



Box 160

La Grange, WY 82221

Marching on in March

Dearest Ones in Christ Jesus,

This is just a quick update to inform you of family as well as faith matters, specifically my trip to Cuba.

By far, this has been the toughest departure for Cuba I have yet made. Sylvia had not been feeling well since the Thursday before my trip on Monday morning. On Friday she dragged herself to school and Saturday her fever was going unusually high. She battled high temperatures and body aches for the rest of the day. These symptoms were atypical to her syndrome, so we did not think much of it. On Sunday morning, however, while I was already at church, she was preparing to join me, she had a mild dizzy spell and my wife rushed her to the hospital. This was not the condition I wanted to leave her and my wife in before going to Cuba. As I had no definite direction from the Lord to cancel the trip, I pursued to keep the course and so my wife drove me to the airport and I left Sylvia in God's hands and in care of my dear wife. Other than Sylvia, she was the one most affected as she spent the following four days and nights there until Sylvia was discharged on Thursday afternoon.

The Cuba Call

My McAllen-Houston flight was quite interesting, with the pilot announcing, right before descending that we were experiencing mechanical problems with the landing gear, and to prepare for an "unusual touchdown". When we did land at the high speed planes typically do, I noticed fire engines and ambulances on the side chasing after our plane. I told myself, ***"Ah, so much excitement and I'm not even in Cuba yet. I can tell this trip will be great."*** When we came to a complete stop, we had to be towed in. From there I rushed out of the plane to get to my connecting flight for Miami, getting in the plane just in time, as most passengers had already boarded. From there, my dear friend Bill Marietta and I traveled together, leaving for Holguin, Cuba early on the following day.

My teaching material had to do with the book of Nehemiah and the theme was *"Restored to be Used"*. Pastors came from the entire island, Pinar del Río (western-most part of the island) and from Holguin and Santiago (eastern-most part). So far, this was the most exciting and personally fulfilling pastors conference I've been involved in. On the second day, the president and secretary of this group of pastors were already making plans for 2017. Like in most places (and even more so in Cuba) one of the interesting aspects of ministry is the fact that the speaker has to earn the right to be



heard. The Cuban pastors want to know if their speaker, especially the foreigners, can identify with personal suffering. That is the reason I usually start with my humble beginnings in a small village in Mexico and the first years of my life losing several family members to our genetic disorder. Having established that, I know I will have a very attentive audience, and that I did, from beginning to end.



Aramis (playing guitar) and his elderly mother have a special worship time with some of their leaders who minister to the disabled. This ministry was started 16 years ago and today, they number about 500 members strong in about 4 different provinces (states). There's no stopping this group. Aramis travels in a special tricycle, which he pedals with his hands. His grandfather turned 103 years old a day after this photo was taken.

In Cuba, most churches are really house churches, especially those that are preceded by the Revolution. In such cases, churches can only start as such, until the government allows them the privilege of existing. The exciting thing to appreciate here is the fact that the government has not been able to stomp out Christians. It must be noted that quite the contrary has taken place.

Here, I pose with Pastor Felipe, who has had to stop building for lack of funds. I was so happy to be entrusted with a financial gift to help him (and other pastors, as well) continue building for a few more days. His aged and ill father was called to be with the Lord a few hours after this photo was taken.



Worship in Cuba, as in most Hispanic cultures, is very euphoric and lively, using hands, arms and feet to praise the Lord with. Most pastors and wives must at least know how to play the guitar, one of the most basic instruments in the Spanish-speaking world.

This was the final photo at the conference, with grateful pastors holding out their brand new Bibles and their “jabita”, a plastic bag containing a few personal items that we were able to bless them with. Some of these pastors had travelled 14 long hours in very poor means of public transportation.



In Havana, Bill and I spent a few days with Pastor Luis Alberto, his wife Idania and the church with whom we’ve been connected for the past 7 years. Personal advice was given on certain marriage and ministry related issues they are currently facing. We also had a great time in getting to know other Havana ministries, as well.

I could not finish this brief report without expressing our profound gratitude to those of you who have been praying for me on this trip. To the one church entrusting us with financial help – thank you. Seven churches were directly benefited from this special building offering. All pastors meals at the conference, my travel expenses and personal gifts for pastors were covered by several special donors who have come to appreciate what the Lord is doing in Cuba. Thank you so very much for the great trust and confidence you have blessed me with. May I always be found faithful in this special ministry of encouragement and training to pastors who are doing so much in God’s Kingdom in Cuba with so little material resources.

Eternally grateful,

Franc & Mary Ortega

Ps. 48:14