

The Beginning of a Christian Revolution

Seminary sends first missionaries to Cuba since 1960s

[Campus News](#) | Posted on September 26, 2017



Joseph (left) and Christian are the first missionaries to Cuba since it became closed to religious work in the mid-20th century.

By: Samantha Angeles

For the first time in 50 years, the Seventh-day Adventist Church will send long-term missionaries to Communist Cuba. Care for Cuba, a ministry of the Master of Divinity (M Div) program at the Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, is the sponsoring organization. Since 2013, Care for Cuba has equipped the Cuban Adventist Church

with libraries of ministry resources and bicycles for hundreds of Cuban ministers who have no transportation, and has baptized more than 800 new believers in the annual evangelistic campaigns led by M Div students.

“Cuba has been isolated for so many years, and we are eager to start changing that,” says Fernando Ortiz, M Div program director and Care for Cuba founder. “Our students’ lives are revived and transformed every time they go, and the local conferences are revitalized as they see firsthand the mighty work of the Spirit.”

However, as first an atheist and now a secular country, Cuba has rejected overseas missionaries for more than 50 years. In fact, many Adventist pastors have been imprisoned and other religious leaders killed during Communist rule.

“Everyone said that it wasn’t possible, but I knew we could at least try,” said Ortiz.

To the amazement of all involved, Care for Cuba’s proposal to send long-term missionaries to Cuba was approved by local, state and national Communist leaders. In April, the M Div program began accepting applications from students, and a small committee chose Christian Guana-Jarrin and Joseph Capeles to be the first Adventist long-term missionaries to Cuba since the 1960s. During the third week of September, they arrived in Santiago de Cuba — the second-largest city in the country — to engage in creative evangelism utilizing sports, English classes and interest-based small groups, among other, more traditional methods, such as evangelism meetings and Bible studies.

“I am humbled and overwhelmed at the prospect of doing ministry in a country that has not hosted a long-term missionary in five decades,” said Capeles. “It’s an awesome opportunity to connect with people from my culture and share the gospel with them. It is my hope that I will do all that God has planned for me, and that I will represent him and the Seminary with excellence.”

For Ortiz, who has pioneered North American Adventist ministry to Cuba since he led the first mission trip in 1998, sending these two long-term missionaries is the fulfillment of a decades-long dream.

“It’s the beginning of a Christian revolution,” he says. “A movement reminiscent of the awakening in Russia in the 1980s. A grassroots movement that will succeed not by force or weapons but by the revolution of the gospel. One that will reach many hearts and get them ready for the second coming of Christ.”

To learn more about Care for Cuba or to donate to the initiative, visit CareforCuba.org or call 269-471-3538.

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