



# **SOUTH WEST DISTRICT NEWSLETTER**

**Rev. Dr. Rinaldo Hernandez, District Superintendent**  
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**September 2013**

## **Why a relationship with Cuba?**

As many of you already know, I was born and raised in a Caribbean island called Cuba, almost 56 years ago. My family came to Christ through the ministry of American missionaries who came to share the Word of God in the protestant tradition at the end of the Hispanic American war in 1898. The Cuban Annual Conference was part of the Florida Conference for all of those years, and the Florida Resident Bishop was also our Bishop down there on the island.

During 62 years of American missionary presence in Cuba 120 churches were built. Numerous colleges were serving the Cuban people: "Candler College", "Buenavista College" and "Central Methodist College" in Havana, "Irene Toland" in Matanzas, "Elisa Bowman" in Cienfuegos, "Colegio Metodista" in Santa Clara, "Pinson" in Camaguey, Agricultural and Industrial School in Playa Manteca (Holguin province) among others. In 1959 "Candler College" was upgraded to "Candler University". Also there were several clinics (called "medical dispensaries" in Cuba) throughout the island, mainly serving the poor. A theological school was opened in Matanzas (Seminario Evangélico de Teología / Evangelical Theological Seminary) in conjunction with Presbyterians and Episcopalians, where lots of Cuban and Latin American pastors earned a Bachelor of Theology degree.

But in 1960 the chapter ended because of the political differences between Cuba and the United States of America. Cuba was proclaimed to be a "socialist" and "atheistic" country and all diplomatic, social and cultural ties with the US were severed. All missionaries were recalled and 85% of the Cuban pastors made the difficult decision to migrate to America.

The challenge for the Cuban Methodist Church was immense and we had to attain financial self-sufficiency in a matter of months. All the colleges and dispensaries were "nationalized" by the government, so we were able to just keep the church buildings and the Seminary open. Because of the lack of pastors, a lot of lay leaders had to fill pulpits and get some training to become the pastors of those churches left without pastoral leadership.

The 60's, 70's and 80's were very difficult years because of persecution. Many of our remaining pastors (and even of our "lay supply") were taken to forced labor camps. In 1973, the Cuban Annual Conference reported

1800 members (down from 10,000 in 1959 when the “revolution” happened). I remember going to “youth camps” with less than 50 kids in attendance from all around the island.

Beginning in the 90’s, the Methodist church in Cuba started experiencing a genuine revival, born out of the many prayers we lifted up to the Lord asking: “What can we do to be the Church of Christ in a communist country?” God’s answer was a powerful movement of the Holy Spirit, which made us strong witnesses for Christ, not ashamed of being identified as Christians and committed to God and the Kingdom. Prayer vigils, fasting, evangelistic rallies, astonishing miracles, deep spiritual experiences (within the temples) and one-on-one faith sharing became an intrinsic part of our Christian journey. We were not allowed to build churches in new communities, but people offered their homes to accommodate a worshipping community. At some point I had 56 “house churches” meeting on Tuesday evenings with worship leaders, children’s ministry and a lay preacher while I served as a Pastor at University Methodist Church in Vedado, downtown Havana. Several of the house churches would have 50-70 people in attendance.

Worship became more culturally relevant. Musical instruments that are part of our cultural heritage were incorporated into worship: guitars, bongos, and tambourines. Some of us had a hard time trying to keep alive our rich hymnological heritage because of the lack of hymnbooks. Bibles were precious possessions that were given from one generation to the next, due to the inflexibility of the government to allow Bibles to come from other countries.

From a sociological point of view, I believe the Church in Cuba became the only freedom space people could enjoy. From the spiritual standpoint, people were confronted with a meaningless life and found personal freedom and endless possibilities of self-realization through the Gospel and the leadership possibilities offered by the church. We had a Youth Service every Saturday evening, one block from Havana University, with more than 500 youth in attendance during the period from 1995 to 2000.

A relationship with Cuba is not only something you do to “help” those poor people down there, or to help with things that are necessary for their ministry, it is something that we do for our own spiritual benefit.

In the 12 years I’ve been a part of the Florida Conference, I have heard countless testimonies of people being empowered and transformed through their experience on a “mission trip” to Cuba.

People going from the United States to visit a Cuban sister church will find:

- Conversions to faith in Christ happening at every service in the church
- People being delivered from spirits and principalities of darkness
- Lively music and dancing as part of the worship experience
- People unapologetically claiming to be Christians and actively witnessing to others, inviting them to church and accompanying them to the altar to offer their lives to Christ. There are altar calls being made at every worship service
- A church with lots of material limitations, but with such a passion in worship and zeal for the transformation of human beings
- Faith communities with an incredible creative capacity to make instruments, clothing for liturgical dancers and to use different artistic manifestations connected to worship
- Discipleship processes that would take a person a whole year in preparation before they are baptized and made members of the Methodist Church
- People faithfully tithing out of the limited resources they have or the little salaries they are paid. The problem is that the Cuban currency they give can’t buy materials or equipment the churches need for ministry there

- People who are incredibly hospitable and would offer you all they have and beyond to make sure you have a pleasant stay among them
- Churches, missions and house churches everywhere, in a country whose goal was to eradicate “religion” from Cuba by 1970. Today there are more people professing the Christian faith in Cuba than ever before in their history

So, if you ask me: Why Cuba? I would say: “Do it for your own benefit. Do it and your life will be forever transformed as you experience the Cuban way of being a fully committed disciple of Jesus Christ”. Go there to give, but also to receive. Of course, I can be biased.

In Christ's Name,

Rini



**IMPORTANT NOTICE FOR SPRC MEMBERS AND OTHER LOCAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP**

Local churches and other salary-paying units (SPUs) in The United Methodist Church (UMC), as employers, need to understand an important employee notice requirement this year under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), the national health care reform law. This summary is intended to help local churches and SPUs understand their responsibilities with respect to this Notice requirement.

Employers must provide this Notice to all current employees **before October 1, 2013** (regardless of whether you offer a health plan to your employees or not).

This date is also the first day of open enrollment for the Health Insurance Marketplaces, also called "Exchanges" (for coverage to begin January 1, 2014). For employees hired between October 1, 2013, and December 31, 2013, the Notice must be provided on the employee start date. For employees hired on or after January 1, 2014, the Notice must be provided within 14 days of hire.

The Notice must be provided in writing and may be delivered through first-class mail, or through electronic delivery (e.g., via e-mail if the employee's access to the employer's electronic information system is an integral part of the employee's duties). Note: Posting the Notice in the employer's website or an on-site bulletin board does not satisfy the requirement.

The Notice must describe certain information including an explanation of the Marketplace, the impact of employer coverage, the tax implications if insurance is purchased in the Marketplace and Marketplace contact information.

To assist employers with providing this Notice, the Department of Labor has released two template forms entitled New Health Insurance Marketplace Coverage Options and Your Health Coverage. Templates and sample documents are provided for your use at [The Marketplace Notice Toolkit](#) on the Florida Conference website.

Local churches and SPUs should choose the template Notice most applicable to their circumstance; e.g., a church that offers coverage to the pastor through its annual conference, even if it does not offer coverage to lay employees, and even if the pastor declines coverage, should use the Notice for an employer who offers coverage to some employees. These templates

Employers will need to complete the template forms by adding certain information about the employer and its health plan, if any. The Conference is providing an Employer Toolkit for assistance in completing the forms (available at [www.flumc.org/hr](http://www.flumc.org/hr) **Affordable Care Act Notice Requirements**).

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**WEBCAST: Tuesday September 24 @ 2:00pm**

SW DISTRICT CUBA CONNECTION

Although there were things going on around us that were normal to the people in Cuba and caught us Americans completely off-guard, (using horses and oxen as main sources of transportation, along with hitch-

hiking, and drinking water out of a big bucket of collected rain water) I was more surprised about the intense presence of God in all of these people's lives that I met over the nine days.

For example, within the first two hours of arriving at Camp Canaan, I met a girl named Arlen. She spoke as much English as I did Spanish, (which is un poquito) so most of our conversations was very basic and used a plethora of hand signals. Some even included pathetic attempts at sign language! Arlen had a friend named Amanda that spoke much more English than Arlen did, so she acted as our translator. Arlen and I were talking about our favorite music, books, and what we like to do in our free time. Then she continued to say that she was sixteen years old. I told her that I turned sixteen a couple months ago as well.

Arlen said she had a very nice birthday, but her all-time favorite was her thirteenth. I asked her why her thirteenth was her favorite, and her eyes immediately lit up just at the thought of it. Arlen pointed to herself and dragged her arms out and then back into her body, showing that she had gotten something, and then said in English “A can Coca Cola.” I thought she was going to continue and explain what her party was like, and what food there was, but that’s all she said. “A can Coca Cola” left her beaming for minutes. I quickly realized that the can of coke was the one and only present she had gotten. I didn’t want Arlen to see that I was completely taken aback by her answer, so I said “Wow! Muy Bien! Delicioso!” After my reaction, Arlen said in Spanglish, “My life es perfecto.” I was speechless. How could someone who got one can of coca cola for her thirteenth birthday say that her life is perfect?

This simple, ten minute conversation about Arlen's birthday changed my perspective on the vast amount of tangible things that we all think are necessities. Arlen showed me that when you wake up with God as the focus of your life instead of tangible things that provide about eight seconds of a carbonated aftertaste, your life can be as close to perfect as possible. When we can be free of what the World defines as perfect and simply dwell in God's love and his plans for us, that is when our life is truly perfect. Arlen was just one of the 980 children at Camp Canaan. What were the odds that she would approach me and tell me a story like this? God only knows.

Throughout the remainder of the week, whenever we sat down at a lunch or dinner table and there was a bottle of “Tukola” (Cuban Coca-Cola) my mind flew straight to Arlen. In fact, when we walked out of the air-conditioned Miami airport and were reminded of what real roads look like again, the first car that caught my eye was an eighteen-wheel Coca Cola tractor trailer. I came home from Cuba with myriads and myriads of more stories and experiences that I would be ecstatic to tell you about at anytime, anywhere. There was no tangible “thing” that I took back from Cuba to the United States, but the one memory I will always have is Arlen and her “can Coca Cola.”

**Hear more amazing stories from the youth that have just returned from Cuba, September 26<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m. at Cypress Lake UMC, in Fort Myers.**

**Do you have students interested in going to Cuba next summer? Contact me immediately at 941-468-7209 or dancc@comcast.net.**

Dan Christopherson, South West District Cuba Coordinator

Direct Line: 941-404-4620 --- Cell: 941-468-7209 --- Email: [dancc@comcast.net](mailto:dancc@comcast.net)





## REGISTER NOW

The training is free but we need you to register so we know how much lunch to order! You can select the links above or go to the Conference website ([www.flumc.org](http://www.flumc.org)) and select "Districts" on the left side of the home page. Scroll down to select South West. On the right side of the South West page you can then select the event you would like to attend.

### Report from Mike Edwards, SW District Youth Coordinator

Contact info: Mike Edwards, FLUM SW District Youth Coordinator  
Youth Director, Faith UMC, 15690 McGregor Blvd., Ft. Myers FL 33908 -- [medwards@faithum.com](mailto:medwards@faithum.com).



Ladies - grab your mom, sisters, daughters and friends this is going to be a great day!  
Doors will open at 8:30 am - Event 9:30 am - 4:30 pm



Tickets are \$15.00 and include lunch. T shirts are available and must be ordered prior to the event. For registration or more information, visit [www.saintjamesumc.org](http://www.saintjamesumc.org) or contact Debbie White, Ministry Manager, Saint James UMC - 941-377-6180.

**YOU CAN VIEW ALL LOCAL CHURCH EVENTS ON THE CONFERENCE WEBSITE – SELECT “LOCAL CHURCH EVENTS” UNDER THE ‘QUICK LINKS’ SECTION**



## Join the Million Reasons Campaign

***“For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink.”***

**"A Million Reasons"—a year-long Florida Conference mission to pack 1,000,000 meals to fight hunger—was launched at Annual Conference in June with a Stop Hunger Now meal-packaging event.**

**Now, the rest of the Million Reasons campaign begins. Many churches have already contacted Stop Hunger Now to schedule a meal packaging event, so the journey toward the 1,000,000 meals goal is underway.**

Go to <http://flumc2.org/pages/detail/2317> for more information and Pam Carter's invitation to join the campaign.



## HELP WANTED & CLASSIFIEDS....

- **CREDO Confirmation Resources Wanted:** Gulf Cove UMC (located in Port Charlotte) is looking to borrow the 8 or 12 week version of the CREDO confirmation resources. Please contact Rev. Bill Fisackerly at Gulf Cove UMC, Port Charlotte (941-697-1747).
- **Children & Family Minister Needed:** First United Methodist Church in downtown Fort Myers is receiving resumes for the position of Children and Family Minister. Part-time with the possibility of full-time as the ministry continues to grow. Salary commensurate with experience. The person we are looking for is an active disciple of Jesus Christ, committed to discipleship of all age-levels, and has a history of growing children's ministry. Please send resumes to Rev. Chris McNeill, First UMC, 2466 First Street, Fort Myers FL 33901.
- **Discipleship Director Wanted:** Estero United Methodist Church is accepting applications for a Discipleship Director. Successful candidate will demonstrate strong organizational and administrative skills along with excellent interpersonal and communication skills including leadership and teamwork. Experience in Christian Education or Bachelor's Degree in a related field is preferred. This is a full-time salaried position with benefits. Responsibilities will include:  
1) Develop an integrated discipleship program that encompasses the experiences and knowledge needed for individuals to become fully devoted followers of Christ. This program will include emphasis



# CONFERENCE EVENTS

## **Designing Creative Worship that Converges & Connects: A Workshop for Preachers, Artists, Musicians, & Worship Planners**

Presented by The Fellowship of United Methodists in Music and Worship Arts (Florida Chapter) and *Mary Scifres Ministries*

Saturday, October 19th, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm at the Life Enrichment Center, Fruitland Park

Rev. Mary Scifres, Abingdon author and worship expert, is coming to the Life Enrichment Center of Fruitland Park this fall to present a worship workshop on Saturday, October 19th.

“Designing Creative Worship that Converges and Connects” invites pastors, musicians and worship leaders to explore new, creative possibilities for “convergent worship.” By merging and integrating styles and ideas from “emergent worship” and “postmodern worship” with “traditional” and “contemporary” worship, Scifres demonstrates practical ways to bypass the age-old worship wars and forge new ways of maintaining a congregation’s center while enjoying varied and rich worship elements.

Rather than seeing new expressions of worship as alternate or additional styles and programs to add to church schedules, Scifres teaches worship planners to integrate multi-sensory, participatory, communal spiritual disciplines and diverse worship components into current worship settings. Using the convergent process, worship connects more easily with people both outside and inside the church doors.

Early Registration is only \$50 and includes morning snacks, a full lunch catered by Life Enrichment Center, and all materials. After October 1, registration increases to \$60. CEU credit is also available for an additional \$10. Register today at [www.maryscifres.com](http://www.maryscifres.com), or by emailing your name and contact information to [maryscifresministries@gmail.com](mailto:maryscifresministries@gmail.com). Payment can be submitted through PayPal or by personal check, mailed directly to Mary Scifres Ministries, 28825 Top of the World Drive, Laguna Beach, CA 92651.

## **Registration is now open for Rooted 2013**

Rooted is an annual youth worker training, networking, and gathering event for youth workers in the Florida Conference. From veteran youth workers to those of you who are new to youth ministry, Rooted has something for you.

Please note: If you are new to youth ministry, new to the Florida Conference, or if you are new to The United Methodist Church, we have a block of training on Monday afternoon that you cannot miss.

Rooted is put on by the Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church and the Youth Ministry Institute. While at the event, you will have a variety of classes and roundtables you can join in on. You can also take advantage of an opportunity to sit in on Youth Ministry Institute classes. A full list of class offerings and an event schedule can be found on the website listed below.

Event: Rooted 2013 - A Youth Worker Training and Networking Event

Date: September 16 & 17.

Location: Warren W. Willis United Methodist Camp in Fruitland Park, FL

Cost: \$50 for whole event or \$20 for one day only (Monday or Tuesday)

Click on the following link to register.

<http://www.flumc-mwyp.org/#/youth-workers/rooted-registration-page>

Contact Joel Pancoast at [jpancoast@flumc.org](mailto:jpancoast@flumc.org) if you have any questions. Look forward to seeing you there!