. Hernandez (a graduate of Matanzas Theological Seminary and Columbia Theological Seminary and a Cuban native) continued by saying,

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Something has dramatically changed because of the upheaval. If you could hear what people are chanting in the streets, the most common word is freedom, freedom, freedom.

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Notes

The photo behind the text is from a photo of the cross in the sanctuary of Iglesia San Pablo Metodista de Fomento (Cuba).

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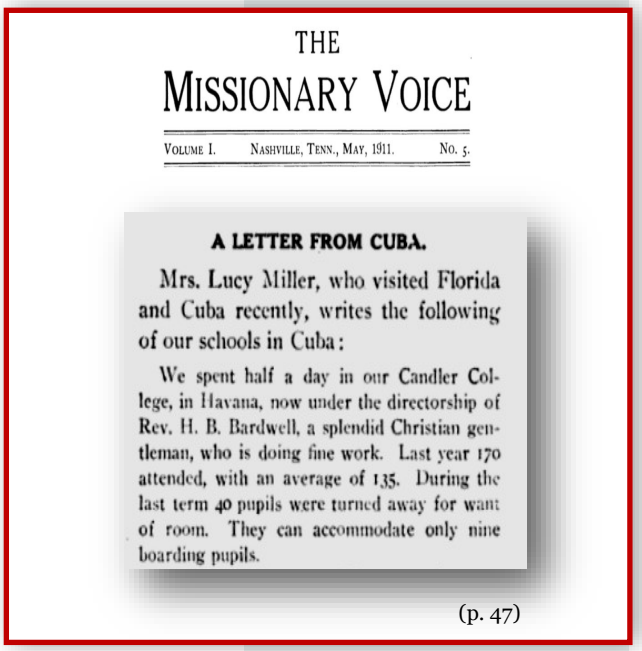

THE

MISSIONARY VOICE

VOLUME I. NASHVILLE, TENN., MAY, 1911. No. 5.

A LETTER FROM CUBA.

Mrs. Lucy Miller, who visited Florida and Cuba recently, writes the following of our schools in Cuba:

We spent half a day in our Candler College, in Havana, now under the directorship of Rev. H. B. Bardwell, a splendid Christian gentleman, who is doing fine work. Last year 170 attended, with an average of 135. During the last term 40 pupils were turned away for want of room. They can accommodate only nine boarding pupils.

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Submission Guidelines

If you would like to be a published author in an upcoming issue, see guidelines below:

Call for Stories and Articles

- **"I Remember When" snapshots**: These are short descriptions that recount church life memories. They are usually **25–100 words long.** See below for general guidelines.
- **Oral interviews:** Interviews may be audio or video taped. Trinity historians write up the interviews in narrative form with approval from the persons interviewed before publication. Videos or audios of the interviews may be posted on Trinity's website with permission from persons interviewed.
- **Firsthand stories:** Individuals may submit stories based on their firsthand experience at Trinity. The stories are generally **500 words, but can be longer.** See "General Guidelines."
- **Research articles:** These articles are more formal in nature.

o Criteria for formal articles include **relevance** to the purpose of the newsletter, which is to publish articles that pertain to the history of Trinity in a substantial way; **quality of writing**; historical **accuracy**; **clarity**; **conciseness**; **coherence**; and **reaability**.

o Articles should be **original** works and not excerpts.

o The word limit for articles **is usually around 500 words, but can be longer.**

A list of resources used for historical research may be requested. **Original** sources (instead of information from history books, newspapers, or newsletters) are preferred when possible.

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- Writing should be free of disrespectful language.
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