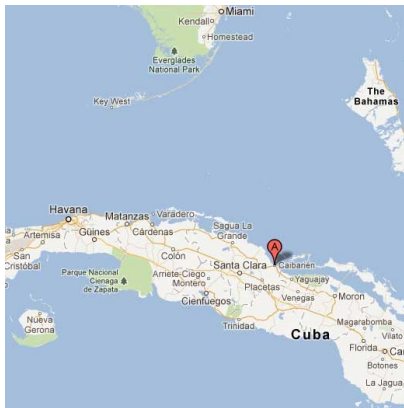


Cuba Missions Trip



May 17, 2012

Preparing for departure in Miami airport



Arriving at the airport in Havana we are greeted by Che Guevara, one of the three key people involved in the 1958 revolution.



We arrived in Havana airport and after clearing customs we headed to Caibarien on the North coast of Cuba. As we drove here we saw these sights.



We arrive in our new home, the Baptist Church of Caibarien. (They use the word, Templo to refer to the church building, iglesia to refer to the church people.)



May 18, 2012

Our first day of working on the church in Dolores, a neighborhood of Caibarien. We go by truck with our tools and supplies.



We dug a footer while the electric team installed the circuit breaker box. Then they connect the service from the outside meter. Rick makes a beautiful hole but it is in the wrong place. We often do things twice in Cuba. They decided that they want to move the service meter to the side of the building so the hole goes in the wall to the left.



Judy is forming triangles from wire to hold the rebar in place. We fished wires through the ceiling. Judy was cut by the metal and is getting treatment here for the bleeding but no pain.



Here you can see the triangles on the rebar in the ground, pending the concrete.

The church where we are staying:



We took a walk to the port that has been closed for many years. This is the Atlantic Ocean, just south of Key West.



May 19, 2012

Today we worked in the back of the church and made a footer for the back room. Finding the right position for the column. As we prepared, we saw this spider.



The church members of Dolores prepare lunch for us in the home of a member who moved out so that we could use the house to eat and for bathroom.



May 20, 2012

Before church we went to see the downtown which has shops that open at 9 a.m. Church begins at 10 a.m. with Sunday School, worship service is at 8 p.m.



The church in Dolores where we are building the front and installing the electrical system.



The pastor introduces the service and I gave my testimony in English and Spanish. Andy helps me with a few words. Then Ray presented the sermon from Matthew 22, 1 Corinthians 13 and 1 John 4 while Andy translated. These young ladies sang a duet. This man is the principal builder next to his family at the church. It is not unusual to see horse drawn carts and people on horseback.



There is a lot of country, farm area in Cuba. This apartment complex is just outside the town. Naiviv, (Vivian) one of the ladies who serves us lives in the apartment on the right.

They have a good idea, the youth lead the evening service and it is full, both young and old enjoy the music and sermon.



May 21, 2012

We continued in Dolores, preparing rebar and forms to make concrete columns for the front of the church. We completed the forms and will make the concrete tomorrow, our last day.



Cutting the wire from the bale in 310" pieces for 10 31" rectangles. Sawing the wire for the rectangles that hold the rebar in a square.

“The crooked made straight.” Forming the square from wire using a jig that Ray made. These are the ladies that prepared lunch for us each day. It was good. Today we had yuca and pork.



We had a little rest after lunch. Then we set up the forms with the rebar inside. Alas, the forms were a little too small and as the thunderstorm approached we took the forms inside to make them a bit bigger. We watched an ox cart go by. We tie the rectangles onto the rebar to go inside the form.



It really doesn't take this many Baptists to set up a column, we all got into the act. Rice grows in the field as we return home.



Playing around, Jans and Julie are supervising.

May 22, 2012

Our last day working and we want to finish the columns we started. We have forms for two columns on the front porch of the church. Fish for lunch with yellow rice and fried plantains. Ray is leveling the column and preparing supports to hold it upright while we pour the concrete. It rained all last night and all day. We were able to work in the rain anyway. You can see the rain accumulated on our “street.”



We mix the concrete with one bucket of cement, three of sand and two of gravel. We then bucket by bucket fill the columns.



The “finished” project, the Baptist Church in Dolores.

Of course its not finished, the next group will take down the forms, install them in the center and then prepare forms and concrete for the cross beam that will make the porch.

On Cuba:.

Life is simple in Cuba. Cell phones were introduced about five years ago and service is expensive in the day time so people keep their phones in their pockets. Internet is not readily available so information and communications are as they were thirty years ago. People spend time with their families, men play dominoes, throw ball, play basketball. Food is simple, hunks of pork, chicken, accent rice and beans, mostly white rice, some yellow. Tomatoes, cucumbers, mangos, pineapple, bananas are served with each meal. We had some special food, fish and lobster. Our interpreter had never had lobster before. Desserts of flan, ice cream, puddings and cheese. Few items are processed, most are fresh, bought from farmers. No preservatives, food is fresh and tasty.

Caution: My visit is to a small town on the coast in a country area and its “suburb” a farming town of a few dozen people. I spoke solely to Christians, who are in the minority.

On Communism: Everyone who wants to work has a job. Everyone seems to have what they need. Everyone seems happy. Your home, medical care, dental care and education through university and beyond and is provided by the government. Basic food in limited quantities is available very inexpensively.

If you want anything else it is similar in cost to US prices unless its manufactured and imported when it is more expensive. In large part everyone is about the same, there is very limited wealth accumulation because there is nothing much left over. Though the monthly wage is about \$18, this is largely spending money as little is needed for the basics otherwise supplied as mentioned above. Household goods, clothing, more than the basic food and utilities consume this even when two people in the household work. I was told it really takes \$50 to live. “We are all the same, we are all poor.”

Teachers are paid about the same as laborers so it is not a good living. Doctor care is free but in the town we visited, there was no local doctor so the dentist took care of basic medical needs.

Those who I talked to were not members of the communist party. Though expression of religion seemed unlimited, a basic principle of communism is that there is no god. The second assumption is that all workers will do their best for the benefit of the entire community. Unfortunately, mankind is inherently programmed so that all workers do the least necessary to get by and fend for themselves. All shops and most businesses are government owned. Thus, those who are in an occupations where you can steal a bit do better than those who cannot. Farming seems like a good trade because you basically sharecrop with the government and you consume and sell what is not paid to the authorities. As the government owns all of the livestock, when a horse or cow dies, an inspector comes to make a report.

It was obvious on the street that a church service was going on on Sunday and there are evening meetings as well so expression of religion in this area was unfettered. Nevertheless, Christians, being the minority, are passed over for the better positions. Though you don't have to be a party

member, to get a good government job, it is a requirement. It is also helpful when you need a favor from the government or get in some trouble.

When you count off the liberties we have in the bill of rights, we note that freedom of expression is greatly limited, one may not speak against the government nor its leaders. You can be discriminated against by the government for your religion. You can be stopped and searched and detained by a police officer without cause. You cannot peacefully assemble, certainly not for political reasons and they watch how many people are together at once, except for at the church. On the other hand, the presence of police was not obvious to me. People on the street seemed to do their business and associate with their friends without concern.

Without the incentive to achieve, there is little innovation and waiting in line is common. Building supplies are not always easy to obtain and faucets drip. The water is good but is pumped into a tower for the household where it flows down with little pressure. They have to turn the pump off and on manually as they have no automatic switch. There are no incandescent light bulbs and the only place that I saw that was air conditioned was the pastor's office. Thus we are very energy conscious.

The main highway was in good condition but pot holes were common but not nearly as bad as Jamaica. On the other hand, few people have cars, most travel by bicycle, horse or horse drawn carriage. Remember, I am in a country area so be careful about over generalization as to the whole country.

No one has ever emigrated from Cuba and returned. It is not impossible to emigrate but it requires an invitation, money and an official having a good day. Everyone I spoke to was in awe of the United States but they see only the good stuff. Those I spoke with were not in favor of communism.

May 23, 2012 – La Habana, the Capitol

As we drove into La Habana, 400 km (240 miles) from Caibarien we saw the center of Cuban industry but surprisingly, there is no suburbs or other population until you are well within the city limits. There are plenty of old cars in the capitol.



A cruise ship is in port and the streets are packed with South American tourists. Old canons and canon balls are used to make pedestrian streets. The statue of the priest with the child marks the St. Francis Convent. At lunch we were serenaded by this duet.



Judy's shrimp were served in a pineapple shell. The plate was huge. The Spanish Revolution (about 1850) stands before the fortress, originally established to protect against pirates. History was made on these old streets in the "old town" section.



While we were eating lunch, Ernesto and I were talking about how he couldn't go certain places because he was a Cuban. I told him that he looked like Rick's son from Oregon and he would not be identified as a Cuban. He did not believe me. Here these Cuban ladies mistook him for a foreign tourist and kissed him. I was right. Below, a church and the Capitol. How'd you like to ride in one of these taxis?



Mimes are present in many cities around the world, La Habana is no exception. Judy, Samantha, Andy and I were standing in front of our hotel. Andy and I became good friends, he was our interpreter for the mission. I taught him American expressions that you don't learn in school, e.g. "He has a screw loose." Andy wanted to give me a CD on Cuban history so he asked me to call him when we got to the hotel. I invited him and his wife to dinner. A concierge suggested this totally awesome restaurant that had just three tables and we were the only diners. The entre was \$15 and the four of us ate for \$83. The food was really good.



May 24, 2012 – As we went to the airport on the last day, we passed by the Fidel Castro Plaza. Here are monuments to the three great leaders of the Revolution.

