

Travel Report – Official Trip to Cuba from 14th January to 1st February 2013

*Dear Sisters and Brothers,
Dear Friends,*

this report is intended to share with you my impressions during my trip to Cuba. A large portion of this report will also be published in our magazine, but I would like to pass on to you some more information, sharing how God is moving and working in the projects there.

Marveling at God's Work!

Any other heading for this report would not be more appropriate. During the last two weeks of January we visited the projects that are supported by EBM MASA in Cuba, and again we could experience how God is building his kingdom also in the midst of great misery and in spite of lacking resources, how he enables his people and makes the Gospel come alive. This time I could visit the Cuban projects together with a team. I was accompanied by my wife Marli, our Regional Representative Arturo Köbernack and his wife Betty and three EBM volunteers: Stephanie Peters Waldow (our daughter), who is working in Cuba for ten months, Marvin Neubauer, student of theology in Elstal and at present volunteer in Argentina, and Oliver Stock who previously worked as volunteer in Brazil and who also wanted to know the projects in Cuba.

Again, the two weeks were very intensive. They were filled with travels, many project discussions, meetings, three baptizing services, a farewell service for 52 participants of a training project for church planters. We participated in the celebration at the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the church on the Youth Island, we had a retreat with EBM MASA missionaries and their families, and we were also present during the foundation ceremony for the church in Tamarindo, a district of Havana. We attended a service in the church of Zaldo, a slum district where we had very moving encounters, and then we also had our meeting with the Central Committee of the Cuban Government, and much more. The conclusion at the end of our trip is the following: God has given in abundance and he has blessed! We could attend all our appointments, we stayed in good health (great caution was needed because there had been an outbreak of Cholera in Cuba), we could take strategic future-oriented decisions and could enjoy the very positive results and growth of the projects.

Highlights of the Trip:

1. 15th Anniversary of the Youth Island Church

Mission work on the Youth Island was the only project of EBM MASA during the first 10 years in Cuba. Daniel and Ana Isabel Gonzalez were then young missionaries who had begun this work without any help starting from zero. The EBM MASA support made it possible for them to totally dedicate themselves to their vision. After ten years Daniel handed over the work to the first convert from the Youth Island, Karell Lescaille, who became his right-hand man in mission work there. The Gonzalez moved to Havana in order to spread their vision to all of Cuba. Today there exist as many as five congregations on the Youth Island, three more are to be set up during the next two years, and there exist already more than 80 house groups. 18 missionaries and many more co-workers are promoting mission work on the Island of Youth with love and passion. They have a clear vision, their strategy is excellent, and they are using any possible or sometimes even impossible opportunity in order to reach people with the Gospel.

The solemn anniversary service in Nueva Gerona was a marvelous experience. More than 500 people gathered there on Sunday full of great joy and thankfulness. The worship was accompanied by excellent music, children were blessed, 12 people were baptized and Daniel's ministry was a challenging sermon, underlining the thankfulness to God for all he



has done there over the years and representing a deep conviction regarding missionary work in the future.



On Saturday we had a meeting with the approximately 40 missionaries and co-workers of the mission team under the direction of Karell Lescaille on the Island of Youth. Each of them had something to tell about his work and the challenges of the projects and how they could experience God's will. We could thank them for their passionate commitment and motivate them to continue in the same manner.

2. Training for Church Planters in Eastern Cuba

Four years ago it had been envisaged to train missionaries for church planting work. God called Marcos Rivero into this ministry. But there was no money to help him and they asked for our assistance. Since then he is an EBM MASA missionaries. No one could suspect what God had in mind to create:

During the first two years about 120 people were trained in Las Tunas and Region, these set up 120 new churches. In consequence more and more churches became interested in the project; many people heard God's call for this type of mission work, so that now it is being offered in all of Eastern Cuba. At present more than 600 people are trained by Marcos Rivero and his team for their ministry as church planters. Anyone who is already engaged in mission work may participate in the 2-years training. There biblical basics as well as practical guidance for their evangelization and church planting work are imparted. After these two years intensive continuation training on different levels of theology and parish ministry for one year will follow.

We had the chance to participate in a graduation ceremony for 52 new "church planters". One week later the first group of 100 celebrated the end of their continuation training. During these four years more than 250 new churches were set up. It is God's doing, a genuine revival! Many of our brothers and sisters in Cuba have understood God's calling and they commit themselves to him with much love and passion and enormous dedication.



Their aim? Cuba for Christ!! We as EBM MASA - and I speak for all who pray and donate – share in the joy and the privilege to be witnesses.

3. Congregation in the Zaldo Slum District

To meet the children, young people, adults and old ones in the slum districts deeply moved our hearts. They hardly have any chances, are exposed to greatest misery, and quite frequently they get into contact with drugs and crime. However, praise be to Jesus Christ, because through his church he reaches these people with his love. It is wonderful to see how not only people but also their surroundings are changed through the faith in Jesus.



In Zaldo we heard about the enormous problems and challenges of the congregation there which they bring before God with many ardent prayers. But we also learnt about the God-given victories. For three years already a concrete ceiling over some old little houses is being built. One third is already finished, that is where the people meet for their services. We hope that during the next months we will be able to fund the remaining part of the roof. At present they also have to face hostility, but they go ahead with confidence.

Rolando García is the new missionary in Zaldo, successor of Frank San Juan, to whom we are very grateful. Frank unfortunately had to move to the USA for family reasons.



4. Tamarindo Church

Tamarindo is the name of the district where we could be present during a church foundation ceremony in the open air. About 150 people had come. The joy was overwhelming. EBM MASA missionary Daniel Gonzalez and his congregation are full of enthusiasm about their vision of church planting in the big cities becoming reality. In this district the work started with 10 house groups. Now these groups joined together in a new independent congregation which is starting with just under 100 members, two pastors and a worship team. They do not yet have a building, but a plot that could be bought with the help of EBM MASA. In the near future a roof of corrugated metal will be erected, and then it will be a church with a "roof over its head". Soon three more churches are to be founded in the same manner in three more places.



5. *Three Baptisms*

➤ in Murillo

There was bright sunshine on that Wednesday afternoon at the beach of the small village of Murillo, about 100 km northwest of Havana where the baptism took place. As it was a weekday not all those engaged in church planting work could come, but all who could had come to be present at the baptism of five brothers and sisters. Joyful worship and great enthusiasm all along! Some of the people to be baptized had been delivered from deep occult practices when they were converted to Jesus. Juan and Ana Iris Sanchez, the missionaries for this region are extremely happy about this, just as we are. In this area Juan is responsible for several church planting projects such as in Sayas and Bahía Honda. Mission work is not easy there, and it is confronted with big challenges, therefore it is even more important to see how God blesses and gives fruit..



➤ On the Island of Youth – has already been mentioned

➤ In Zaldo church

As also older people were to be baptized whose baptism could not have taken place in the sea in Havana, the ceremony was performed on a Sunday afternoon in the church of Daniel Gonzalez. 11 brothers and sisters were baptized upon confession of their faith in Jesus.



6. *Retreat together with the EBM MASA missionary families*

The retreat lasted from Thursday afternoon until Saturday morning. The two days were very intensive. During the afternoons there was free time to rest and/or enjoy the beach. The volunteers took care of the children so that they also had a program especially for them. Our aim for the retreat was to reflect a few important issues on the basis of the bible, to listen to each other and to pray for one another, to offer counseling and advice and to discuss the strategy for the Cuban projects for the next few years. We are very happy to have experienced God's work and his blessing. During the evaluation at the end of the meeting we



were convinced that we had reached our aims. It was a wonderful gift. Quite frequently tears were shed. Once due to joy over what had been reached through the projects during the past year, and on the other hand because the missionaries could share with the group the struggles they very often have to go through. Every time a couple had reported about their life and service they took place in the middle of a circle and we prayed over them. Arturo and Betty and Marli and I were also "prayed for" and blessed.



7. "A Chair for Cuba"

This campaign was meant to cooperate in providing seats during the services for many sisters and brothers in Cuba's newly founded churches. Most churches just don't have enough money for chairs. And here comes the announcement of a success: 1,800 chairs could be bought! The chairs are very simple, made of wood or plastic, but they are a great comfort for our brothers and sisters. It was moving to experience their joy and gratefulness. Brothers and sisters from Argentina, Brazil and also from German churches had contributed so that we could raise the approximately 15.000 Euros. At this point a very hearty thanks on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Cuba.



8. Disaster Management

When in October 2012 hurricane Sandy had partly or fully destroyed 80 % of the houses in Santiago de Cuba and Region we as EBM MASA reacted with an immediate First-Aid drive that was organized by Daniel Gonzalez. Thanks to this aid from the Disaster Fund of the BEFG of 5,000 Euro and donations from the AGA churches in Argentina amounting to 4,000 Euro we can also provide further and more lasting assistance, which is organized by our missionary Marcos Rivero together with the leadership of the Eastern Union. The aim is to help about 30 families who have lost their homes to get a roof over their heads. At this occasion a word of hearty thanks to the leaders of the German Union as well as to the churches in Argentina which made this action possible. This is also a concrete demonstration of the Gospel for many people.

Many heartfelt thanks for your loving support.

Soli Deo Gloria!


Carlos Waldow