



Planting Water Lilies

by Paul Thompson

I'm on a training mission in Cuba, the first of two planned for this year. At this moment I'm in Holguín, a city of almost half a million in the eastern extreme of the island. Known as the intellectual centre of Cuba, the city boasts of numerous universities, a school for the arts, theatres and a symphony orchestra. I am sitting on a veranda overlooking a principle thoroughfare. Bikes, horse drawn buggies, an ambulant baker announcing fresh bread, tricycle taxis, an ambulance siren in the background, a truck fumigating the city casting a huge white cloud, I feel like I'm on a movie set located somewhere in southeastern Asia. It's relaxing just to sit and watch the city, perhaps 50 or maybe a 100 years behind history, so far removed from the bustle of modern America, yet so close.



My mission consists of training national workers and pastors in the disciplines related to church planting and multiplication. About 30 men (some bring their wives) gather from the whole region to interact on their lives and ministry and receive encouragement and orientation. On this occasion

I'm giving an overview of Scripture, emphasizing its unity and the mission of God "to fill the earth with his glory". Cell phones are scarce, the Internet is prohibited, so distractions are reduced. It's a great privilege to teach eager, receptive people.

Like a tree loaded with ripe fruit, Cuba's hour is now. We all know that left untended the fruit will be eaten by birds or drop and rot on the ground. Our task as missionaries is to prepare men and women to harvest the fruit. For years right in the centre of the island, Los Pinos Nuevos, a Bible seminary, served as a catalyst for evangelism and church planting. Today the circumstances call for decentralized training. Seizing the moment, national church leaders have the goal of establishing 10 training centres throughout the island within the next 10 years. These centres are nothing elaborate, usually housed in churches where trainees can gather for five days of intensive input and discussion.

The result of this training has been explosive growth. Living on meagre means and confronting incredible odds, these faithful warriors come to us weary and war-torn. They need a place to unload, to share their frustrations as well as tell of their victories. The interaction is lively and rich. The trainers, veteran church planters themselves, supply information, clarify issues, and share tools for ministry. In this case, all my training sessions are on video so that each participant can take them back to their house churches.

(Continued on next page)

The paradigm of the centralized cinder block schoolhouse is quickly giving way to the house church. Hundreds of homes are opening up, whole communities are being reached, the gospel is penetrating the cities, block after block. While evangelism at one time was restricted to rural areas, today the great cities of Cuba are the target. Each training centre is in a key city.



Paul Thompson and some of his students

Today Cuba is a nation on the verge of bankruptcy. Many goods which at one time were manufactured locally now need to be imported. I noticed arriving at the airport the lack of toilet paper. I inquired and found out that there was a national shortage. I wrote my wife and told her that I had been negligent in failing to bring a couple of rolls. While the food was abundant at the seminar, we had no napkins, something the Cuban hardly notices. Because of the scarcity, pastors have to scramble to make ends meet. Most of them are dirt poor. I was invited for supper by a pastor and was appalled by his living conditions. The house was unpainted cinder block without plaster, a zinc roof full of holes. Table and chairs were honed from unfinished lumber, yet not a word of complaint or excuses. The evening was spent in stories of conversions, in fact, the motive of the visit was that a Jehovah's Witness had come to Christ through my tape series on the gospel and wanted an interview.

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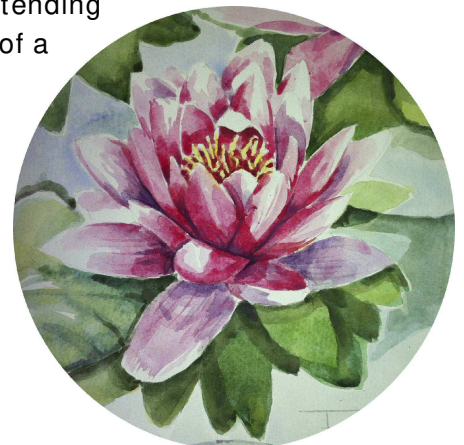
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It is obvious that these seminars need to be subsidized. We cannot bring these leaders to a central place, feed and house them without financial help. I just said goodbye to a young pastor from Guantanamo, about 300 kilometres from here. He left us about 2 pm after the seminar closed and won't get home until early tomorrow morning, if he is lucky. Since there is no regulated public transportation and none of the participants have their own cars, they have to rely on the goodwill of passersby. So we supply a little for transportation money, then feed and house them while at the seminars.

As a parting gift one of the young artists attending the seminar presented me with a painting of a water lily. He explained how the water lily grows in swampy, muddy water, yet it has the ability to purify the water surrounding it. He said, we live in a swamp, all around us is dirty, smelly, stagnant water. Every time we plant a church, the atmosphere around us is purified; and the more we plant, the clearer the water becomes.



The Los Pinos Nuevos Seminary

by Omar Bada, Rector

God is doing great things among us, especially in the Los Pinos Nuevos Seminary. He has greatly blessed us, blessed us to such an extent that moment by moment we feel His presence with us in every aspect of what takes place.

By God's grace, during the spring semester we were able to continue offering all our existing programs and began to offer two new study programs. What are our Mission and Vision? Why do we exist? We prepare those who will lead local churches, we prepare those who will lead nationally. And what are the two new programs? I'll get back to them.

Vision. Our vision is to be an academic institution which serves local churches in the expansion of God's Kingdom. We do this through the formation of the character of Christ in those who have been called to ministry and come to us.

Mission. Our mission is to fully train pastors and leaders; to develop and prepare them to be able to minister in the context of our society in a way which enables the formation of multiplying healthy churches, reproducing churches, which impact society with the life and power of the Gospel.

We are continuing with our full program of residence and distance education courses which lead to a Bachelor's Degree in Theology and Bible. We minister through the main seminary location as well as through seven regional centres spread throughout the country. Our total number of students, spread across Cuba, now numbers 768. They are in many programs, not just our degree level programs. Here is how it all breaks down.

Bachelors Degree in Theology and Bible	311
Masters Degree in Biblical Studies	132
Diploma in Biblical Studies	51
Certificate in Church Planting	34
Certificate in Biblical Counselling	24
Certificate in Liturgy	16
Diploma in Christian Education	200

By the grace of God we began new programs of Bachelor's Degree and Masters Degree Post Graduate programs in Theology and Bible and in Biblical Studies, now available at the seminary. This brings upon us a great challenge and also a struggle. As we move forward we do so counting upon God's help and presence. We truly appreciate the help of Christians and institutions around the world who are willing to help us in the extension of God's Kingdom in Cuba. For all who help us we have many projects and needs. These are the foremost:

1. Pray for us and support us always, for without prayer we can do nothing.
2. We are urgently in need of funds to print books and the basic study materials which are used in each of our courses.

We have many, many needs, but we thank God that in His mercy He shows his goodness to us each day. He is watching over us.



Students on the Los Pinos Nuevos Seminary Campus

What Can We Do?

What can we do to help the Church in Cuba? What can you do? What can your church do to help? There are many needs, many ways to help.

- ▶ The Los Pinos Nuevos Seminary needs financial assistance in order to continue to prepare pastors and church planters for ministry.
- ▶ The denomination needs funds to support many projects and activities
- ▶ Help is needed to support ongoing training of pastors and lay leaders as outlined in the article written by Paul Thompson
- ▶ Your church could make a missions trip to Cuba to help a church or the Los Pinos Nuevos Seminary.

Would you like more information? *Would you like to know about current Cuba Projects and ways in which you or your church can help in Cuba ministry? Or about a missions trip to Cuba?*

Write to: Gary.Clow@worldteam.org
or to one of the addresses on the form below.

Would you like to be involved in supporting ministry in Cuba? Your donation will help provide the things Cuban churches cannot provide for themselves.

Yes, I want to have a part in ministry in Cuba I am enclosing my gift of \$ _____

Where Most Needed in Cuba Ministries (40503)

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