

Evangelical Christian Humanitarian Outreach to Cuba

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A Letter from the Editor

In the traditional Thanksgiving story, Samoset and Squanto were two Native American Indians who assisted the pilgrims in getting through their first harsh winter in the New World. Samoset and Squanto taught the pilgrims how to grow crops in the new unfamiliar climate the pilgrims had settled in. The two Native American Indians also stepped in to interpret and negotiate relations for the pilgrims and with neighboring tribes. This collaboration eventually lead to late fall harvest, and for the pilgrims, their first Thanksgiving. The pilgrims were grateful for the help of the Indians, because of them the pilgrims learned how to survive in the New World. Fast forward to 2007 and ECHO-Cuba would replace Samoset and Squanto as we translate the needs of the Cuban people to their neighbors in America.

Like Samoset and Squanto, ECHO-Cuba is the bridge between two radically different forms of government. On of the ways we build this bridge is through our small business development plan, Proyecto Pescadores (Teaching to Fish), where ECHO gives the Cuban people a hand up rather than a hand out. Through the development of local micro enterprise programs we assist the Cuban churches and individuals in creating independent enterprises. Samoset and Squanto taught the Pilgrims to grow corn in the New World,

ECHO teaches the Cubans to become financially independent; both lessons are life sustaining and give hope to those who feel overpowered by their surroundings.

As you sit around your Thanksgiving table this month remember your brothers and sisters in Cuba. They are in need of your prayers and are encouraged by your service. In the spirit of Samoset and Squanto, do something daringly different this holiday season, venture to the lost and confused in Cuba and see how you can help. ECHO-Cuba is more than happy to lead you in that direction.

ECHO is grateful to be the "middle man" between America and Cuba, our prayer is to unite the needs of the Cuban people with those who can help. Cuba is only 90 miles from Key West, yet in terms of poverty, freedom, and security we are so far apart. The situation in Cuba is dismal, but God is working on that. Many times God works through people to fulfill his purpose, but he needs volunteers. He needs people like you & I to say "Here I am Lord; you called me" (1 Samuel 3:6). God is calling...are you listening?



*In His Grace,
 Jessica E. Pineda*

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About ECHO -cuba

Ministry Vision:

The vision of ECHO-Cuba is to build and empower the Cuban Evangelical Christian Church, uniting those who can help with those who need help.

Ministry Mission:

ECHO-Cuba is a mission community of Christ-centered people committed to reaching the people of Cuba with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are strengthened by our compassion for the Evangelical Christian Church. The programs directed through our mission promote Christian education, as well as help its Cuban citizens to enhance their lives through; capital projects, social & human services, humanitarian needs, agricultural entrepreneurship, and church organizational capacity.

Want to know
 How to help?

Contact ECHO-Cuba at
 (305)884-0441
 Or check our website
www.echocuba.org
 for more information.

Playing Tennis without a net



By: Vanessa Fernandez

Every humanitarian organization has its work cut out. There is funding to obtain, aid to distribute, and logistics to coordinate. Being a humanitarian organization to *Cuba* however, brings even more obstacles and challenges. Almost every day I get phone calls from people, well-intending people, who want to help Cuba, but either don't know where to begin, or are trying to go about it in a way that ultimately will not end well.

The biggest problems associated with working in Cuba boils down to the governments, both Cuban and American, who have imposed many restrictions on NGOs like ECHO-Cuba trying to assist the Cuban people. There is currently an embargo between the U.S. and Cuba. Even though ECHO-Cuba has obtained a special license to engage in humanitarian related travel and transfer of humanitarian aid to Cuba, there are still many obstacles and limitations to what we can do. For example, let's say a grocery store wants to donate baby food to families in Cuba who don't have anything. The process would begin by ECHO-Cuba submitting a request to the U.S. Government for a specific commerce license to send the baby food to Cuba.

This is a tedious and time consuming process, one which does not have a guaranteed outcome. If this license is granted, we cannot simply send all the baby food down.

There are weight restrictions, 44 lbs per person. Anything over 44lbs and the traveler must pay \$2 per pound for any overage. As you can imagine this gets expensive quick. Even if we got funding to pay for the overage costs, we would still have to deal with the *Cuban* government.

Because of the nature of Cuba's communist government, to send humanitarian aid to the country is considered an affront to their ability to provide for their own people. If, as our humanitarian aid couriers pass through the Cuban airport, suitcases full of baby food are opened by the customs agents, it could be either confiscated, or the passenger would be followed and the Cubans who received the aid may get questioned, or in more serious trouble. Of course this is a scenario assumes there's a willing donor, willing couriers and a reputable ministry in Cuba. Finding all three of these things is another struggle in getting aid to Cuba.

God is doing a lot of exciting things in Cuba, but in order to help those who need it most in this tight-lipped communist country, we need to spread knowledge of how and when to send humanitarian aid intelligently. Ultimately there is nothing too hard for my God, but let's be wise as serpents and gentle as doves.

From the Desk of Dr. Teo Babun, Jr.



On Thursday Sept. 27th Danny Thomas of Harvest International hosted a presentation titled "Politics and Religion in Cuba" which dealt with the persecuted church in Cuba. More than 30 persons attended meetings which were conducted by ECHO-Cuba's Executive Director Dr. Teo A. Babun, Jr. Some of those in attendance expressed an interest in traveling to Cuba as medicine couriers and to support the programs of ECHO-Cuba there. A similar meeting is being planned for the Tampa, Florida Area in the near future. Please contact us if you are interested in hosting a meeting in your community.

ECHO in the Island: A first-hand travel account in Cuba

When was the last time you were held for interrogation in a Communist country? For me, the experience was all too recent. Last month on a 15 day trip to Cuba, one of the main purposes of my trip was to bring news of the churches, pastors, and ministries ECHO is assisting in Cuba. Sometimes it gets hard even for a Cuban-born person like me, to remember what it means to be a Christian or help a Christian on a country like Cuba. As I was going through customs on my way back from Cuba to Miami, I was stopped and interrogated for half an hour; the Cuban authorities confiscated all the information, pictures, and even the personal items I was bringing home for ministry purposes. As I was standing there, fearing that I would be taken to jail, the Lord spoke to my heart in a small still voice and reminded me that “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for HE is with me”(Psalm 23:4)! It’s a beautiful experience when we understand and believe that no matter what happens fear has no place in our hearts because our lives are depending on Jesus Christ.

It is always surprise and an encouragement to see how much Cuban Christians can do with so little, it is a truly testimony to the world that the mighty hand of God is upon them. The poverty is devastating, as is the customer service offered in all public places. In spite of this, the Cuban Evangelical Church is growing every day more and more, about 90 percent of the church population is between the age 13-30 which is amazing! Praise God! When I attended a Sunday school service I was able to see the thirst, enthusiasm, and desire the Cuban Church had to serve God whole-heartedly, the beautiful things they do with little or no resources at all deeply ministered to my spirit. It broke my heart to see all this and realize that churches here in our country are full of people who don’t want to serve God.



Just a few hours away there are people who would give everything they have to serve God. It is ironic, but it’s also an eye opener for all of us who have been sleeping for so long, a call to wake up and start serving God one way or the other. Of all the wonderful experiences on this trip, the most precious was the lesson God taught me in the face of danger.

It is my prayer today that as you read this column and see these pictures you feel the fire of the Holy Spirit inside of you telling you that it is time to start doing something to help the Christian Church in Cuba. The time has come for the children of God to be alert and humble ourselves to our knees in prayer, for Jesus has not revealed the hour of his coming. I want Him to find me awake, and in prayer.

In Christ,
Gretel Rodriguez
Cuba Mission Projects Coordinator

Deadly Collision between a Bus and Train in Eastern Cuba



This October in Eastern Cuba a train collided with a bus killing 28 people, injuring 73, with another 15 people critically wounded.

The train was said to be traveling from Santiago while the bus headed from Bayamo, the accident took place at a railroad crossing near the small town of Veguita.

Sadly many railroad crossings in the Cuba are nearly invisible. If the railroad is marked it is often with a small sign, and is void of any gates or flashing signals like we have here in the U.S. This is not the first occurrence, in June a truck transporting passengers in the same area flipped over and left 11 dead in it tracks.

ECHO is not without loss in this disaster. Please pray for all the families who suffered loss in this tragedy. Remember that God, though invisible to the naked eye, knows and sees all. He hears the cry of the broken-hearted. Cry to Jesus.

Proofs of Joy

Here are some photos of the disadvantaged people ECHO-Cuba had the honor to help. We want to thank those who have contributed to our efforts as ECHO becomes God's hands through giving.



God's precious children receiving new clothes and shoes!



The elderly are many times forgotten, but hold a dear place in ECHO's heart.



Our Monterey Humanitarian Program substantially enhances the lives of the handicapped through services that go beyond just physical nourishment. We bring the joy of Jesus to minister to those who are suffering.

Prayer Requests

ECHO-Cuba is in need of constant prayer! If God has placed a burden on your heart to pray for ECHO, here are some of our immediate needs:

1. Recent train wreck in Cuba
2. We are seeking an additional representative in Cuba
3. General funding for ECHO-Cuba
4. For God to continue to show us favor for US government so that we may work with Cuba.
5. For the safety of each person who takes a humanitarian aid trip to Cuba.

Donations Needed

We are in need of various donations, including;

1. Laptop Computers (new/used)
 2. Vitamins
 3. Medicines i.e. Tylenol, Decongestants, Allergy meds, Asthma meds, glasses etc.
- If you can help, please do. Don't wait. Cuba needs all the help it can get.

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