

## **2019 Annual Report Puente de Amigos Committee**

Puente de Amigos is pleased to report on an active year of reaching across boundaries to share love and connection with our Cuban Friends. Despite political challenges limiting travel, four groups from New England Yearly Meeting visited Cuba Yearly Meeting (CYM) this year. Our relationships with Cuban Quakers have grown in both breadth and depth.

We have seen our relationships broadened by different and new types of visits. A group from Hanover Monthly Meeting visited their sister meeting in Havana, then traveled clear across the island to the east, where they visited the monthly meetings located in Oriente, the home of most of the Cuban monthly meetings. A team organized by Benigno Sanchez-Eppler also traveled to Havana and to Oriente. Their mission was to assist Cuban Friends with digitizing all of CYM's minutes, a two-year task which they were able to complete this year. Two library experts from Northampton Monthly Meeting were accompanied by two Amherst College students for this trip. A third group, from Wellesley and Framingham Monthly Meetings, traveled to Puerto Padre Monthly Meeting, where they helped in the redevelopment of the Wilmington School into a community center. Cuban Friends plan to broaden their mission in the renovation of this building by teaching construction and other local employment skills to non-Quakers in their community.

The fourth delegation this year was an example of increasing depth in our connections with Cuban Friends. Noah Baker had been asked by the CYM President to help encourage the younger generation to take up leadership roles, especially since the emigration of several younger leaders from Cuba. He traveled with Jackie Stillwell to Cuba for a week, and together they were able to continue discussions about Friends' ministry. They also answered Cuban Friends' request for a representative of NEYM to attend CYM sessions, an annual commitment of our Committee.

Our relationship with Cuban Friends has also become deeper and stronger with a project to raise funds specifically to assist Cuban Friends communicate with each other and with us. Although use of the internet is increasingly widespread in Cuba, it is very expensive. Len Cadwallader initiated a successful project this year to raise funds for online access. Communication with Cuban Friends is now often through Facebook Messenger, allowing for more frequent and informal communications, with specific tasks and documents being shared.

Beyond the visits themselves, the Puente Committee undertook the task of updating our processes and procedures for inter-visitation this year. We are exploring ways to strengthen the New England/Cuba sister meeting relationships, the foundation of our fellowship. We grieve the absence of Cuban visitors to New England due to the US government prohibitions over the past three years, and a political response is under consideration. Our Cuban Friends are suffering increased economic hardship this year, and we are considering what we can do to help.

In these times, it is heartening to experience the impact that loving relationships between Cubans and New Englanders can have. We have visits in the planning stage for next year, including another intergenerational trip, Alternatives to Violence Projects, and annual visits to CYM. Please let us know if you are interested in joining a delegation to Cuba.

Maggie Fogarty and Em McManamy, co-clerks