



**Cuba Outreach Ministry
November Mission Trip
November 02, 2019 to November 09, 2019**

Pre-trip.

From past experience it was best to take the day off work making sure everything that needed to be done was done. Checking and double checking, weighing and resorting last minute changes to the bags ensuring what was needed most takes priority. Some things that were intended to go will have to go next time because we are down to Plan "C".

Plan "A" was to be several days with our pastors at a Cuban Resort as a Retreat with their families. Due to the current state of Cuba it is no longer possible.

Plan "B" was for at least a Pastor's Day/Conference where we would have worship and educational development. This also is not possible due to all the shortages and costs of travel.

Now we are down to Plan "C", personal visits with each and every pastor and their families in their homes or churches.

Friday continued with visiting the bank, printing tickets, photocopying passport information page, reweighing bags. There are 6 of us going each with 3 X 50# bags totalling 900 pounds of necessities. The 50# of medicine arrived two days ago with 6 different kinds of antibiotics, pain killers, high blood pressure meds, and diuretics, vitamins, anti-fungus, antacids, and so much more, very specific to people we know.

All the luggage packed into the vehicles ready for our departure to London airport early in the morning.

Day 1 Saturday November 02, 2019 Travel Day- "Strathroy – Toronto - Varadero - Santa Clara "

We proceeded according to plan departed from Strathroy 4:30a.m. Arriving 5:30a.m. London. Our 1st. 50 pound suitcase costed \$30. The 2nd 50 pound duffle bag was a freebie (humanitarian) with West Jet and the 3rd. and final 50 pound duffle bag was \$50.00. All our clothes and our necessities were in the carry-ons. We barely got our luggage checked and through security when the announcement for boarding our flight to Toronto was heard. During the security check I was asked to open and show the 15 "Messengers" I had boxed up together. After showing one and explaining what they were I was on my way with minimal delay. I figure it would have the same reception in Cuba.

We are aware of the multitude of people committed to praying for every step of our journey. Our mission continues to be to encourage, equip, and evaluate. We will never know the full impact of this trip. There is strength in numbers. This is no lone wolf operation. We all depend on one another. Our journey is full of constantly going, stopping, sharing, resting and then going again, and again and again. How we measure time constantly changing. Not sure of what we will find in Cuba, only confident that God knows and will have the way prepared. He's got it covered.

I think of our people in Cuba receiving, sharing, planning, praising, working, preaching, teaching, worshipping calling out into the darkness the love, hope, and grace available to the whosoever glorifying God making disciples who are making disciples. It is like medicine for your soul.

Flight time to Varadero Cuba 3hrs 16minutes. Smooth uneventful flight. Team keeping in good spirits all experienced and prepared. The walk through from the terminal to Customs a long one. Easily through Immigration with all documents in order. After the first Security x-ray/check point there was a long wait for the luggage to arrive. Everyone got their own luggage. Paired up and left the building to be greeted outside by our good friend Yonail with a rented van and driver.

Because the flight was booked solid, I was given the ability to have my carry-on checked in at Toronto. In Varadero my carry-on case had been written on it showing I had to go the secondary inspection. It's the "Messengers". I was expecting this. The "Messengers" are no threat, they are not a two way radio device, nor a GPS, just simply an "e" book. (Not recommended to declare them as a Bible without a Religious Visa.)

A 2 ½ hour ordeal began with not one Inspector knowing what to do with them. I was kept at a desk by this one young lady Inspector who was looking around lost, asking other Inspectors passing by. Same thing over and over again with Inspectors asking same questions and walking away doing nothing. Like they were wandering around and around tending to other travelers, mostly returning Cubans bringing things back into Cuba in bales of wrapped plastic. Eventually there were very few travellers left and finally the young lady Inspector took me yet to another desk where the Inspector there told me the Messengers were not allowed in Cuba. She wrote out a lot of things on the seizure form referring to a book, copying lines. Told me I could take 10 with me and placed the remaining 5 into a coloured cloth security bag secured with a numbered seal. She asked me how long I would be in Cuba and then told me the first 5 days are free but then it costs \$3.00 CUC per day thereafter to recover the Messengers going back to Canada. I was asked to fill out another Declaration Form without the reference to the other passport numbers on it. All this time they were in possession of my passport. As I left Customs I was greeted by my granddaughter Abigail and Yonail who were anxiously waiting just outside the doors.

The rest of the team were in a Taxi at a restaurant on their way to Santa Clara that had to be hired because there was no room for everyone after filling the hired Van with luggage.

The travel time from Varadero to Santa Clara is about 3 ½ to 4 hours (230 km.). We all reconnected at the 142 KM Restaurant on the Cuban National Highway. The owners are Christians. Music videos were playing while we enjoyed our supper. The electricity went out temporarily delaying the cooking in the kitchen. It's Cuba. Cost of meal \$10.00CUC each including drinks.

During the drive in our conversations I find out from the driver the 2013 Van we are travelling in is valued at \$170,000CUC. Where do they find the money? Maybe some questions are best not asked. The price of fuel is \$1.00CUC/ litre (\$1.35CAD). Out of reach for most Cubans. Costs of the Van with driver and the Taxi were \$160.00CUC and \$120.00CUC. We found a place to buy drinking water before arriving in Santa Clara (\$.70.00CUC 1.5 litre bottle or \$1.90CUC very large jug) No change over the years.

At Hostel Buena Vista Santa Clara VC we did not find the owner Santiago but his son Jesus who was expecting us only because while delayed at the airport Belinda had Yonail call Buena Vista earlier to let them know we were on our way only delayed. The bags were sent on to Placetatas with Yonail while our suitcases went to our rooms. Everyone enjoyed showers and settling for a much needed sleep for the night. All in agreement, everywhere we visit we will take turns praying for them.

Day 2 Sunday November 03, 2019 "Day of Worship" Palmira

Belinda and I got our usual room. We had no working clocks to go by. Last night the clocks were reset 1 hour back (Fall back). Hoping to find a Bank open today. They are open a few hours in the morning. That's a change over the years.

Last night all our information (passports) were recorded in a book should immigration inspect this place. This Casa Particular is for the tourist. If a tourist was to try and stay at a Casa Particular exclusively for Cubans and is caught it is a \$1,000.00CUC fine. There are people around the area who are informants to the government.

Plan today after breakfast (\$5.00CUC) is for all of us to fit in Yonail's 1956 car and go to Palmira to attend Pastor Ariandys' Church service which starts about 9:30a.m. Later on we are to visit Pastor Ramon who is just around the corner and a km down the road. Baptist Church (Palmira). When we arrived there it was during the first part of the service with teaching by Pastor Ramon. There is a 10 minute fellowship time with coffee followed by the final session of the service with preaching by Pastor Ariandys. I noticed there were 10 fans rotating trying to move the very hot humid air. The church regularly has anywhere from 95-100 people attending. 9 rows of benches on the left and right with many chairs filling in all around. You can tell by the seating this is a very family centred church. When the pastor visits the homes he asks if the family is praying together and if the man of the house teaching the children from the Bible. Ramon (Palmira). The visit included an update on current health. The need of medicines, for back pain, allergies, puffers, and plans of moving to their mission in Dagame by our next visit in March. Our team was treated to biscuits with mayo and cola soda. Very difficult to find soda in Cuba. Production of everything has stopped. No oil. No production. Ramon would like to get an external hard drive for his computer. The previous 1.5 terabyte external hard drive I got him years earlier has failed. The weather is hard on computers. Hot and humid.

Salutations to good friends in Canada John and Diane, Ross and Donna. While we were leaving Ramon's we met Carlos, Gina and their boys on their way home right outside of Ramon's. A good reunion catching up on what has happened to them since leaving COM. Ariandys (Palmira). We were welcomed to go to the backyard where there was some wind. Ariandys has been working in Palmira area for 6 years. Believes a strong church is the result of a strong family. A strong nation comes from a strong family. There needs to be unity. What is essential to good teaching is it must be Biblical. 9 years ago he was working/preaching in the mountains. He experienced government interference firsthand. The government knows it cannot stop the Christian belief so they attack the people and leaders with false accusations of corruption or subversion (working for foreign gov't.). Everyone in Cuba depends on the government for work except those in the church. If you are independent the government cannot control you. Ariandys wishes to not be published or shown on social media for fear of problems.

While travelling from Palmira to Placetatas we stopped in at Santa Clara where we are staying. There was more discussion about renting a car because 7 people in Yonail's car is too much. Lots of suffering, 4 people in the back trying to sit in a place designed for 3. Renting a car even for 3 days (Tuesday, Wednesday Thursday) would go a long way helping providing some relief. At Placetatas, we visited, caught up, played games, accessed internet if needed, or rested as needed until supper time prepared by Seryesky. At supper we enjoyed soup, meat, chips, vegetables, rice and flan. There was water available but no soda.

Later we shared conversations about current events. We learned the Cuban Government claims all problems are the result of, "Conjunctional Issues" Fuel shortages, lack of items like toilet paper, shampoo, soap, detergents, all problems are Conjunctional Issues. Every night we return to our Casa Particular in Santa Clara.

Day 3 Monday November 04, 2019 "Sorting Day" Placetatas, Santa Clara

Another good night's rest. Every morning we share a breakfast (\$5.00CUC) at Buena Vista and have assigned each morning someone to provide a devotional and prayer. Every morning we hear the sounds of the city. Traffic, birds, motor cycles, people shouting, dogs barking, slowly growing in frequency and volume.

There is more determination to rent a car, team members suffering needlessly. Yesterday we were busy and missed the Bank. Today we need to get money to settle accounts.

Conditions in Cuba continues to worsen noticeably even from just 6 months ago. Many shortages, what little was being produced has stopped. Stores are closed. What I saw in a popular store in Santa Clara City Centre while looking for soda was very few items available. Even if you have money it's still hard to find things

At Getsemini Church Placetás, we followed the game plan from the March trip for sorting. Beginning with placing the loaded bags, one at a time, on the table for Belinda (who personally knows each bag) to steer where everything goes. There were 20 marked smaller bags receiving items specific to those receiving. We will have to deliver the bags personally to help relieve any hardship in transporting them. Not easy for the Cuban. There is a wheelchair for Pastor Virgillio who survived Polio in his youth, continues to endure a life of pain, and now most recently has had an operation on his good shoulder and is recovering. All team members and Yonail's wife Marilyn worked very hard with lots to do. Meanwhile Yonail and I went banking. The rate of exchange was 1.35. \$100.00CUC costs \$135.00CAD to buy. In Placetás, Yonail and I went to the Car Rental place. All of these rental places are government owned and controlled. Recently the price has gone up to \$90.00CUC per day. Made arrangements to pick up the rental car tomorrow morning in Placetás for 3 days. (Costs \$90.00CUC X 3 days = \$270.00CUC plus returnable deposit of \$200.00CUC including unlimited mileage). The only car available looked like it had been through a lot with many dents and scratches but it's better than nothing. Getsemini Church has an air conditioned room with bunk beds where some of us rested to help recover from the hard work and heat. Supper in Placetás and back to our rooms in Santa Clara at night.



Day 4 Tuesday November 5, 2019 "Santa Clara- Placetás-Santa Clara-Cartagena-Palmira-Carlos Caraballo- Ranchuelo-Placetás-Santa Clara"

After Yonail and I spent some time in Santa Clara looking for possibly another rental car nearby (none available). We travelled to Placetás to the only one available, returning to Buena Vista Santa Clara to pick-up the rest of the team to continue delivering supplies to our pastors.

Raimon (Cartagena) The church is doing well with adult and children's programs. This church received from an anonymous benefactor on one of our previous visits funds to purchase much needed cast iron chairs (17) and the number of new people attending went up that same number. Locally the community is very poor. Local people go out to the National Highway nearby trying to sell anything (cheese, onions, and garlic) which was witnessed by the President of the country. He was angered so he declared this illegal and said it must be stopped.

People with diabetes are rationed ½ pound of beef for health reasons (only available to them), insulin is cheap, meters available, given 10 needles a month so they are used until dull. Costs are kept down but you have to pay. No pay-No medicine.

Farmers were given ground to work but at any time it can be returned to the government because they are the owners of the land. Prayer items: God will use the ministry here this way, for a printer for the church, for the youth ministry, for their construction plans (classroom and temple), for permission to be given for the construction (they have been asking 5 years now), for the process of legalizing papers. Dorothy H. went over the craft with Raimon's wife Kenia because there is no Pastor's Day. Before leaving Cartagena we found a store with toilet paper, detergent and soap. Because it was rationed we each went in and bought what we could to add to the pastor's supplies. It seems to me that the big cities are depleted of everything while very poor outlying places still have something because there is no money out there to buy up everything. (my observation and opinion) On our way to Carlos Caraballo we stopped by Palmira dropping off supplies for our pastors Ramon and Ariandys there. (Had seen them Sunday)

Santiago (Carlos Caraballo) we were warmly welcomed. We were treated to biscuits and a cold drink similar to a smoothie. His wife is away taking care of her aged mother which is a common family obligation taken very seriously. Family takes care of family. Due to this he may see his wife a few hours a week. Santiago is ordained and teaches at a local university courses in theology, in depth study of the Bible book by book. Three times a year for five weeks each time he teaches these courses.

Prayer items: For his marriage, Family situation, continued church growth and children's programs.

Denis (Ranchuelo) by the time we got there it was getting dark. Cuba is not a country you want to be driving at night. The family is looking good. His daughter (Isis) is now a practising doctor locally at a clinic. Medicine for his father in law are in his supplies. Denis asked for prayer of a situation in his church. A Christian married couple in the church experienced the loss of their 21 year old daughter who died without knowing Christ as Lord and Saviour. A very difficult time.

We travelled to Placetas, visited the church, shared supper, picked next day's supplies, and returned to our rooms.

When parking in front of Buena Vista, Santiago the owner had me park the car where his security cameras were aimed.

Day Five Wednesday November 06, 2019 "Santa Clara-Baez- Placetas-Santa Clara"

After breakfast, preparing to leave I noticed the rental car missing marker lights seeing the electrical lines outside the car and cut off. I told Santiago. Contacted the rental people who said I need a Police Report. The rest of the morning was spent waiting at the Police Station just around the corner. From my friend Yonail, I learned to recognize the uniforms of the Police, Police Guards, Solders, Special Forces Soldiers, and the Secret State Police (no uniforms) What else do you have to do for hours.

After 1 ½ hours I was visited by an Immigration Officer because I am a tourist. He spoke English asking for my Passport and Visa. Neither one I had with me and explained they were kept safe in my room but I did have a photocopy of my Passport. This was acceptable. They only required proof of the identification. This photocopy also worked for my renting the car only failing me once for the first time attempting to exchange money at a bank in Santa Clara. Depends on who you are dealing with.

Janio (Santa Clara) will be going away for 5 months. 3 months in Columbia for training for missionary work followed by 2 months in the field in Asia, China, and Japan. He will be a leader of three groups of ten people.

Yanel (Santa Clara) has a mission in the city some 2 km away meeting in a home attended by 25 adults and 22 kids celebrating its first anniversary. This new work is in a new area after his earlier attempt (hard ground) in another place provided no fruit for his labour.

Prayer item: For a larger place of worship. It is illegal to rent a house for the purpose of worship. For family, church and health. Cuba has problems with outbreaks of Denga fever and Zika virus. His mother suffers manic depression. Father has high blood pressure and stomach issues. Father-in-law and mother-in-law are ok.

Shandry (Baez) everyone currently ill. It's going around. The church had celebrated its 10th. Anniversary. (2009-2019), Plans in place for a cement and rot iron security fence with gates in the front yard with the yard all covered over in cement. The bathrooms for the people of the church have working toilets but not the showers. I had Shandry copy on my memory stick a video celebrating their 10th.

Anniversary. We brought into Cuba a Dr. Ho pain therapy device with pads. Shandry's mother-in-law received a treatment for back and leg pain. This device was given to Yonail with instructions, spare batteries in the hope of putting it to good use wherever it's needed.

Raimon (Santa Clara) Belinda at our Casa Particular has a violin we received from someone who bought it 2 years ago (never playing it) and wanted to gift it to Shelita, Raimon's daughter. A graduated from Santa Clara University majoring in Music and now plays in a symphony but has no violin of her own. 3 weeks earlier Raimon contacted Belinda asking her to pray for a violin for his daughter.

Belinda was able to say to him that God answered his prayer before he asked it because we had received this violin several months earlier purposed for her. We were unable to deliver this violin at our earlier visit because Shelita was not home but in Santa Clara. Now in Santa Clara we were visited by Shelita accompanied by her father who kept it all secret. The violin was placed on a table in its open case. With all of us in front of the table, Shelita was led in. We separated. Belinda explained to her that this violin is hers. She was in awe and disbelief. What a moment. We asked her to play us something. She tuned the violin, rosined the old bow (there was a new one in the case when she needs it) and played the song, "Hallelujah" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2vF8rfCUJ0> (an example of her playing). People working nearby stopped to hear her play. It was heavenly. Such talent. We were blessed to be there.

Later we were visited by Daisy and her family so a letter from her long-time friend in Canada could be delivered. She invited us all to visit her next trip to Cuba.

Day Six Thursday November 07, 2019 "Santa Clara-Camajuani-Vega de Palma-Tahon-Placetas-Santa Clara"

Good News Church (Camajuani) visited Dr. Diana, wife of Pastor Fernando Rodriguez. He was originally to be part of our plans this trip but he received prepaid tickets to Puerto Rico and was told he was needed. He was kept very busy. Later Fernando will be travelling to California USA. This trip we were able to leave medicine and medical supplies with Dr. Diana. More to be delivered later by Yonail.

Wilmer (Vega de Palma) had warmly greeted us with everyone. The local missionaries Isnel, Yerandi and Salvador were also there. The team was treated to biscuits with Mayo. Ham, and soda pop. The only soda pop we came across available at a Particular Restaurant in a place like Vega de Palma. We got some pop in preparation of a special event later. The water well we left money for last visit was completed, ready except for a waterproof cord to supply electricity for the submersible pump. Once done all the water needs will be met. The toilet is now able to be flushed. There was a great reunion between Dorothy and Mariam. A young lady who years earlier had such a special connection to Dorothy on her first trip with us. Our team was asked to pray for baby Abraham while he was anointed asking for God's healing. On one of our earlier trips the team discovered baby (Abraham) with a very serious heart condition. Fernando was with us then. After several phone calls an appointment was made in Havana with a heart specialist. The team then took up a collection to help send the baby and his family to Havana. Several surgeries later he continues to improve but now needs more attention. Next week Abraham will return to the Doctors for more tests. (prayer needed)

Our health was inquired about, as well as people they are aware of in Canada. (Alyssa, Beverly)

Efren (Tahon) warmly welcomed us inviting us for a meal. We spoke about the history, current events, church events, and how the many youth here play such a great role in all the church programs.

Efren continues to teach at the seminary in Remedios and Santa Clara.

Prayer item: could use a used lap top for the church, family, health and church.

Jose R. (Placetas) welcomed Belinda and me. We spoke about history, friends, current events and had coffee. The rest of the team was visiting Danay.

We were told by Jose how the Cuban government told the people the month of December was Option "0". No fuel, nothing left, no gas, no production from factories, nothing, there will be nothing available. This is hard to imagine. Worst then the 90's.

Prayer item: For family, health and growth of church. Jose has back pain, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Dana, his wife has an autoimmune disease (Scleroderma)

Day Seven Friday November 08, 2019 "Santa Clara-Placetas-Santa Clara"

Today the rental car has to be returned to Placetas before 11:00a.m. When checking out the car I found the rear truck lid emblem was missing (cut electrical wires hanging out) phoned the rental company in Placetas and they said just bring the car back. No police report needed. I thought the nerve of someone maybe returning and taking anything that can be quickly and easily removed.

I refueled in Placetas. There was a drunk beggar asking for money, very thin, dirty, and poorly dressed, and eventually laying down on the pavement between the gas pump and the car.

When paying for fuel the Cubans had to show their I.D. which was recorded with their purchase. As a tourist I paid at a separate location without any of this rationing. Costs \$45.00CUC. While visiting in Placetas, Olivia and Abigail opted to stay at the church keeping busy.

Jorge (Placetas) in good health but he still has be careful. Years earlier he survived only by the grace of God a ruptured appendix. He had undergone 3 major operations in 9 days. You would not know this seeing him today. He pastors two churches. The 3rd. Baptist church in Placetas and 8 kms out of town the 4th. Baptist church which he founded. Sadys, Jose's wife has been very busy taking care of two houses one of which her mother in Remedios (cancer survivor) needs her help. Jorge needs a back bike tire. (26 X 1 3/8).

Virgillio (Placetas) are elderly. With 3 children and 6 grandchildren. Due to their health the family has a grandchild living with them helping to take care of them. Virgillio founded his mission work in Maximo outside of Placetas. Difficult for even a Cuban to find. He is recovering from an operation on his rotator cuff of his good shoulder. He woke up from the operation pain free. First time in a long time. Next week he will be getting stiches removed. Couple years ago a cement ramp had been built in front of his house to help him walk because he needs a cane. When we delivered a wheelchair for him to use he smiled. The Medical Clinic Virgillio attends is just around the corner a block away. Multi-vitamins for over 50 was left for him.

Virgillio's wife Norida suffers from diabetes, thyroid, and psoriasis. No shortage of hardships.

Prayer items: For complete recovery from the operation, and for Norida's health,

All the pastors in Placetas ask us how John and Diane are doing. They are missed very much.

Omar (Placetas) is now living in a house church" Los Pinos Nueva" but uncertain of the future. Need prayer for him and his family to be settled in a place. Omar and his wife work in thee churches in the area. He suffers from emotionally triggered seizures. She helps him by playing guitar and singing. Here at this church he is the assistant pastor.

Tomorrow, they will have been married 23 years. She was married at the age of 15.

I was able to confirm an event involving the Police that happened in Placetas. It appeared temporally on Facebook and then disappeared never to be found again. Suspect the government had it removed. It involved a person being beaten to death while in Police custody and the disappearance of the wife of the victim. They were politically active. This event was well known.

KiKi (Placetas) next year the leaders will be taking the youth around Placetas area doing a one week Missionary Camp in January 2020 evangelizing. In October 2020 they will be sending youth to the area of Santiago de Cuba trained for missionary activities. They need

everything including funding. Need experience. The leaders want to work with the families of the young people promoting and strengthening relationships in the attempt to protect and keep the youth from falling away.

Day Eight Saturday November 09, 2019 Travel Day “Santa Clara- Varadero – Toronto -Strathroy”

Yonail got us a Cuban friend (Jose) to help by driving us to Varadero. The much needed second car. All packed and ready to go we were delayed right off with a flat tire on the Russian car. Eventually we arrived in Varadero in time for check in.

Cuban Customs demonstrated once more a failure to get it right. I was told by information to go to Customs Arrival to settle accounts there. After watching the Inspectors walk around and around doing nothing for ½ hour I asked for the Supervisor. Surprise, I was sent to the wrong area. I was supposed to go to Departure side of Customs for settling (paying for the Messengers. While in the wrong area I met two gentlemen from The Alliance Church coming into Cuba with power tools. Tools to be used to help build something in Cuba which they had to pay a duty of \$175.00. They were not happy going through an unclear difficult experience.

I had my boarding pass ready earlier so going through Immigration was smooth. No issues at Security x-ray. Once through someone called my name and pointed to a desk. Finally. The lady Officer spoke only Spanish which got us nowhere. More writing. More reports. Eventually an English speaking Inspector assisted. Explaining more of the process. I had to pay the \$6.00 CUC at the exchange bringing the receipt as proof of payment. They had retrieved the security bag. Broke the seal. Opened the bag by just the end while careful not touching anything inside. I reached in only to bring out someone else’s expensive “I” phone with GPS. I said, “Hey this is not mine. What is this? Let’s Make a Deal? I’m sure this is worth more.” More time wasted waiting for someone to go back across to the other side and retrieve the right bag.

In conclusion, no more Messengers going to Cuba with us. They are an exceptional valuable tool much coveted in Cuba but they create too many red flags trying to bring them in.

The remaining Messengers will be going with a friend into Costa Rica where they will be put to good use.

Post Trip

Very thankful to our prayer partners. Without pray you can do nothing. My thanks to our faithful dedicated team members willing to do whatever it takes to accomplish the mission even when it is uncomfortable. Too many blessings and special moments to record here.

We are now planning for a 2020 March trip taking what we learned into the planning of the next mission. God willing there may be some from this trip going and possibly new ones. Our mission is to encourage, equip and evaluate. Are we always going to get it right? Probably not, but we are with God’s help always looking to learn and improve.



ABBY YONAIL BELINDA DOROTHY WALTER OLIVIA LINDA