

Report on my official trip to Cuba, March 16 – April 4, 2012

Right, EBM MASA Missionaries:

Journey

It is again with great joy and thankfulness that I would like to give you some insight into what I experienced during this journey, where I was accompanied by Arturo Köbernick, our Regional Representative. The trip went smoothly, the entry checks were o.k. As usual, the suitcases were a little overweight, because I always try to take with me as many things as possible for our missionaries in Cuba: mostly items for daily use, chocolate, even things like bedding – things you can hardly get in Cuba or which cost an enormous amount of money, which our Cuban friends don't have. Small personal gifts for the missionary families are always included, too. God gave his blessings and I did not have any problem entering the country with all these things.

During the first week of our journey, we were accompanied by Lars Müller, a student from Elstal with a missionary heart who wanted to get to know the work in Cuba. He had arrived before us and spent a total of three weeks in Cuba. I think it was very moving for him to experience how God is at work through "his people" in Cuba and to see what is being achieved.

Our missionaries and their families

The encounters with them were again among the priorities of the journey. We were privileged to invest a lot of time in them, listening to them, learning how they are and what is moving them, what challenges they are facing and how they are coping. Time and again, the times spent in prayer with them are inspiring to me. They all work hard, are involved with passion and minister with a great deal of love. We are also happy to see that they all take care to invest in their families – their marriage and their relationship with the children. Our missionaries are our greatest asset, this is still my conviction!

While we were in Cuba, **Ana Isabel**, Daniel Gonzalez's wife, was not in good health. She had to go to hospital for several medical checks. The outcome was that she needed immediate surgery to remove gall stones, which in the meantime has been performed. Her recovery has been excellent, and she will be able to accompany Daniel to the Mission Council in Spain, a wonderful gift of God's.

After a few days in Cuba, Arturo Köbernick had problems with somewhat persistent hypertension. Several days went by till it got back to normal. This is why he could not be present while I visited a couple of projects, nor accompany me on my trip to Eastern Cuba.

We were happy that after a consultation, the taking of some medicine and many prayers everything got back to normal.

The Conference of the **Baptist Convention of Western Cuba** was held during our first week in Cuba. We attended it for a day and were given the opportunity to address the assembly in the name of EBM INTERNATIONAL



Family Gonzalez



Family Rivero



Family Dias Claro



Family Lescaille



Family San Juan



Family García



Family Sanchez

Now let me give you some important information from the projects:

Isle of Youth

On Friday night, we arrived in Cuba, and early Saturday morning we were already off to the Isle of Youth. On the same day, we visited several of the recently founded churches. Joyfully, the people there showed us the three carts and the horses which could be purchased last year with support from EBM MASA. These help the missionaries accompanied by small teams to get to the villages faster and more easily in order to work there. Another three are to be bought in 2012; the money has already been transferred.



Every harnessed team costs 500 EUR. It is still difficult, practically unaffordable, to have a car in Cuba, so people have to use other means of transport. The same day, we also had the evaluation and planning talks with the leadership. Work continues very well here. Karell Lescaille, MASA missionary, and his team have a clear vision, work strategically, train many co-workers for missionary service, take the gospel to the people and plant more and more new churches. On Sunday, we had the privilege of attending a worship service with them in Nueva Gerona, the main church. It is moving to witness their enthusiasm in singing, praying and listening to God's word.

Havana Slums

Frank San Juan started this work a few years ago in Zaldo; now they also take the gospel to several other slums. It fills us with great joy to see how God is at work here transforming people, how Jesus is building and strengthening his church among the poorest and the most wicked.

The church in Zaldo with its appr. 200 members is most happy to celebrate their services on the concrete ceiling, which allows for more room. The structure has not been quite completed yet but should be in 2012, with further support from EBM MASA. Further work will be building the last part of the concrete ceiling and the corrugated iron roof across the whole area. This concrete ceiling has been built over several old houses by various families. The biggest of these, corresponding to about half the entire area, was now on sale (there has recently been new legislation in Cuba allowing purchase and sale of properties). The owner, an old man (with his family), who had allowed the church to build the concrete ceiling over his house, now wanted it to be entirely at the church's disposal. He would only need a place to live. This came as a huge opportunity because then, the house would officially belong to the church. It would make dealings with the authorities a lot easier.

While we were talking about this topic, Frank was sitting there with his eyes full of tears and he said: I am aware that this is a huge and unforeseen financial challenge for EBM MASA, but for quite some time I have been on my knees every morning at 6 a.m. and have been praying that God would open a way because we cannot miss this chance. To us, too, it was clear that we could not let go this opportunity and we decided to buy a flat for this elderly brother and his family, amounting to 10,000 EUR, and now, most of the houses beneath the concrete ceiling used for the church events officially belong to the church. Hallelujah!

Arturo and I had the privilege of preaching in two different services here, and once again, the joy and the enthusiasm of the church left us with a deep impression.

What makes us somewhat sad is that Frank will move to the USA with his family, for family reasons.

God has used Frank to start this work in Cuba from scratch. Frank has always been involved with great love, a fighting spirit and passion. This decision was also a big challenge for Frank; it was a very difficult one. We had many talks, together with him



and Daniel Gonzalez, in order to find a good solution to the situation. Daniel Gonzalez will take on the main responsibility and coordination of the project. Rolando Fernández García, who has been Frank's "right hand man" in the work, will take it over as the leading pastor. The church has accepted this solution unanimously, and we are happy about God's good guidance in this situation as well. We had been very concerned about it. Even though Rolando is quite a different personality, has got different gifts and tackles many things in different ways, we now hope and pray that the Lord will use him in order to manage and advance this important project. Rolando and his wife Milena have jointly opted for this calling, which is very important to us. In 2012, there are to be regular evaluations, towards which any necessary further decisions will be oriented, step by step. Such decisions will include, e.g., how structuring and managing the work in the appr. 10 other slums will be done without Frank in future.

Eastern Cuba

It is thrilling to see how the training of co-workers and church-planting missionaries is progressing under the leadership and coordination of **Marcos Rivero** and **Sorangel Dias Clara**, both MASA missionaries. In Santiago de Cuba, I had a meeting with the Executive Committee where we once more addressed the basic concept and the standards for shared responsibility in this project. I invited them to become EBM members. Basically, they are interested, and they are going to have a closer look and think about it. Together with Marcos and his team, we travelled around four provinces in three days. We had meetings with six groups of missionaries (being trained right now) in different places, e.g. in Guantánamo, Las Tunas and Holguín, with up to 60 co-workers attending on each occasion. In all of these places, I had the privilege of preaching, encouraging them a great deal and thanking them for their passionate involvement.





In the past three years, this project has been instrumental in founding about 100 new churches. By mid-2011, 120 church planters had undergone this training. These are now doing the second phase of the training. Last year, Marcos said that they wanted to train 200 new co-workers/church planters in four provinces. This

sounded like an exaggeration to me, but we supported and motivated them. This time, he handed me the report: Now, there are 247 new co-workers participating in the training. However, there had been many more applications, and as the demand cannot be met because of lacking personnel, they have started a correspondence course; 300 additional "missionaries" are now being trained in this way. So at the moment, there are 667 co-workers being trained, and all of them are involved in mission and church planting activities. Simply fantastic! These new churches are being founded in the interior of the country, in villages and also in cities. I am thrilled to see that many people who are being reached by the gospel take many hurdles in order to attend the services. They often walk for many kilometres, cover long distances in oxcarts and tractor-drawn trailers in order to be there.

When some three years ago we decided to support this vision and this project, we were aware that it was a credible project worth supporting, but we did not have any idea what God would make of it. I guess it is easy to understand that Marcos Rivero and his team have to travel a great deal in order to cope with the challenge of training in several places. So far, he has travelled by bus, as a passenger in lorries and at times using other solutions which are almost beyond our imagination. But he cannot possibly go on managing the amount of work in this way. That is why we have decided to buy a car, although it is a challenge to the budget of EBM

MASA; this car will allow him and his team to visit the remote training sites. It is a 1959 "veteran car" which, however, is in top shape. This car costs 12,000 EUR. Well, that's how crazy things are in Cuba. Even though some things have changed in Cuban legislation, it is still "impossible" to purchase a new car.



Bahia Honda and Sayas

In this region (some 80 km from Havana), **Juan Sanchez and his wife Ana Iris** keep on doing a good job. There are several small churches and house churches they look after in this region. One of them is Murillo. We could attend a baptismal service on a natural beach in Murillo. About 150 people had gathered, including people who did not belong to the church. Arturo gave the message and I had the privilege to help with the baptism. 12 new Christians were baptized on that day.



The oldest, at 80, talked with enthusiasm about what Jesus now means to him. Another, whose whole life had been entangled in occultism/spiritism, talked about his deep and great joy of



being delivered and enjoying a new life in Jesus' joy and love. When at the end of this full day we returned to Havana and realized the intensity of the days behind us, my heart was bubbling with joy and I thought by myself : There is nothing more wonderful, worthwhile and thrilling than being involved in the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I am not concealing that very often it is really challenging and hard. But it is simply marvellous!

Havana

Daniel Gonzalez, EBM MASA missionary and coordinator of the projects in Cuba, and his wife **Ana Isabel** still do a tremendous job. The workload they manage is impressive. The church in the Santos Suarez district, where Daniel is the pastor, has been completely transformed in the 18 to 24 months since he took over the church; it has really been revolutionized. The projects supported by EBM MASA and run through this church, the Bible Clubs and Sports Evangelism, are steadily growing. Through these projects, about 1,000 children and youths are being reached, as well as their families. These children and youths come from destitute families for the most part, many from the drugs scene or criminal backgrounds. Many become believers, are baptized and integrated into the church. We were invited to attend the meetings of several groups in these projects and share the Word of God with them. In one of the Bible Clubs, where there is also a church-planting activity, we were present at a meeting with the children and also with the grown-ups. It took place in the backyard of a house, under some trees. Many children were attending. When after the short but appealing message the missionary called on them to make a decision for Jesus, about 10 grown-ups came to the front. It is also here that we met Yriorta, a rather bad woman who had led a group of spiritists in her home and who had committed her life to Jesus two weeks before. With immense joy she told us how Jesus had



delivered her from all troubles and slavery. Helped by some church staff, she had disposed of four big sacks full of idols and things linked to her occult entanglements. She also talked about how she would now like to live her life quite differently, with Jesus.

In Daniel's church we also had a meeting with some 50 staff who are involved in the projects supported by EBM MASA. We had the chance of showing them our appreciation, of thanking them very warmly for their love and commitment and motivating them for their further tasks and challenges and of asking the Lord's blessings on them.

A story that has not ended

As in Acts, mission work is always a story that has not ended yet. New challenges and objectives are always before our eyes. The mission story in Cuba, too, is going on. I am closing, reporting to all those who pray, who donate or support the work in any other way. Let me seize the opportunity to say a big and warm thank you to all of you, as well as to our leadership, the Executive Committee, our team in Elstal, to the churches in Europe and Latin America, to the many people who stand up for the cause. May the Lord reward you.

With warmest greetings

Yours,

Carlos Waldow
Mission Secretary for Latin America