

PUENTE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2020

This year was marked by sadness at the US government's continuing prohibition on Cuban citizens' travel to the U.S., compounded by the recent coronavirus which has had the effects of freezing all travel and exacerbating injustices worldwide. At this time, it is soothing to experience how dear our loved ones are and to give thanks for the ways in which we can continue to warm our hands at communal fires, even though they are mainly electronic ones. Our committee members have found new ways to remain in touch with our Cuban Friends via Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, email, and sharing packages of letters and pictures at the time of our February 2020 delegation to Cuba.

That delegation was the only one this year, after four delegations in 2019. The travelers were Bruce Neumann (in his new position as NEYM clerk), Jackie Stillwell, Marion Ahearn, and Em McManamy. We celebrated the opportunity to participate in Cuba Yearly Meeting (CYM) sessions, where we observed a new generation of leadership taking the helm. We contributed by honoring the outgoing CYM clerk with a plaque created by numerous NEYM hands. Bruce offered moving ministry at sessions, and the other travelers facilitated workshops as part of a wonderfully collaborative tapestry of yearly meeting events.

Much of our committee's work has the goal of animating the relationships among the pairs of sister meetings in Cuba and New England, as a means of knitting our communities together. Our NEYM gathering in August 2019 was blessed by video greetings and an original Puente de Amigos song sent to us by our Cuban Friends [<https://vimeo.com/351536174>]. Nine monthly meetings in Cuba have sister meetings in New England, and three more sister-meeting pairs are in process. NEYM individuals and meetings are also encouraged to communicate with Cuban Friends. An ad hoc group of the New England sister-meeting representatives gathers bi-monthly (via Zoom). Several delegations from New England that were scheduled for 2020, including a first-time gathering in Cuba of all Cuban and all New England sister meetings, will be postponed to a later date.

We were gratified to complete several multi-year projects this year. In September, an expedited and simplified process of approval for travelers to Cuba was approved by Permanent Board (PB). The procedure allows for preliminary approval of delegations by PB, allowing full discernment to proceed with a more flexible process. What a concept! Another task was the complete reorganization of our Handbook for those considering joining a delegation to Cuba [[Handbook for Friends Interested in Travel to Cuba](https://neym.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Puente%20Handbook%20Preliminarily%20Approved%20November%205%202019.pdf)] [<https://neym.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Puente Handbook Preliminarily Approved November 5 2019.pdf>]. The new Handbook refines and clarifies the discernment process and offers queries and guidance for individuals and monthly meetings.

In financial news, our committee has been able to transfer more funds to Cuban Friends for their own discernment and use, in the absence of Cuban travelers to New England. We also raised additional funds in New England to send Cuban travelers to the FUM 2020 triennial (postponed) and to assist with their internet communications. Despite obstacles, we continue in faith and love.

Submitted by Maggie Fogarty and Em McManamy co-clerks