

PUENTE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2020 – 2021

This year, our committee mourned the sudden passing of Ramon Gonzalez Longoria, while on an extended visit with his son Marcos in Miami. He had been unable to return to Cuba due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. Ramon was a beloved and faithful member of Cuba Yearly Meeting (CYM) who held many leadership roles in CYM and the wider world of Friends. The Friends World Committee on Consultation (FWCC) held a moving memorial service for Ramon, and the recording of this event is available here: <https://youtu.be/BuHXDHT0TYM>.

Along with the rest of the world, our committee's work was deeply hampered by the effect of COVID-19. Visits from the US to Cuba have become impossible due to both the pandemic and the US government's continued prohibition of Cuban visitors to the US. This spring, Cuba experienced an upsurge in cases, and many monthly meetings were not able to meet in person. In addition, Cuban citizens felt the economic impact of COVID acutely. They reported that without international trade, they were unable to obtain food, gasoline or other supplies. Travel became impossible for most, and many have been unable to obtain sufficient basic supplies. In response, the Puente Committee made a donation to CYM for COVID relief. In addition, individuals made generous donations for the pastor's fund established in the name of Ramon, and for additional household supplies.

The committee is working to overcome communication challenges faced by Cuban Friends. Though internet sites are now more freely available to Cubans, the cost of connection is prohibitive to many. The committee is both exploring the logistics of donating funds that Cuban Friends may use to communicate and learning how to use the platform preferred by Cuban Friends, WhatsApp. We have a WhatsApp group called "Amigos Puente de Amor," a platform that will include at least one representative of each sister meeting in New England and Cuba. This platform has been helpful in providing a way to communicate easily and quickly with each other individually and as a group. We have all been learning to use WhatsApp as well as Facebook Messenger, despite the varying degrees of comfort with social media experienced by many of us in New England.

This year we celebrated three new sister meeting connections:

- Portland partnered with Durham in their connection with Velasco Monthly Meeting
- Vassalboro created a new connection with Pueblo Nuevo Monthly Meeting
- Fresh Pond and Framingham Meetings created a new connection with Delicias mission

This brings the number of monthly meetings in New England that have a sister meeting or mission in Cuba to thirteen. There is one monthly meeting and several missions that are still looking for partners in New England, and those interested are encouraged to be in touch with the committee. All sister meetings are finding creative ways to communicate with their partners in Cuba. For example, Hanover Friends held a Cuba celebration on zoom this winter, and Kirenia, the pastor of Havana Monthly Meeting, was able to make an appearance online. Photographs, letters, and even videos of worship services are being shared on social media.

Administrative tasks this year included the updating of the Purposes and Procedures committee document, available here: <https://neym.org/committees/puente-de-amigos>. In addition, the Handbook for Friends Interested in Travel to Cuba has been updated and is available on the committee website.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Puente de Amigos between New England and Cuba. We will consider how to celebrate together with our Cuban Friends, knowing that the loving community lives in that which is eternal, beyond the human limitations which we all experience.