

JOURNALS POSTED ON MARCH 30, 2012

Mary Weaver, IM Staff Member, Reflects on Her Recent Trip to Cuba



MARY WEAVER

My name is Mary Weaver, and I am the administrative assistant to Rev. Dr. José Norat Rodríguez, Area Director for Iberoamerica and the Caribbean with International Ministries. I have been working with José for almost 20 years and prior to José, I worked with Rev. Victor Mercado for 4 years. I would like to share my recent experience of my trip to Cuba.

IM's partner, the Convención Bautista de Cuba Oriental has 500 churches and 100 missions. They also have house churches and cell groups. The cell groups are formed from the house churches. The Convention focuses on planting new churches and leadership training. One of the pastors shared with us that 81 new churches were formed in 2009 and 2010. The goal is to establish 30 to 50 new churches a year. The churches are filled with people and there is such an atmosphere of enthusiasm and warmth.

This was my second trip to Cuba. The first time I traveled to Cuba was in 1997 with a group of Executive and Area Ministers from American Baptist Churches. This first trip was an evangelistic fact finding mission, and I served as a translator for Rev. Judy Allbee, who was an Area Minister for Indiana and Kentucky. This trip was different from the first since we were working on a construction project at Iglesia Bautista "El Cristo" where Rev. Néstor Rodríguez serves as the pastor. Just as with my first visit in 1997, I had the opportunity to visit different churches in and around Santiago de Cuba. On this trip, I experienced the same enthusiasm and warmth of the people in the different churches where we visited. The churches are growing and everywhere we went the churches were well attended.

It was a blessing to meet Pastor Néstor and his family. Pastor Néstor is very committed to his family and the church. He is very humble man, but I sensed that he is a person who has accomplished so much. He loves his country and is very deeply committed to it, to the church, and to the community. He was very caring with our group and there was no detail left untouched. I felt very blessed to be under his leadership during our stay. Also, I appreciated the opportunity to meet with the Board of Directors of the Convention together with Kim Kushner Dominguez during our stay. These meetings were very informative and enlightening.

I felt a real sense of love and warmth from the people that we met in the churches. There were differences in the churches where we visited. Some of them were larger more historic churches and some were more humble such as the house and cell churches we visited. I was very impressed with the cell church that we visited. Despite their difficult circumstances, the people gave us a warm reception. I was able to translate for two of my colleagues when they gave their testimonies and I really enjoyed being able to do this. Also, the leader of the cell church, Augustina, who was an older woman, impressed me and it was surprising that she was very open minded for a person of her age.

This is the first time that I have gone on a mission work trip with a group where we all stayed together during our visit. It was really nice to get to know the different members of the group. I felt that we all had a very good rapport.

I would love to return to Cuba again. I have always been interested in the country, its history, the people, and I find it to be very fascinating. I have made many friends over the past 15 to 20 years among pastors, who are members of the Eastern Cuba Baptist Convention. Some of those pastors are retired now, but are still involved in ministry. I feel honored and blessed to have been able to maintain these friendships. I have really enjoyed helping people in Cuba when needs have arisen where I am able to help. I believe that I will always have an interest in Cuba and in her people.

Although many years passed between my visits to Cuba, many of my experiences on both trips were similar. Also, I would like to thank José Norat Rodríguez for having made these trips possible.