

Cuba



The Republic of Cuba is located in the northern Caribbean Sea, where the Sea meets the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. Its name comes from the Taino language of one of the native peoples that inhabited the island when Europeans arrived. Cuba covers an area that is about the size of the state of Virginia and its population is almost double that state's. The capital city is Havana.



A street scene in Santa Clara, Cuba

Many people who live in Cuba call themselves Christian, (about 85%) but few practice any faith at all. This is because after the 1959 revolution that brought the current Communist government

to power – meaning they are ruled by a few people who make and enforce laws— the country was declared officially atheistic. This designation was dropped in 1992 and the rules against practicing ones' religion were relaxed.

Education is provided by the government only and is compulsory. There are no faith-based schools whatsoever. Almost all students graduate from high school. Many go on to a technical school or college.

Health care is also provided by the government and is among some of the best in the world. Cuba has one of the highest doctor to population ratios and send many doctors overseas to work. Challenges for the doctors who stay in Cuba are very low salaries, (all people make the same salary for all jobs under the Communist system) lack of supplies due to an embargo against imported goods from the United States, and facilities that are poorly maintained by the government.

As the rules against the open practice of religion were relaxed, Enrique "Fidelto" Cabrera was reading a Venezuelan Church publication.

MCA in Cuba

In it, he learned about the Missionary Childhood Association (MCA) and decided to start this faith-based society for children in the Diocese of Camaguey. MCA is now blossoming into a national movement, present in most Cuban dioceses, including Santa Clara, where a group from the United States, including three from Boston, visited last May. Using a common non-Church language—baseball—they attracted many young people to clinics with professional coaches.

One little face peered into the field through the chain link fence, watching with eager eyes. He inched his way towards the action; he was shirtless and shoeless. He wore denim shorts a couple of sizes too big, held up by the elastic at the waist. His curly mop of hair topped a long face, but it was his huge, eager eyes that caught the missionaries' full attention. He took in everything: nothing escaped his gaze.

He came closer. He was not a member of the group, but a neighborhood boy. He was just the kind of child the Cuban Missionary Children and the visiting U.S. coaches had hoped would join the baseball drills and game they started.

As he slowly made his way onto the field, the boy watched the coaches put the older children through typical baseball drills -- stretch your muscles; catch the ball, plant your feet, and throw; throw accurately while you run. Unless Cuban children are so talented that they are in a system that leads them towards competing for a spot on the Cuban Junior national baseball team, they do not receive this kind of training.

Something in his mind must have told him to stay on the periphery at first. He picked up a loose ball and began to toss it in the air and play catch with himself. He had good hand eye coordination! Next he noticed a glove laying on the ground. Without a word, he

scooped it up and continued his private game of catch.

The glove's owner, Jim Spillman, noticed and approached the boy asking, "Como te llamas?" He seemed worried he would get in trouble for using the glove and ball. "Pedro," he answered quietly. Jim, who's not only the principal of Blessed Sacrament Elementary School in Walpole, but also a youth baseball coach, put the boy at ease by motioning to Pedro to play catch with him.

Pedro's eyes lit up! Soon Jim had him involved in all the drills and the game that followed. Pedro was a natural. Even without shoes he was quick on his feet and handled the ball like someone much older.



At snack time, he scarfed down a double helping of the sandwiches Missionary Childhood provided and learned about the Catholic faith through the volunteers of the Missionary Childhood. Sister Bernadina, a local missionary Sister and her crew led simple prayers, led by example, and by their very witness were drawing all of us closer to God.

Last August, Fidelito and Sister Bernadina held a National Missionary Childhood Congress. Four hundred children attended and received World Mission Rosaries that were hand delivered by our mission team members from Boston. Your prayers and sacrifices continue to make a difference in the spread of the Catholic faith in Cuba!

Missionary Childhood Association

66 Brooks Drive, Braintree, MA 02184 | Tel: 617.779.3871 | Fax: 617.542.1778

www.propfaithboston.org | mheil@propfaithboston.org