



The Christians in Cuba

Background & Prayer Needs



Breaking down Walls

Using the Gospel of God to save lives in the name of Jesus!

Our Mission: Our mission is to assist the suffering church in Cuba, working in the spirit of Christians teaching to promote the Gospel.

Our Vision: As Christians, as Christ's representatives here on earth, it is our responsibility and privilege to feed the poor, clothe the naked, visit those less fortunate and offer assistance to the sick and widows.

Our Prayer: The fundamental motivating force in all activities of EchoCuba is the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it pertains to the alleviation of human suffering, the development of people and the fostering of religious freedoms.

Our work would not be possible without the prayers and generosity of donors. Your compassion helps us bring lifesaving and community-building aid to Cuba's most poor, vulnerable and suffering people.



Cuba

Republic of Cuba a Brief Background

Geography

Land Area: 110,000 sq km (mainland 105,000 sq km; Isle of Youth 2,000 sq km; keys 3,000 sq km) the largest island in the Caribbean.

Climate: Sub-tropical; average temperature 72F average relative humidity 81%

Measurements: Metric system

Currency: There are two domestic currencies: the Cuban peso (CUP) in which prices and wages are denominated within the domestic economy; and the convertible peso (CUC) used in hard currency retail outlets. In general the value differential is 23 CUP to 1 CUC. The Cuban government has established the difference to be 1 CUC to \$1.50 dollars.

Demographics

Hispanic 98%; Mulatto 51%; White Hispanic 36%; Black 11%.

Racial lines are extremely blurred; most likely the black population is higher than given.

	<u>Population</u>	<u>Ann Gr</u>	<u>Density</u>
2010	11,204,351	0.02%	101/sq km
2020	11,193,470	-0.04%	101/sq km
2030	11,019,440	-0.23%	99/sq km

- Literacy 99.8%.
- Official language Spanish
- ❖ Population 11.2 million
- ❖ 8 million born after 1959
- ❖ 2.2 Million born after 1992
- ❖ 62% Afro-Cuban

Aging Population

As would be expected from a population that has reached relatively low levels of births and deaths, Cuba exhibits an age structure with relatively few minors, unlike the situation in many countries in Latin America. More than one-tenth (over one million Cubans) of the total population is above 65 years old.

Economy

Sugar production, along with the rest of the economy, collapsed with the Soviet meltdown as aid and subsidies dried up. The US trade embargo, devastating hurricanes, repressive centralized socialist planning, corruption and poor productivity hamper progress. Lack of many essentials (including food) still affects the country, yet there is a high standard in literacy, education and health. Tourism is becoming more and more economically important.

- Public debt 35% of GDP; Income/person \$2,300 (5% of USA).

Politics

Cuba with a population of approximately 11.2 million is a totalitarian state led by the Castro brothers. Independent from Spain in 1898; Castro's revolution brought Communism to power in 1959 replacing a corrupt and venal regime. After decades of exporting revolution to Latin America and Africa, Cuba remains among the last protagonists of Communism. An ailing Fidel Castro passed along power to his brother, Raul Castro (now President), in 2008. Subsequent economic reform has not been accompanied by civil or political change; political opposition remains illegal despite increasing dissident activity, prompting emigration and pervasive hopelessness.

- Main political organization: The Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) is the only legal political party.

Religion

On the eve of the revolution, neither the Catholic Church nor the Protestant churches were a dominant force in Cuban Society. Nonetheless, in modern day trajectory, the Cuban government holds strict control of all church activities and repression of religious freedom. By law, discrimination against Christians is illegal, yet discrimination and harassment continues as growing churches are often perceived as a threat to regime stability. According to anthropologist Maria Elena Faguaga, people who follow Afro-Cuban religions are a majority in this Caribbean island nation. According to official Catholic records, about 60 percent of the Cuban population has been baptized in the Catholic Church. But experts say this does not mean a majority of Cubans are practicing Catholics. Within the population an estimated 5% belongs or attends protestant churches, including Baptist, Pentecostals, Jehovah Witnesses, Seventh day Adventists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Lutherans, and the Quakers, among others. Other groups include Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Bahia's and member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).





The Case of the Cuban Church

While most Cubans are Catholic, more and more people are Protestants who squeeze into tiny home churches to worship. The Cuban government made it so hard for pastors to get permits to build churches that they started to preach at home. Outlawed for decades, once house churches became legal, the trend exploded. But the Word of God remains strong in the hearts of the church body. More importantly, the common Christian, whether Pentecostal, Baptist, Methodist, or Episcopalian, has not lost his enthusiasm for Christianity. Many church leaders are lost, fleeing political oppression, but new leaders have risen to

The permissions process for everything from prison visits to building permits works well enough for those that are members of the government-controlled Cuban Council of Churches, an arm of the Communist Party. Nonetheless, the Cuban constitution protects religious freedom, however, in law and practice, the government places restrictions on freedom of religion. Nonetheless, all denominations have experienced a large increase in membership, such that neither the Cuban Communist Party's office of attention to religious affairs nor the Cuban Council of Churches is able to provide even a rough figure of the actual activities of protestant movements.

While the majority of church leaders would likely cite the difficulty to expand their church buildings as a chief concern, other clergy cite frequent detentions, sporadic arrests and harassment. Between 2009 and 2010, one church had more than 100 of its members detained, usually for short spells, according to the U.S. commission's report. Those pastors mostly lost jobs and homes and saw religious materials confiscated. Christian Solidarity Worldwide, a religious rights organization, said it is monitoring cases of continuous harassment of about three dozen pastors. A few were imprisoned and banned from preaching. Against all odds, the body of Christ in Cuba is growing and establishing Godly warriors ready to battle the spiritual wars of communism and persecution. They find refuge in the Word of God and seek the help of all Christians to actively pray and establish relationship with the suffering church. The biggest spiritual battle among Christians in Cuba is facing the popularity of African religions. As much as 80% of the population consults with practitioners of religions with roots in West Africa and the Congo River Basin, known as Santeria.

Paul says in Galatians 2:20 that “the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God”

Prayer Needs

Leadership for the churches remains an urgent need. Many fled or were expelled following the revolution. Praise God for those who stood firm and were trained in the school of suffering; many are weary from long years of service and need fresh vision. Cuba has a dozen evangelical and two Catholic Bible schools or seminaries. Student numbers are limited by government interference and a lack of both material and human resources. **Hand-couriered laptops crammed with Bible resources** are creative ways of addressing this challenge. Pray for a multiplication of visionary leadership for the churches that enables them to cope with the growth and change.

The less reached: *Spiritism* has been actively supported by the government as "cultural". Afro-Caribbean religions under a thin veneer of Catholicism have a greater following than the 18% attributed to spiritism. There may be more than three million devotees of *Santeria* and other cults which resemble Haitian voodoo; "*Santeria* tourism" grows as increasing numbers come on pilgrimage to Cuba. Pray that Christians may exercise love, understanding and spiritual power to see many delivered from this satanic bondage.

Foreign missions are largely restricted to tactful support and occasional visits from outside the country. A few workers remain in low-profile teaching ministry; others visit to train church leaders in all aspects of ministry. The government blacklisted dozens of foreign organizations, one way of denying precious resources to the national Church. Pray that wise input from abroad will serve Cuba in an effective way.

Christian help ministries for prayer:

- a) **Bible distribution** — dire need remains urgent as church growth outstrips supply. Over one million copies of the scriptures have been printed by the Cuban Bible Society press, and many thousands are imported every year. The version within the island of Cuba is called “Reina Valera”, a version more difficult to interpret than NIV. A new easy-to-read Spanish Bible will help make the gospel more accessible to many, but it is still difficult for many Christians to get a Bible, no matter the version.
- b) **Christian literature** has been extremely hard to acquire for years and is an intense need. As the church and its leaders grow, more materials are needed. More can now be imported, but permission for local printing is difficult to obtain. Pray that the wide range of Spanish-language resources would make its way into Cuba.
- c) **Christian radio** remains an untapped potential. Although 878 hours/week are broadcast, almost all of it is over shortwave, which is very hard to receive as shortwave radios are illegal in Cuba. Some FM Christian radio can be picked up from other Caribbean islands. Local Christian broadcasting is still not permitted.
- d) **Music** is a core aspect of Cuban culture and identity. Rising up and training Christian musicians and worship leaders is hugely strategic. Some prominent musicians have become believers, increasing Cuba's exposure to the good news.