

## Travel Report – Official Trip to Cuba from 24<sup>th</sup> January to 8<sup>th</sup> February 2014

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*Dear friends,  
Dear sisters and brothers,*

With great joy I want to report some of my experiences of my latest official trip to Cuba. As already mentioned in the itinerary, besides Arturo Köbernick, Airton Nickel, our regional EBM MASA representative for Brazil, as well accompanied us on that trip. Another fellow passenger was Atabak Sahraei, a young man from the church in Hassenhausen.



### “This is God’s time for Cuba!”

We hear this convincing claim all the time when talking to our missionaries about the mission work on Cuba. For them this is God’s time for Cuba, which they do not want to miss. And we approve. We are filled with gratitude and enthusiasm after having visited the projects supported by EBM MASA. Many people are reached with the Gospel and start believing in Jesus Christ. Hundreds of co-workers and missionaries are being trained. New churches are being planted. The vision is very clear and the next steps for the following years are set to reach the ambitious aims.

Our missionaries and the many co-workers who are responsible for the mission work in East and West Cuba often have to face massive challenges, experience immense spiritual attacks, suffer from a lack of resources, but never give up. During the past years I have learned important things with my brothers and sisters from Cuba. On the one hand it is their love for the Word of God and for prayer. They invest their time and do not consider themselves too good to meet in prayer once or twice a week at 5 or 6 a.m. On the other hand it is their conviction: “There is no victory without fight or struggle!” When they have a clear calling from God for a task they go ahead, do their work, with or without resources, with or without support, with or without fight.

Before telling you more about the trip and the projects, I will give you short statements of our regional EBM MASA representatives Arturo Köbernick and Airton Nickel who accompanied me on the trip.

*Arturo:* Our biggest current missionary impulses and challenges of Latin America are on Cuba. Each year we visit all the projects and can see a very positive development. We can also see how our missionaries develop and grow in their vision and strategy. We are glad to be part of these proceedings. Each project has its own character and its different effects; however, there is a strong common working philosophy and a spirit of unity. Pastor Daniel Gonzalez, our missionary and coordinator for the projects on Cuba, told us: ‘The EBM MASA projects on Cuba have an identity, have become more mature and sustainable. The missionary DNS which the projects contain since the beginning has become stronger and is the impulse for new actions and projects. The future perspectives are convincing.’ This is true for all projects on Cuba. It is hard to describe, but to really see that with your own eyes keeps surprising us and really makes us grateful to God. This is why we say that ‘this is God’s time for the Gospel on Cuba.’”

*Airton:* “This was the first time for me to be on Cuba and to get to know all the projects EBM MASA is supporting. It was an impressive, refreshing and inspiring experience. I have to admit that I have never before seen churches so lively, with such a missionary enthusiasm and such great love

for Jesus, and who practice the love for their neighbors so practically. I thank God for the vision of EBM MASA for Cuba. The projects are being enlarged by that and more and more people can be reached with the Gospel.

## Highlights of the trip:

### 1. *Church plantings*

On our first day after our arrival we were able to take part at two church planting services, which are projects of the church of Daniel Gonzalez. These are also being supported by EBM MASA. One of those churches is in Villa Panamericana, a suburb of Havana. The other one is in "La Perla" (the pearl), a poor district in the heart of Havana. Both churches are now independent with about 50 church members and one responsible missionary. However they still work closely in a missionary network with the mother church. As I cannot give you all the details, here are just some insights of La Perla: About five years ago a Bible club for kids started in a backyard in this poor district of Havana. Even the families of those children have been reached with the Gospel. Some of them became Christians. Many of them could also get freed from the "slavery" of spiritualism which is very widespread. House churches have been started, so did a church planting work. On January 25 of 2014 a new church was planted. It was a special day. A group of people from the mother church was also there, very enthusiastically. The church people meet on a ground which was bought with the help of EBM MASA. An old wooden house serves as church service room. Parts of the roof are missing. Soon a tin roof shall cover the room and the most necessary repairs are to be undertaken. Yosvani Padrón and his fiancée Anabel Puentes (see photo below) are the new EBM MASA missionaries for this project. They are getting married on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The development of this project thrills us. It started with a small group of poor kids and within five years became an independent church. Hallelujah! This is how God writes his mission story!



Church planting service in La Perla



Many did not have a seat in the chapel



Children from the Bible club in the church service

## "Urbano 2020"

Still on our first day we also attended a meeting with 100 pastors and missionaries. Daniel and his team shared important information concerning the project and invited the pastors and their churches to contribute. The description of the project "Urbano 2020" is already known; nevertheless, I will give you a brief summary so that everybody knows what it is about: our vision is to reach the fast growing population in the cities of Cuba with the Gospel. Together with our missionary Daniel Gonzalez we developed a strategy for a missionary project which he coordinates. This project started in 2013 and goes on until 2020. Churches in urban environment should learn to effectively plant new churches. In the 20 biggest cities of Cuba trained teams are doing their researches. With the results we want to find out how people can be best reached in their environment and their lives and which methods or offers could be helpful. We are going to start with pilot projects to test certain possibilities on how to put the results into action. With the evaluated data handout material will be developed. This whole package of information with methods, material, practical experiences, and examples from pilot projects will then be distributed to the churches in the 20 biggest cities for evangelization and church planting.



Karell Lescaille who lives in Havana since September 2013 with his family is Daniel's right-hand man in coordinating the project.

## 2. Training for church planters in East Cuba

On January 26, we travelled to Las Tunas. About 150 km before Las Tunas, in Céspedes, we had a meeting with a group of about 70 "missionaries" who were trained in evangelization and the planting of new churches. Some gave a testimony of God's working in the midst of big challenges. They told us about the people who found Jesus and about the new churches which had been planted. We could share some words from the Bible and encourage them for their missionary work. With great joy and the conviction that the support of this project is worth it, we went on.



Missionaries who are being trained for church planting

During the next two days we visited several missionary projects in Las Tunas and that region, which are also the fruit of this missionary training. It is amazing with how much passion and selflessness many of these missionaries work. One example is the couple Aliok and Arián Sanchez Rojas. They live in a cabin, have no income and live with just little money which he earns through different mini-jobs wherever he gets anything to work. However, they live and work in missions with so much love, devotion and conviction to reach their place and the surrounding villages with the Gospel. About 40 people yet belong to that little church. Their lives and their love for Jesus and the mission deeply touched me. I asked Aliok: What are you living on? He answered: "We fight". This is a new term I learned in Cuba, when it is about the "work/profession": fighting. Even some days later I remembered their convincing love and devotion for mission. I hope to never forget it.



Aliok und Arián Rojas vor ihrem Haus in Calixto

Concerning our project in East Cuba, we decided to also take an additional new missionary there: Rafael Rodríguez Morgado (see photo below). For some time now, he is helping Marcos Rivero with the training of church planters. He is a missionary in Camaguey, is planting churches there and will be responsible for the coordination of the training in Camaguey and region. He was trained in that project himself and turned out to be an excellent leader. He will officially be part of the team now as a big help for Marcos Rivero. Marcos is glad about the valuable addition to the team.

### 3. *Church in the poor district "Zaldo"*

The missionary work in Zaldo is going very well. 2013 our missionaries and co-workers had to face difficult trials, however, with joy they talk about how they have been helped, carried through and blessed by God. The wife of one head co-worker died shortly after giving birth to their third child. All the church people carry the sorrow and support the family. For unknown reasons they were not allowed to hold church services for several weeks. They still continued. Today everything is back to normal again. The support of EBM MASA for buying a ground with a house just next to their meeting place also helped with that. We are very grateful that brothers and sisters from Brazil and Argentina donated money for this reason.

Last year we left a task with our EBM MASA missionary Rolando García: to clearly describe the vision and strategy of this missionary work together with his team according to the strategy "EBM MASA 2020". This is our missionary strategy for all the projects in Latin America until 2020. The work has strongly grown during the past years; many people have joined the church community. Now, clear aims and plans how to implement the single steps are required. When Rolando now presented their results, we were just grateful and glad. As head team of their church they had prayed, fasted and worked hard during the past year. The results are more than convincing. For the first time they now invest in training disciples and have already started with a training of co-workers (with excellent content), and withing the next two years will be concentrating more on the consolidation of the work. After that the main focus should again be evangelization and planting new churches in other poor districts. We are proud of our missionaries – without exception!



Church service in Zaldo

#### 4. *Bahia Honda*

Juan Sanchez and his wife Ana Iris are the EBM MASA missionaries in this place. They have lived in Sayas until mid-2013. There they were responsible for a church and evangelized in several villages. About a year ago they went through a big crisis and had to ask themselves how and where their work would go on. We tried to help out through spiritual welfare and advice, in order for them to focus again and develop a clear vision for the missionary work in Bahia Honda and region, and to take strategic paces toward that direction. Three months later, Daniel told us that they had already taken a positive approach. They moved to Bahia Honda in the middle of last year to start planting a church there, though they had nowhere to live. When we now met, we were just happy to see how encouraged and with how much passion they are doing their work. They still do not have an apartment, but live in a little room in a pension. However, 23 people have started their lives with Jesus and began discipleship training. We now helped that they could buy a house for them to live in, but also for the church work to have a home. We are really glad about the development. It is good to see our missionaries move on with new strength and encouragement.

#### 5. *Bible clubs and a missionary sports project*

Daniel Gonzalez and his church community are thrilled to see how many children, teens and youths are reached through these projects. There are hundreds. And it is not only them, but also their families. Some youths who have come to believe in Jesus are now co-workers in the project and tell others what they experience with Jesus and how much worth it is living a live with him. During our time in Havana, we were able to attend some of the meetings of these



Sports and the Gospel go together



groups and could also watch the final game of a soccer tournament. EBM MASA supports 18 co-workers who are engaged in these projects. I just want to tell you one little but important story as an example: The mother of the boy on the photo on the left wanted to take him to a spiritualism meeting where he should be devoted to the Gods. However, he told her: mum, I won't go there with you because I now belong to Jesus. Now we hope that his mother will as well start believing in Jesus very soon.

#### 6. *Isle of Youth*

The weekend we passed on the Isle of Youth made us again thankful. We visited different missionary projects, had a meeting with missionaries and co-workers, and attended a church service. The church service was filled with lots of good music and worship, the preaching of God's Word, a baptism, the presentation of certificate for a group of brothers and sisters who have been trained in missionary work, the blessing of children and a lively and loving community. After 2.5 hours one had the impression that the church service could still go on. The people spare no troubles. They come by foot, on horse wagons or by truck to attend the church service.



Before leaving for Havana, we had the meeting with our missionary Ernesto Cabrera, his wife, and the team. We evaluated the work, orientated ourselves for the aims of the following years, and focused on the consequent challenges and possibilities. We are grateful to God for everything he does there.

I will also give you a short insight into the history and development of the work on the Isle of Youth: About 17 years ago Daniel Gonzalez started from scratch with the missionary work. On his second year EBM MASA joint him for his support. Daniel had a clear vision for the church planting work on the Isle of Youth which is still valid today. To reach people with the Gospel, gather them in house churches and put up a network. "Bible and prayer" have been very important right from the start. Today there are already 2,000 people belonging to eight planted churches, five branch churches and 80 house churches. Together they think of themselves as one big church community which reaches the people on the Isle of Youth with the love of God in word and deed. The first young man on the Isle of Youth who started believing through Daniel was Karell Lescaille. When Daniel moved back to Havana after his first ten years to spread his vision on all of Cuba, Karell was his successor on the Isle of Youth after having been Daniel's right-hand man for some time. Karell continued the mission work during the past seven years. Many people have been trained for co-workers, leaders of house churches and missionaries. Altogether, there are 18 missionaries responsible for the work on the Isle of Youth. They are partially supported financially by EBM MASA. In September 2013 Karell and his family moved to Havana to be responsible for the many EBM MASA projects together with Daniel. This is part of the strategy for Cuba during the next few years. The work on the Isle of Youth goes on with the same vision. Ernesto Leyva Cabrera has been called into charge. He is a doctor and specialist in pediatric surgery, and has been trained for this job during the past years on the seminary. He already supported Karell and is now the head. It is good to see how he pursues the missionary vision and strategy as Daniel and Karell did before. Ernesto is a very friendly man and a perfect team player, and is engaged with passion and love. We are very glad to have him and his wife Sandra, who is also engaged with full passion, as missionaries in our EBM MASA team.



Missionaries and co-workers on the Isle of Youth



Worship team



Missionaries with certificate of the training

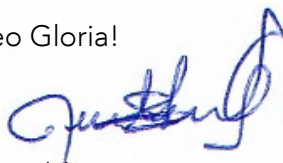
## 7. *Final meeting with the EBM MASA missionaries*

On the evening of our second last day we had a meeting with the missionaries. Unfortunately Ernesto from the Isle of Youth could not join us due to a canceled flight on that day. It was another possibility to give our warm thanks to the missionaries, to encourage and build them up. We can see the team spirit growing stronger within the EBM MASA team on Cuba. They support each other, gain profit from the experiences of the others, feel very much involved with us, and stick to our common vision.

We have again been kept safe under the guidance and blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Closing I want to point out two things that really touched me: Firstly, it is my gratitude for everything that God does and achieves on Cuba, and secondly, the consciousness of our missionary responsibility for Cuba. I am excited to see how God continues to write his mission story on Cuba during the next years!

Many thanks for your loving support.

Soli Deo Gloria!



Carlos Waldow

### **EBM MASA missionaries on Cuba**



**Family Gonzalez – Havana**



**Family Lescaille – Havana**



**Juan & Ana Iris Sanchez – Bahia Honda**



**Family Garcia – Zaldo, Havana**



Family Leyva Cabrera – Isle of Youth



Yosvani Padrón & Anabel Puentes – La Perla



Family Rivero – Las Tunas



Family Dias Claro – Las Tunas



Family Rodríguez Morgado – Camaguey