

Annual Report 2023
Puente de Amigos Committee

The Puente de Amigos Committee is responsible for maintaining the Bridge of Love between NEYM and Cuba Yearly Meeting (CYM). With the easing of the pandemic, we have been able to send two delegations to Cuba under our care in the past year. There are solid plans for another to go in September. Each delegation carries financial support for CYM raised by the Puente contributory fund. We also carry goods and medical supplies. The leadership of CYM discerns how best to disperse the funds and goods. Each delegation goes through a clearness process with their monthly meeting and with the Puente Committee. They also meet over several months to create a functioning spiritual group among themselves.

Through the reports of visitors, we learn of significant food and fuel shortages, exacerbated by high inflation. The community is further strained by the emigration of young people. Visitors report on the strength of the spiritual communities despite these circumstances. When we ask Cuban Friends whether our visits are a burden, they insist that the benefits of intervisitation far outweigh the costs.

Late last year a member of our committee from Portland Monthly Meeting traveled to Cuba with the FUM Living Letters program in which she learned of a need for medical supplies. As the group from Portland and Durham Meetings prepared for their trip, they gathered the supplies needed. The delegation attended the annual sessions of Cuba Yearly Meeting, and they visited many Monthly Meetings, including their sister Meeting, Velasco.

In June Benigno Sanchez-Eppler of Northampton Meeting visited to offer support to the pastors of Cuba Yearly Meeting. Due to extensive emigration, there are not enough pastors to go around, and there is a lack of lay leadership to assist pastors or provide leadership. Benigno sent back moving daily epistles about his ministry and his experience of living and worshiping among our Cuban Friends. We know from Jorge Luis Pena, clerk of CYM, that Benigno's visit was exceedingly enriching.

In September two members of Providence Meeting will travel to Havana to offer training in Alternatives to Violence for Friends from all around Cuba. They are planning the work jointly with Kirenia Criado Perez, pastor of Havana Meeting, and Jorge Luis Pena, and a Friend from Mexico. A generous gift from Hanover Meeting will cover travel and accommodations for Friends from eastern Cuba. This is the first time that Puente has supported such a delegation.

Plans for trips in 2024 are taking shape.

Lastly, we received a request from CYM for funds to begin repairs to the pastor's home in Puerto Padre. This is an historic house, built in the early 20th century by missionaries from the US. Benigno Sanchez-Eppler delivered the funds, and we have pictures of the supplies already purchased.

We know from our communications in person and on WhatsApp, that our connections are very important to Cuba Friends. They yearn for contact through the sister meeting relationships. They want to be included and remembered.