

# Cuba Current

JUNE, 2011

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## Seven travel to Cuba Annual Conference

Pastor Rusty Belcher (First UMC in Winter Garden) is leading a group of seven MUIP travelers on a trip this week to the Annual Conference at Camp Canaan in Villa Clara, Cuba.

Dr. Laurence Coles, pastor at Swaim UMC and Bruce Morris from Ponte Vedra UMC are traveling from our District. All arrived safe and sound in Havana on Monday.

We hope to have a report on the caravan in our next issue of the *Cuba Current*.

Several sister churches sent packages with the group.

Thanks!



*Ponte Vedra UMC's Bruce Morris packs for Cuba*



## Cuba Bishop Pereira attends the Florida Annual Conference

Bishop Ricardo Pereira of the Methodist Church in Cuba, along with his wife, Maritza, attended the Florida Conference in Tampa earlier this month. These are exciting days for the Bishop. The church has more freedom than it has in 50 years and is

growing at a rate that would be the envy of any denomination in the United States.

Pereira was re-elected in April to his third four-year term as bishop. He was the preacher at the Service of Word and Table on Thurs-

day. Florida Bishop Timothy Whitaker, in his introduction of Pereira, called him "our brother in faith." In a lively sermon, Pereira told the appreciative audience that following Jesus is like a party to which he invites us. *Continued on page 2*

## BIBLE VERSE:

*If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done.*

*Ecclesiastes 11:4 (NLT)*

## Bishop Pereira attends the Florida Annual Conference *(Continued from page 1)*

“People ask us in Cuba, ‘What must we do to join your church? What are your prohibitions?’ We say, there are no prohibitions. The Christian life is positive. The Christian life is a party. The Christian life is a walk with Jesus,” he said. “I have been in ministry for 38 years, and every day when I get up, it is as if life is beginning all over again.”

Pereira told the audience that in the past 12 years, the Methodist Church in Cuba has grown from 9,000 members to 30,000 members. Pereira reflected on the hopeful situation of the Methodist Church in Cuba. He said for the past 12 years, it has experienced 10 percent membership growth annually and 15 to 20 percent growth in worship. It is a matter of training people for personal evangelism, he said.

“We teach our members to commit themselves to preach the gospel. When someone converts, they are learning to be filled with the Spirit and witness,” Pereira said.

It’s a lesson Pereira said he hopes the Cuban church can teach to Methodists in Florida.

“Due to our limitations, we have to do evangelism as a personal witness. The freedom you have here makes people feel more secure, but in the Cuban scenario, our people have to continue knocking on doors. That’s what we’d like to see here,” he said.

Growth has its own challenges, mainly in training enough pastoral leaders and paying them adequately given a struggling Cuban economy. The partnership with the Florida Conference is helping on both counts. The offering collected at Thursday’s worship service will be

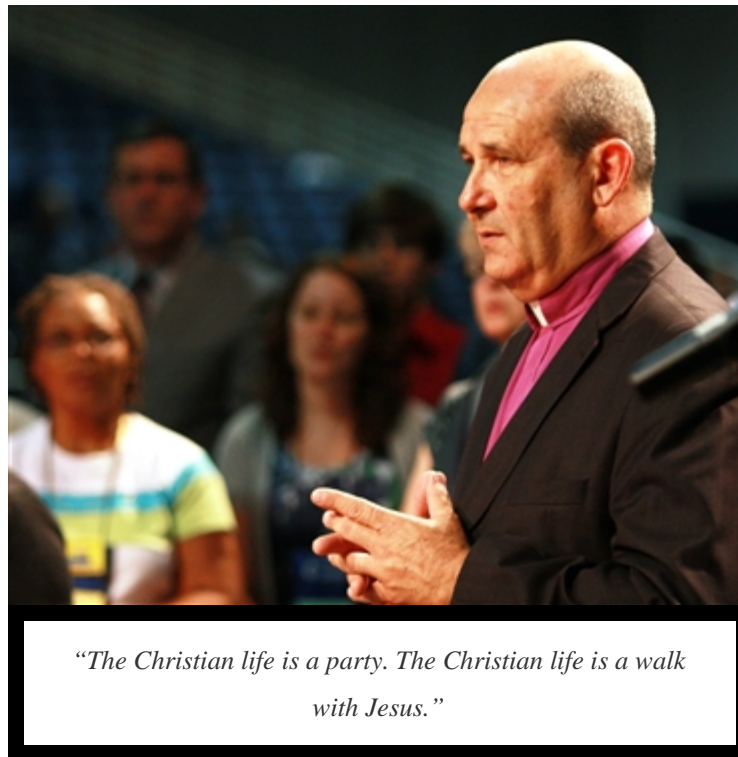
divided among the Conference’s three overseas church partners, with 30 percent of the offering going to help the Methodist Church in Cuba with its four-year-old seminary in Havana.

Pereira said half of the money received will be used to feed the seminary students, and the other half will be used to build houses for the professors. In a somewhat surprising gesture, the land for the houses was given by the Cuban

ers are becoming Christians,” he said. “The government has realized the church is not the enemy. I saw that last Saturday Raul said the government needed the prayers of the Cuban churches.”

In a further boost, the United States government announced recently that it will relax restrictions on groups traveling from America to Cuba, including religious groups. That means the partnership between Methodist churches in Florida and Cuba, formalized in 1997 but cramped during the Bush administration because of travel restrictions, may begin to flourish again. *Methodists United in Prayer* is exploring new ways of strengthening the bonds between them.

Following the Conference, Bishop Pereira attended a MUIP Task Force meeting and reception. He also preached at two services at Hyde Park UMC in Tampa, and later met for lunch with members of the MUIP Task Force.



*“The Christian life is a party. The Christian life is a walk with Jesus.”*

government.

Pereira said there has been further improvement in the Methodist Church’s relationship with the Cuban government in the past few years, which he attributes to visits to Cuba by Florida Bishop Timothy Whitaker and Conference Director of Global Mission Icel Rodriguez.

“The last few years, people had much more freedom of expression. The fear of witnessing for Christ has been fading away, because many government lead-

*Note: this article is excerpted from a post on the Florida Conference Connection:*

<http://fcnn.brickriver.com/news/detail/4362>

## We have a new sister church relationship!

We are thrilled to announce a new sister church relationship. First United Methodist Church in Jacksonville is pairing up with Bishop Pereira's church, Marianao, in Havana.

Dr. David Moenning at First UMC will be coordinating this new relationship with Pastor Jorge Ortega. Both churches are excited about the opportunity to work together in this new partnership.

We were able to deliver the news to Bishop Pereira while he was still visiting Florida. He was delighted with First UMC's decision.



*Bishop Pereira, Pastor Antonio, Gina and their kids at Marianao*

## We still have four unconnected Cuba churches

Many of our District Churches do a great job supporting their sister churches. In fact, we were blessed with four visiting Cuba pastors over the last year (more than any other District) and we sent eight people from Jacksonville to Havana. But we have some work to do. Of the 23 churches in Havana, 15 enjoy strong connections here; four churches have struggling connections, and four more are totally unconnected.

The Cuba church is growing by leaps and bounds, with new missions constantly being formed. But they need our help. Resources are scarce; medicine, and at times, food, are in short supply. The average Cuban earns only \$25 per month.

We expect that recently relaxed travel restrictions will allow more mission caravans this year. **We need your help NOW** ([george.reed@pv-umc.org](mailto:george.reed@pv-umc.org)). If your church is looking for a great mission opportunity, please get in touch about becoming a sister church. You

will see immediate, tangible results from a modest investment of time and money.

*“Four churches are totally unconnected.”*

## MUIP praying daily in unison

MUIP Task Force president Terry Denham is encouraging us to become a Prayer cell as a group to intercede daily for Cuba and the Cuba ministry. He asked us to lift prayers to God Almighty in unison daily at 7 am for favor and grace in continuing to do His will in our Cuban sister churches. Let us also pray for each other as members of MUIP for God's guidance.

Task Force member Renee Kincaid offers this prayer:

*God Almighty, Father in heaven, let this prayer made in unison with my Covenant brothers and sisters rise up to Your throne like a sweet aroma.*

*We are a cord of many strands that cannot be broken because we're the Body of Christ.*

*Grant us singleness in Your purpose. Don't allow the world's distractions sway us from Your presence and Your guidance.*

*Give us unity in spirit and actions.*

*Protect us against the devil's attacks wanting to defeat Your purpose in Cuba. Your strength, power and righteousness in this spiritual battle is our vanguard.*

*Bring laborers to our ministry. Turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh- Touch us with love and compassion for the World's unsaved.*

*Thank you for listening ears and obedient hearts.*

*In Jesus Christ I pray*



*Bishop Pereira admiring the desserts at the MUIP reception*



*Bishop and Maritza at the MUIP booth at Annual Conference*



*Bishop preaching Sunday morning at Hyde Park*

## Do you want to visit your sister church in Cuba?

As reported in our article on Bishop Pereira's visit, he expects travel restrictions to Cuba to be relaxed for our caravans. If you are interested in visiting your sister church, let us know! You will need a valid passport (which is not set to expire soon). We are keeping a list of travel prospects and will reach out to them when trips are confirmed.

Email your contact information to:  
[george.reed@pv-umc.org](mailto:george.reed@pv-umc.org)



*La Sierra's new tractor, a gift from their sister church*

## UMVIM Team Leader Training

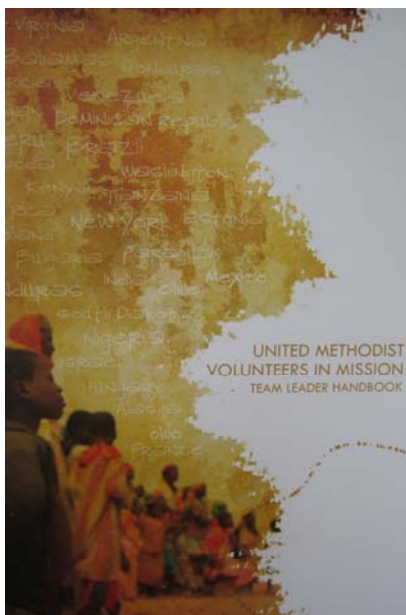
MUIP members are being encouraged to take the UMVIM Team Leader course to be able to lead groups in caravans to Cuba. Loree and George Reed took the training in Coral Gables last month and report that the course was excellent. The next opportunity is September 10 at New Covenant UMC at The Villages.

Click here for details: <http://www.flumc2.org/pages/detail/970>

## Cuba Task Force meets

The Task Force met in April in Leesburg. Also in attendance were the District Superintendent from the Sierra Maestra District in Cuba, Leonardo Diaz and his wife Mercedes.

The group discussed caravan travel to Cuba scheduled for September and/or October (in addition to the June caravan). It appears that we will be able to legally wire money to our sister churches in Cuba via Western Union. More details as they become available. There was much discussion and planning for Bishop Pereira's trip to the Florida Annual Conference.



**Discussions, and in some cases firm plans are underway to arrange sister church pastor visits:**

Jesús Barrios to Swaim UMC

Alexeis Garcés to St. Paul UMC

Guillermo Piloto to Southside UMC

## Methodists United in Prayer

149 South Roscoe Blvd., Ponte Vedra, FL 32082

<http://www.Facebook.com> Search Groups:  
"Methodists United in Prayer North East District"

<http://www.methodistsunitedinprayer.org/>

<http://www.imecu.org/>

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*Cuba Current* is published for Methodists in the North East Florida District involved with or interested in "**Methodists United in Prayer.**" "Methodists United in Prayer" facilitates prayer, love, exchange, and mutual support between the Cuba Conference and the Florida Conference. We hope to increase the relationship between sister churches in the two conferences and focus on these priorities:

- **To pray** for one another and develop a common study of Scriptures.
- **To engage** in the interchange of peoples at Cuba and Florida Conferences.
- **To respond** to the priorities of the Methodist Church in Cuba.
- **To build** relationships between the Florida Conference and the Methodist Church in Cuba for mutual support and encouragement.
- **To enable** the training of pastors and lay people for the equipping of Cuban disciples.
- **To mutually share** the history, current events, culture, and spirituality of both Conferences.

## Sister Churches



Havana District	NE Florida District
Artemisa	Community (Lake Como)
Bauta	<b>Unconnected</b>
Capdevilla	Glynlea Grace Harmony Chapel Spring Glen
Central	Avondale
La Europa	Keystone
Guanabacoa	Mandarin
El Guatao	Highlands Garden City New Life Community Wesley Fellowship
Jaimanitas	<b>Unconnected</b>
Loma de Cañita	1st UMC Starke
Marianao	First UMC Jacksonville
El Mariel	St. Paul
Mayorkín	Middleburg
Martin Pérez	River of Life
Playas de Santa Fe	Orange Park
Punta Brava	Isle of Faith
Regla	<b>Unconnected</b>
San Antonio de los Baños	<b>Unconnected</b>
San Antonio de Rio Blanco	Trinity (Palatka)
Santa Cruz del Norte	Swaim Memorial
Santiago de las Vegas	Southside
La Sierra	Ponte Vedra
Tumbadero/Callazo	Macclenny
Vedado / University	Lakewood