

DO NO HARM



Mission Work in Cuba: What You Need to Know

On June 16, 2017, President Donald J. Trump unveiled a new U.S. policy toward Cuba. But since President Obama's December 2014 announcement that the U.S. was charting a new course with Cuba, a large number of North American churches and ministries have found their way to Cuba to expand their foreign missions activities. This is good, but this also has opened the door to doing harm to the evolving and vulnerable church in Cuba.

Already American churches are showing up in Havana with the promise of millions of dollars to enter into "relationship" with them. Many church leaders have expressed the fragmentation they are experiencing as some of their weaker leadership has bent to aggressive American personalities with their own theological and methodological agendas.

EchoCuba wants to help. In over twenty-three years of experience working with Cuban churches and seminaries, EchoCuba has learned that Cuba is a very challenging field for missionary activities. While Cuban Evangelicals will welcome you warmly, and conditions for missionary work have been moving in a positive direction, do not expect everything to have changed overnight. Important legal parameters must be honored, and complex social and interpersonal issues need to be respected. Deepening your understanding of these issues, as well as listening carefully and speaking thoughtfully and respectfully, will help you avoid regrettable missteps and allow God's work to unfold in His infinite grace.

For example, we know from experience that Cuban Evangelical leaders have a persistent and consistent desire to preserve the best of who they are and not bend to the philosophical and cultural failures. They understand that the barbarians of materialism, consumerism and inequity are standing at the gate—literally at Miami International Airport, ready to board the plane, checkbook in hand to buy their soul.

What will unfold as Cuba encounters and clashes with the realities of the 21st century? Cuban church leaders are well aware of what's coming and they have immediate and grave concerns. They are not as worried about when Cuba will open, but about what will happen to the Church and society when it does.

In summary, the reality of Cuba entails the availability of believers who feel the missionary call in order to invade the society with the full knowledge of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself emphasizes the reality that the preaching of the Gospel's message will precede all achievements. He said "And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the entire world, for witness to all nations; and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14), but we need to be very careful in our mission's response at this critical moment in Cuban church history. It must be informed. In other words, we need to enter God's narrative for what He is doing in His Church in Cuba and not project and prescribe our plans and agendas. We need to prayerfully and carefully discern from the Holy Spirit and listen to the Cuban Church and its leadership about how, if at all, we can or should be involved.

Did You Know?

- There is an "Office of Religious Affairs" (ORA) of the Communist Party of Cuba that oversees all religious activities in the country.
- U.S. churches and ministries need a special visa from the Cuban government in order to conduct work with their Cuban partners.
- Foreign clergy and religious leaders need to obtain special permits and visas in order to organize conferences, concerts, and/or Evangelical events.
- Special arrangements must be made to ship and distribute humanitarian aid; aid cannot be shipped to the country without a specific license.
- The broadcasting of radio and television programs of a religious nature is prohibited unless a special exception is obtained.
- It is not legal for Cuban Christians to conduct evangelistic services outdoors and door to door without first obtaining a special exemption.
- Cuban pastors cannot freely minister in prisons and orphanages.
- Even if pastors obtain adequate funding, they may not be allowed to build a new church building.
- There are no religious schools. Only Sunday schools or theological seminaries are allowed.

15 DO's and DON'Ts

	YES	NO
The US and Cuba have normalized relations		✓
U.S. churches and ministries can conduct work with their Cuban partners without needing any special visa from the Cuban Government		✓
Cuban Christians can legally conduct evangelistic services outdoor and door to door without special permits		✓
The Cuban Government has an Office of Religious Affairs that oversees all religious activities	✓	
Foreign clergy and religious leaders can organize conferences, concerts and/or evangelical events without special permits and visas		✓
Humanitarian aid can be shipped to the country for distribution by a church or a Convention (denomination) as needed		✓
Bibles can be shipped in container quantities to any denomination for distribution to their churches without special permissions		✓
The church is vulnerable to influence of cults such as the Afro-Cuban religion (Santeria) that distort the truth of the bible	✓	
The vast majority of the churches' pastors & leaders lack formal theological formation or experience	✓	
Divisions run deep between Protestant churches accepted by the government and the independent churches that do not	✓	
Pastors can arrange to build a new church if only they had the funds		✓
Until recently the Cuban constitution declared the country as an "atheist state"	✓	
Between 1963-1968 thousands of persons with religious beliefs were sent to concentration camps called the "UMAP" where many died	✓	
The Cuban church was literally shut-down for over 20 years by the Cuban government (from 1960 to 1982) until they were allowed to function again	✓	
Years of persecution and anti-religion policies is manifested in religious leaders that are suspicious and cynical of other leaders. It will take time for them to build trust and envision a brighter future	✓	