



My fervent Christmas prayer for you: That you will enjoy a wonderful season of celebration, as the crowning of a beautiful year . . . during which you and I have preached Christmas all year long!

December 1, 2016

Dear Ministry Partner,

Let me take you for a moment to Cuba . . . To a little town . . .

. . . To meet the town drunk.

A guy who consumes alcohol, loves mariachi music, and that's about the extent of his life.

Drinking isn't this fellow's only flaw. He also has a hot temper. He's built like a bald Russian muscleman, and he would just as soon fight you as look at you.

You probably don't expect his name to be Nelson . . . but it is. Not the typical Cuban name, no. . . . It's a unique name—for a unique individual!

Now look again. Nelson has changed.

Still bald, still a muscleman, but he's beaming. He seems always to have a huge smile. He also has a wife, as sweet and shy as he is tough and bold!

What happened to Nelson?

The Lord got to him through a simple message:

God loves you, Nelson, and wants to give you a whole new life.

It wasn't some celebrity evangelist who reached Nelson. It was just a team of ordinary Christians visiting Nelson's little town, sharing with anyone who would listen: Our team!

Nelson is not a man of half measures. He accepted Christ and jumped in with both feet. His life was radically changed. He had been in "the kingdom of darkness," but now was "transferred to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1:13). **Just like Christmas!** "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light" (Isa. 9:9). Nelson was soundly



converted. He joined the team of those proclaiming the Gospel. He soon felt that church music needed improvement—so he began writing Christian mariachi music!

Soon he signed up to become a church planter with our team! The Holy Spirit led him to focus in the center of the island. Nelson planted his first church in the town of Zulueta. Then he led this church to plant six other churches.

Pastor Yaniel, leading the work in Placetas, is so enthused about Nelson's zeal that he has put him in charge of a project to plant **47 more churches!**

The last time I visited Nelson's original church in Zulueta, Nelson made sure to be there. I had the privilege of giving the invitation. Many received the Lord that day; one man among them was singled out by Nelson. I saw tough man Nelson break down and weep, he melted down as he embraced the new convert. I figured this man must be one of his relatives.

No, Nelson explained through his tears, "***he took my place as the town drunk! He is just like I was.***"

It was Christmas all over again!

Now let me introduce you to a woman I'll call Maria. At another Gospel meeting, she quoted Romans 10:15: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace." Then she told an incredible story. . . .

Her father was killed in an accident four months before she was born. Her mother went into a severe depression. She had no hope for herself or for her three children.

She was taken to a psychiatrist, but he couldn't help her. "Put her in a psychiatric ward," he suggested. Maria and her brothers and sisters couldn't bring themselves to do it.

As her depression deepened, the family groped in the darkness. They finally called the local "spiritist" to diagnose the problem and give his "prescription." Diagnosis: Someone in the neighborhood had placed a curse on the widow. Prescription: The woman must break off relations with anyone and everyone in the neighborhood.

Her life only grew darker and darker. She eventually grew suicidal.

But God has simple and powerful solutions!

There came a gentle knock at her door. Ladies from a nearby church spoke with her sweetly and warmly. They were inviting people to a special event. A speaker would share words of hope and encouragement.



We'd like you and your family to be our guests, they said.

Something sounded warmly reassuring in the words of these kind ladies. The widow and her family decided to go—and you can imagine the rest of the story! The people groping in the darkness saw a great light! Today they are deeply grateful, praising the Lord for the beautiful feet of the beautiful ladies who brought them the Gospel of peace!

Our teams reached Nelson. Our teams reached Maria and her family. *Our teams are doing their part. We must do ours!*

It is a privilege to be involved in the work of God. It is a privilege to support these dedicated workers as they bring a message that heals broken lives, that brings eternal life! Santa's helpers have nothing on our teams!

I could fill pages with true stories of people coming to the kingdom of the beloved Son thanks to your support of our workers in the field. During this Cuba visit alone, we saw over 230 decisions for Christ and 50 baptisms. This is just one tiny program led by one small group. The results of the efforts of all 700 of our workers there will only be known on the other side of eternity!

But some of our workers in this nation are facing terrible challenges—and this is the most important reason I'm writing to you today. . . .

Hurricane Matthew pounded the major cities of Santiago, Bayamo, and Holguin. In the easternmost city of Punta de Maisí, the wind and sea made a joint assault. The enraged ocean attacked from the south, east, and north. The only escape route was to the west.

Nineteen of our church-planting pastors and their families fled Hurricane Matthew with only the clothes they were wearing.

When they returned after the storm, **their homes were completely gone**—even the debris had been carried away by the horrible storm.

A church in California has pledged to send \$10,000 when approved by their elders. It's a beautiful gift—but the need is even greater because of the massive devastation and loss. It will take \$2,000 to build each family a basic structure for housing.

When I told Pedro, our national coordinator, that we only had \$10,000 pledged so far, he was jubilant. "At least five families will be able to live and sleep in a house!" he



exclaimed. “Right now they’ve bought cloth and have tied it from trees to make a roof over their heads.”

My friend, let me just tell you what I feel: ***I think it would be grand to be able to announce to those workers they will get to spend Christmas in a house again.***

It would take a total of \$38,000. But if the first \$10,000 pledged is approved, we’ll only need \$28,000 more.

I hope we can “back up” and get the big picture of what God is doing in Cuba. He could have prevented the hurricane, but He also knows the need of millions who need “rainmaker” events that bring water to crops. It makes sense that those who are blessed share the blessing of those who got soaked in the process!

Punta de Maisí today is a perfect picture of this truth. One of our earliest workers in that city one day told me how difficult it was for him to provide water for his family. He was spending no less than two hours a day fetching water to keep his family alive. He needed a water pump for a well—he was willing and able to dig the well with his own hands! The pump was a mere \$85, but this was a fortune to him. So we bought him a pump right then and there.

Months later, at a regional gathering, a man walked up to me and asked if I remembered him. I often get asked that and my sad response was “No I don’t.” So he reminded me about the water pump we had purchased for him. Now he was elated to report that when he dug the well and connected the pump, in just a few minutes he had filled all the containers in his household.

Before he figured out how to shut it off, he had spilled more water than he had captured!

In that moment, he realized that he had the ability to supply water for the **whole village**. In doing so, the message for the town was beautifully obvious: *Jesus offers a river of life!* “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again,” Jesus said in John 4:14. “The water that I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Sharing has always been at the heart of the Gospel. From the beginning, sharing has been in the heart of our workers in Punta de Maisí. And Christmas truly is for sharing.

**No, we cannot wrap a house in Christmas
paper for our homeless church-planting
families in Punta de Maisí. . . .
*But we can wrap a family in a house!***



So I invite you to give as generously as you can today. In the meantime, may you have a most wonderful Christmas—crowning a year when together, we preached Christmas all year long! I hope to hear from you right away so that we can get these 19 families “home for Christmas”!

Gratefully in Christ,

Dr. Manny Fernandez

P.S. I thank you for the sharing you have already done, and I thank you in advance for being a channel of God’s love again today. May God keep His blessings flowing to you . . . and flowing through you!