

# THE PRESBYTERY OF LONG ISLAND CUBA NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2012

## Cuba Work Group

Visit of IPRC Moderator, Reverend Daniel Izquierdo  
Visits Setauket/Southampton Churches - Nov. 21-28, 2011

The Moderator of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba, The Rev. Daniel Izquierdo, pastor of Iglesia Presbiteriana de San Antonio de los Banos, spent most of November in the U.S. After preaching and participating in church activities in Chicago Presbytery, he represented Havana Presbytery at the Cuba Partners to Long Island to spend Thanksgiving week with his sister church in Setauket and renew his friendship with Cuba mission partners from the Southampton and East Hampton Churches. At Setauket he was able to participate in Bible study, meet with mission partners there several times, and worship with the Setauket community at its ecumenical Thanksgiving service.



Rev. Daniel Izquierdo with Elder  
Tom White, Southampton  
Presbvtarian Church



Rev. Daniel Izquierdo was the guest of  
honor at the congregational dinner.

He preached at Sunday services on the first Sunday of Advent. During the week he was also able to see his cousins in New Jersey. With little rest, he left on the 28<sup>th</sup> to fulfill his Moderator's responsibilities in Havana with a visiting delegation from the National Council of Churches.

**Setauket Presbyterian Church Trip to San Antonio  
Dec. 29 - Jan. 6, 2012**

**From: Jenny Kate Schlagel**



**Five people traveled to their sister church in San Antonio de los Banos, Cuba, in December: leaders Tom and Bonnie Schlagel, with youth Jenny Kate Schlagel and Jeremy and Julia Heim. Besides medicines, letters, and a laptop, they carried other supplies as varied as plates for a printing operation and material for a wedding dress.**

**“This past trip to Cuba over New Years 2012 was my 3<sup>rd</sup> trip to Cuba. For the first time, I was able to bring my parents with me. I couldn’t wait to share with them all of my experiences from my first two trips. Traveling to Cuba is unlike any other experience and it is impossible to describe. A group from my church had visited at New Years a few years ago, and I was excited to learn about the holiday traditions. I feel like I am part of a close knit family in the church in San Antonio de los Banos, and I always love returning to spend time with them. Over the past two years I have also become close with their youth group, and every time I leave I miss them dearly. I am already thinking about my next trip to Cuba, and I am weighing the possibility of studying abroad**

**at the University of Havana, to spend more time in the country and with the people I have come to love.”**

**From Bonnie Schlagel: “My daughter’s first two trips to San Antonio de los Banos in Cuba seemed to affect her in such a positive way that my husband and I were happy when an opportunity came up for us to visit. We certainly didn’t know what to expect. In one short week, the congregation of San Antonio became my family. We visited church members in their homes and were treated with love. We played games with the youth and learned their version of dominoes. We attended and participated in the New Year’s Eve service, Sunday service, prayer service, and were guests at a church fiesta. The congregation’s faith and devotion to their church was inspiring and humbling. The pastor, Daniel Izquierdo, was tireless in his ministry. He is forward thinking, always visible, and ready to help with anything needing help. I would really like to return to Cuba to continue building SPC’s relationship with San Antonio and to see the friends I have made.”**

**From Jeremy Heim: “Over the last 6 years I have visited our sister church in San Antonio de los Banos, Cuba, 4 times, this trip being the 4<sup>th</sup>. Cuba has become a huge part of my life, and it is safe to say that it has been a life changing experience for me. I have a connection with their church, and the people who are a part of it, unlike anything I can express in**

words. It feels like a second home to me, and each time I go back I feel just as welcomed as the first time. Going back again I was able to strengthen not only my relationship between our churches. I believe that this relationship between the churches is of the utmost importance to grow spiritually. I am already looking forward to one day going back and seeing the friends I have made again.”

From Tom Schlagel:“ Though my daughter had been there twice before, I wasn’t quite prepared for what San Antonio de los Banos in Cuba would be like. This was my first visit to a Latin American country, not to mention a Communist republic, and I had no context for either of these. We were greeted at Jose Marti International Airport outside of Havana by Daniel Izquierdo, the pastor of the Presbyterian Church in San Antonio. The drive from Havana revealed just how different this would be - American cars from the ‘50’s nursed along traveling alongside Soviet-era cars, motorcycles with side-cars, bicycles, horse drawn carts and pedestrians, all sharing the broken down and poorly marked roads. It was obvious that daily living was a constant struggle.

However, my reservations quickly went away once we arrived at the church and were overwhelmed by the greetings and love of the congregation. Throughout our stay, we were always close by the pastor, his family, the ladies who cooked our wonderful meals, the boys in the youth group, or the members of the church who stopped by to say hello and ask us to bring greetings back to the Setauket Presbyterian Church. The members have a strong faith in the church, and help to take care of each other. It is hard to remember when I have been among a more welcoming group of people. I’m looking forward to my next trip.”



**“A Dream to Consider”**

**“La Iglesia San Antonio de los Banos, San Antonio, Cuba, partner church with Setauket Presbyterian Church, LI Presbytery. Setauket members observing the new printing press – gifts from mission partners on Long Island and Chicago. December, 2012**

A message arrived for the Setauket congregation on June 19th from our mission partners in San Antonio, under the heading, "A Dream to Consider ": Things happen in a way that only God would provide. Many churches would like to have their materials and booklets printed, but that is very difficult to accomplish in our situation, without a printer. We are understanding that this is God's will for a new ministry in our church. If this may come to an end, we expect the project may give us some profits as we do work for other customers in the religious sphere. We will also need funds as well as prayers to make it come true." They waited to weigh even one negative response; it never came. Even in the summer, with

congregations on vacation, the response of seed money from their mission partners in the U.S.(Long Island and Chicago) was immediate and generous. The first trial brochure was successfully printed in December. Dream to reality in Cuba in 6 months, in a way that only God would provide. Its name is The Presbyterian Printing Mission.

### **Julia Heim's Reflections on Setauket Cuba Trip 2012**

“When I first arrived at the Presbyterian Church in San Antonio de los Baños, I was overwhelmed by the community’s hospitality. Every single person we met was eager to get to know us and make us feel welcome. By the end of our first day, we had been greeted with a huge traditional Cuban meal, a personal welcome service in the sanctuary, and the start of friendships that would develop throughout the week. I have honestly never felt so at home in a foreign country. Something about it just has that effect on you, you feel connected to the church after only a few days. There’s just this community feel unlike anything I’ve ever been a part of. The church is such an important part of their lives; so all the members treat each other like family. On any typical day, people would stop by the church just to say hi and the kids would walk over after school to play dominos and hang out. On New Years Eve, we stood in a circle in the sanctuary, praying as the clock struck midnight. And as I stood there, holding hands with people I had just met, I was hit with this inexplicable feeling of comfort. That I could stand there with people who live a life so different from mine, people who don’t even speak the same language as me, and bond over our common faith. There was a connection here. I think I realized it everyday as the sunlight shined onto the patio and reflected off rooftops. As I explored the beautiful country and learned about the culture. I realized that even in a completely different country, there are people just like me, who find comfort in the Presbyterian faith and hold on to that. I learned that this connected us to them, and that’s exactly how a sister church should be. My week there strengthened my belief in the church, and its importance in a community. Going in, I had no idea how much the trip would mean to me, or how much I’d want to return. I met some of the most genuinely good-hearted people in San Antonio and I’m honestly proud to call them a sister church. I strongly suggest to anyone who has the opportunity to visit that they take advantage of it. (Even if you don’t speak Spanish, but especially if you do.) The entire experience was not only incredibly interesting, but also just truly emotionally inspiring.”

### **Thoughts and impressions from the Cuba PartnerNetwork Gathering** **Chicago, November 16-19, 2011** **Rob Stuart**

There were fifty-four of us at the Gathering from around the country, also one representative from each of the three Cuban presbyteries: Daniel Izquierdo Hernandez, Havana; Joel Ortega Dopico (known as Dopico), Matanzas; and Xiomara Arenas Lorenzo, El Centro.

One major benefit for me was to get a sense of the Partnerships: to see ours on Long Island in context of the whole picture with other U.S. presbyteries and churches, and the three Cuban presbyteries. Having our Long Island partnerships entirely within Havana

Presbytery, I have had little or no sense of what is true in the other two Cuban presbyteries. This Gathering helped correct that limited knowledge.

This was my first time at a Gathering. It was therefore also my first time to meet Dean Lewis and to see the strength of his leadership with the partnerships over so many years. Our meetings were well organized and run, with worship, prayers, Bible study, and music integrated into all of it. There was also time to socialize, which is an important part of any gathering.

I went with Barbara D'Andrea, the Chair of our Cuba Work Group, Long Island Presbytery. She was asked at the last minute to preside at one of the workshops centering around the question, What Now, after a partnership has been established? How do we nurture it and keep it going? Barbara put the tag on the workshop, "Moving On." She asked me to co-chair, and we put together some thoughts based on our experience with the Cuba Work Group and the 22 year history of our particular partnerships in Cuba.

Our workshop met twice, once each, afternoon and morning, with good attendance and lively conversation. I would say at least a third of the Gathering delegates chose our workshop. Barbara and I really got things going with but a few comments from our experience, after everyone had introduced themselves. Then everyone jumped in with thoughts or questions. One thing is notable; whereas we oversee our seven partnerships through our presbytery, many other partnerships involve only one congregation within a presbytery, a challenge all the greater to keep those partnerships going, or thriving. Barbara and I emphasized the importance of keeping up correspondence with partnership churches and individuals in Cuba . A one-shot trip every year is not enough. Pre-Gathering information suggested, further, that we who go to Cuba need to know Cuban history, and have a grasp of the present historical and political/social context for the churches we visit, and the presbyteries and Synod. It's a constant learning experience, augmented by the fact that realities in Cuba are themselves constantly changing - significantly in recent years.

Each of the three Cuban representatives spoke in basic terms about their presbyteries - how many churches, how many ministers, how many congregations are established, and the number of mission churches. I liked the brevity of the report by Xiomara, because her statistics alone said so much: 13 churches, 5 pastors and 3 seminarians, and 5 cars.

I was interested to learn that Matanzas Seminary has 26 residential students but 500 students in varied programs. Eight students are pastoral candidates; two will graduate in 2012, two in 2012, two in 2014. The Seminary is also developing ties with the Reformed University, Barranquilla, Colombia, for advanced degree study.

In the Question and Answer time, the three Cubans were asked, Why have you chosen to remain in Cuba? (Not said, but inferred--when some of your colleagues have left.) Among the responses, I was struck by what Dopicco said, who is 40. "This is the country God gave me, how could I leave?" Cuba needs the church, he said, "People need us there." Speaking of his own work in Varadero, he said that for the first time people are coming to the church looking for work. That was never true before.

Daniel said of the younger generation of Cubans that they have no dream, no sense of future; therefore, no commitment to church and society. An older generation had a sense of place in society, with rewards and a sense of call. At age 50, Daniel himself is between one generation and another and gives considerable leadership to the Cuban church and the Seminary. I thought his comments also reflect the uncertainty facing Cuba now with

leadership shifting slightly to Raul Castro, but no one knowing just what is coming. (I would also add from personal experience, that where young adults have found their place even in a shifting society, they do have a sense of purpose, even calling.) Daniel was speaking generally of a younger generation as he sees them.

He also spoke of three areas of tension in the Cuban churches, and at times among their pastors.

1. Disparity among congregations receiving U.S. dollars from the partnerships.
2. Difference in opinion about the relationship of the churches within a communist government.
3. Opinions about homosexuality.

The Bible study was based on 1 Corinthians 12, led by Daniel and Jo Ella Holman, who is the Caribbean liaison from General Assembly for partnerships in the region. “We are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” Soma, or body, is used 56 times in Paul's letter. We have varieties of gifts, but as members of the body, no one is more important than another. Of the 29 times “member” is used in the New Testament, 13 are in 1 Corinthians. There is diversity in gifts with equal eminence for every person, all from the one Spirit. In contrast to Ephesians and Colossians, Christ is not identified as the head of the body in 1 Corinthians.

To those thoughts expressed by Daniel, Jo Ella spoke of Corinth to remind us of the political and social context of “body,” or “the body politic,” in Greek and Roman polity. There were divisions there which Paul did not want to infect and undermine the church; rather, to have the church be a body of reconciliation and unity within itself. She noted the phrase, “to one another” in all of Paul's letters. We have this ministry one to another with a sense of community and communion, of which one table is the symbol. Paul was angry at the violation of that unity and communion.

As with any meeting of this kind, finances and matters of funding were discussed. In one action, the Gathering designated its own offering in worship to the IPRC Tramites Office which handles all the visas for the visiting U.S. partners and is presently in need of funds.

The matter of frozen pensions for the several Cuban pastors ordained before 1967, when the Presbytery of Cuba was still part of the Synod of New Jersey, was also discussed. Correspondence with the Board of Pensions reveals that the matter is, as it has been, in stalemate. The Board does release pension funds on their behalf to Cuban pastors with relatives living in the U.S., but not to a third party.

Another economic, and social, project presented to the Gathering is the Living Waters for the World, which provides a filtration system for water and has been installed already, at Matanzas Seminary. The project trains men and women to install these systems. Barbara and I attended one of the meetings about this project and were impressed, thinking some from within our Cuba Work Group, or extended friends, might become involved.

In other business, Barbara was elected to the Network Steering Committee. Thanks was also expressed for the many years of service Lucy Fetterolf has given to the Network. I enjoyed the Gathering very much, gaining larger insight and perspective into the whole of the Cuba Partnerships through conversations with men and women attending from the other partnerships. It was a rich experience. Respectfully, Rob Stuart

**New Partnership - Bridgehampton Presbyterian Church and Guanabacoa  
Presbyterian Church, Guanabacoa, Cuba**



Guanabacoa Presbyterian  
Church in Cuba



Bridgehampton Presbyterian  
Church on Long Island



**Guanabacoa under construction**



**November – 2011**



**This photo was just taken –  
January 2012 and sent by email.  
It shows a mostly completed  
section of the Guanabacoa  
Presbyterian Church, in  
Guanabacoa, Cuba.**