

Revival Thriving in Communist Cuba

With all the bad news coming out of Washington, D.C., and the assault on what I perceive as our religious freedoms, it's good to get some good news.

On Tuesday I was reminded by Dan Betzer, a well-known pastor in the Assemblies of God circles, that never has there been a greater time to spread the gospel nor a time when people are more responsive.

He gave a report on the growth of Assemblies of God churches in Cuba. They have grown since 1989—under a communist regime—from 12,000 members to more than a half million.

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The setting for our meeting was the annual Peninsular Florida District Council of the Assemblies of God, held at Calvary Assembly in Winter Park, Fla., where *Charisma* began almost 34 years ago. My roots in the Assemblies of God go back four generations, so it was good to reconnect with many of my friends who were there. But by far the most encouraging thing to me was to hear about the revival in Cuba.

This is of special interest since my late father-in-law, Harvey Ferrell, and my mother-in-law, Rose Ferrell (who currently lives with us), made missionary trips to Cuba in the early 1930s through the Assemblies of God.

On Tuesday night, Hector Hunter, the Assemblies of God general superintendent in Cuba, gave a report that when Castro came into power in 1959 there were 89 small Assemblies of God churches. That number remained until 1989—when a revival took place. Since there weren't large church buildings, the people

had to meet outside. During that time thousands of people came to Christ and it drew the attention of the authorities to the meetings. Government officials actually met with church leaders to ask if the large gatherings could be held in homes. It's amazing, the communist regime bent on opposing the gospel, actually authorized home cell groups. Today there are 3,000 cell groups across the 800-mile-long island and 900 church buildings or "templos," as they say in Spanish.

Hunter and an impressive group of young Cuban singers, most of whom had never been outside of Cuba, came to the District Council meeting because the Peninsular Florida District had adopted them as a "Sister District." The council has poured millions of dollars into the island to help build churches and rebuild the areas damaged by the devastating hurricanes over the last few years.

After a great missions sermon, Betzer showed a nine-minute DVD, which I have included in this e-mail. It gives a picture and a report of what's happening in Cuba and issues an appeal for Assemblies of God churches and individuals to help meet the need.

Having grown up in the Assemblies of God, I was well aware of Dan Betzer. For many years he was the primary broadcaster in the denomination. Today he pastors First Assembly of God in Fort Myers, Fla., which is reported to give more to missions each year than any other church in the denomination. In the last 16 years Betzer has served as the missions director and assistant district superintendent for the denomination. Under his leadership our district—which includes only 350 churches in the Florida peninsula—has given a total of \$200 million to world missions.

Long-time friend, District Superintendent Terry Rayburn, told me that before Betzer took the post, special missions projects generated around \$50,000 a year. Today it's typically more around \$2 million a year—when they take on special projects as

they have recently in Cuba.

The Assemblies of God has long been a missions-sending organization. In fact, when it was formed in 1914, part of the impetus was to give a denominational covering to the freelance Pentecostal missionaries who were already taking the gospel and the Pentecostal message around the world. Betzer stirred the congregation by telling stories of how churches have responded to the call to missions. They also introduced by name dozens of missionaries serving around the world and gave brief reports of breakthroughs that are happening.

I moved to Florida in 1962, about the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. I have many friends, including several staff, who are Cuban exiles because of the persecution that happened there. Today my home is closer to Havana than it is to Chicago. So for those of us in Florida we are well aware of Cuba. It's exciting to hear what God is doing in that island nation and to be reminded that even with the worst government opposition possible—the communist regime—the gospel can be spread and churches can grow.

I urge you to watch the video and to forward this report to others, and as you feel led to respond to the need. You can send your donation to the Peninsular Florida District Council of the Assemblies of God at P.O. Box 24687, Lakeland, FL 33802-4687.