

Guidance for New Partnerships

The Cuba Partners Network (CPN) is an umbrella organization of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (PC(USA)), established to facilitate partnerships between churches and midbodies of the PC(USA) and churches and midbodies of the Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Cuba (IPRC). There is a mutual desire on both sides for the establishment of additional partnerships. This document is intended to facilitate the initiation of such new partnerships, serving as a self-study tool in preparation for the identification of a potential partner in collaboration with and consent of the leadership of the IPRC.

Step One: Start with self-searching/discernment as a group.

- Why are you considering a partnership?
- What size group in your church is interested in exploring a partnership? Do you think there are enough people in the group to commit to a long-term partnership if you conclude that you would like one (it does not have to be very large to start, perhaps 3 or 4 people)? Think through the obligations over a period of years – some existing partnerships have been maintained for over 30 years.
- Have you had a partnership or a similar activity before with another church, either in the United States or in another country?
- Do you have particular skill sets or interests that you think would be helpful to a partnership?

Step Two: Do you have a preference for a partner type?

- Large congregation or small?
- Urban or rural?
- A church or a presbytery (Havana, Matanzas, El Centro)?
- The Synod (IPRC) or Seminary (Seminario Evangélico de Teología, SET)?

Step Three: Preparation.

An early step will likely involve visits to the candidate churches or Presbyterian entities in Cuba with which you are considering a partnership. The IPRC in Cuba and the CPN will help you in connecting with a suitable partner or choice of partners.

What are some issues you would want to consider ahead of your first visit to your prospective partner(s) (whether it be church, presbytery, Synod or the SET)? For instance:

- **Communication:** Do you have one or more fluent Spanish speaking group members who will make the visit? It is very helpful if you do. If not, a translator can be arranged. Reliance on phone/computer translator apps is inconsistent with the spirit of mutuality necessary for resilient partnerships. Every traveler should learn a few basic Spanish words and phrases.
- **Expectations:** Do you have specific activities or locations you want to do and see while there? Remember that the primary objective of your visit is to develop a relationship with your Cuban partner. A major part of your visit will be worship and prayer with your Cuban colleagues. Also, avail yourselves of opportunities to meet individual members of your potential partner group, in the church or in their homes. Remember that just as you are assessing the entity as a

potential partner, they likewise will be doing the same. Because a partner pastor may change her/his church assignment, but church members change churches less frequently, you shouldn't tie your decision only to your affinity with the pastor, with whom you will likely spend the most time.

- **Finances:** Consider how you will fund the visit. In many U.S. churches visitors fund their own trips. Some churches have a budget line item for a certain number of trips. Sample budgets for a trip can be shared from experienced U.S. churches or the CPN Partner Mentor Committee upon request. Budget items to include are visas, air fare, airport parking and meals in transit, in-country transportation, translator, meals and housing, special meals, side trips, and cultural attractions. Individuals should consider bringing personal funds for mementos, which will be widely available. You cannot use U.S. credit or debit cards in Cuba because of the Embargo, and U.S. currency may not always be accepted, so currency exchange may be necessary. U.S. cell phones may not work or will incur high minute charges.
- **Cultural background:** your own and that of your partner will differ in ways you may not recognize or anticipate. Always maintain sensitivity to potential differences to avoid uncomfortable situations and the impression of a hierarchical relationship. Partnerships are side-by-side journeys of faith.
- **Education:** There are many resources available to help your group learn more about Cuba, beginning with the internet – but approach those sources with caution. The CPN maintains a list of resources on its web site. It is strongly recommended that visit plans include group in-depth discussions and readings prior to travel to prepare for a productive visit.

Step Four: What do you need to take care of while you are there?

- Are there other relationships you need to be aware of? Similar to the PC(USA), the IPRC is organized in a structure of Local Church → Presbytery (there are three) → Synod (there is no equivalent to the General Assembly). The IPRC is an ecumenical partner in the Seminario Evangélico de Teología (SET) in Matanzas and a partner in the Cuban Council of Churches (Consejo de Iglesias de Cuba, CIC) in Havana. Representatives of the appropriate presbytery may participate in your visit.
- **Handling money issues:** Before you visit a potential new partner in Cuba, it is recommended to identify one person in your group who will handle group funds while in Cuba. All transactions are handled in cash, either U.S. dollars or Cuban pesos (highly variable exchange rate, roughly 0.04 US\$). You need to also communicate with your hosts in Cuba about an amount for daily per person food and lodging costs and transportation costs. Recent CPN travelers can report their incurred costs but be prepared for increases that reflect inflation and scarcities.
- **Personal relationships:** During your trip to visit a potential partner in the IPRC in Cuba, you will meet people who will likely become friends over the years with you and your traveling companions. This is one of the rewards of having a partnership with a church or other entity of the IPRC in Cuba. It sometimes also happens that people you meet will ask for special favors, e.g. money or items they or their families particularly need, or even help in efforts to move to the United States. They should be told that any such special requests need to be made through the pastor of your partner church or the principal person in charge of your partnership on the Cuban side. This is to avoid any appearance of favoritism for certain individuals and to avoid requests that do not seem to support but may even damage the church community.

Step Five: What do you do when your initial trip is over?

- How do you evaluate? The travel team will want to meet and discuss the experience they had, perhaps after some time for personal reflection. If more than one entity was visited, which seemed to be the best fit? Is there still a strong sentiment for a permanent partnership? Does it fit within the mission of your church and the greater Church?
- How will you sustain your relationship? If your church decides to continue a partnership with a church or other Presbyterian entity in Cuba, you should have one or two members who maintain contact with a representative of the church or Presbyterian group in Cuba (usually but not always a pastor). It is also helpful to have a committee of members of your church who meet as necessary to discuss issues related to your partnership and plan future visits. Not all need to be available to make visits, but they should be concerned with the welfare of the partnership. Many partnerships develop covenants that formalize the aspirations, commitments, and responsibilities of each partner. Samples are available from the CPN. If your church feels it cannot establish or continue to nourish a partnership, this should be made clear to the CPN and the Presbyterian entity in Cuba you visited, as well as to the Synod of the IPRC. This should be done in consultation with the Partner Mentor Committee.

Contact the Partner Mentor Committee of the CPN through CubaPartnersNetwork@gmail.com for help considering any of these issues.

2/13/2025