



July 1, 2019

Dear Ministry Partners,

I trust you're enjoying a happy summer in the company of family and friends.

As I write, I am in-between trips to Cuba. I just got back from one trip to the island, and I'm soon turning around and going back for more.

I'm intensely focused on Cuba this summer because the need there is desperate. Let me explain—first, by asking you a question:

Would you like a “special” experience . . . or would you rather have an “extra special experience” instead? Be careful. It's a trick question. In Cuba, it's between the rock and the hard place. *In Cuba, “special” isn't necessarily a good thing.*

The final decade of the 20th century—roughly 1990 to 2000—was known in Cuba as the “Special Period” (in Spanish: *Período especial*). It seems almost tongue-in-cheek . . . because the “Special Period” was awful. During those 10 years, Cuba's economy turned severe.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union set crisis in motion for the Cuban people. Their country lost some 80 percent of its imports and exports. Food and medicine imports stopped or dramatically slowed. Cuba's gross domestic product dropped by 34 percent.

There were extreme shortages of gasoline, diesel, and other petroleum derivatives. The effects were immediate—and painful. Cuba is entirely dependent on fossil fuels to operate, so the major structures of Cuban society—transportation, industrial, and agricultural systems—were paralyzed. Their agriculture runs on industrial tractors, combines, and harvesters, all of which required petroleum to run. Cuba's industrial systems were shell-shocked.

Meanwhile, the lives of average people were radically complicated.

- Waiting for a bus could take three hours.
- Power outages could last 16 hours.
- Food consumption was cut back to one-fifth its previous levels. Even though U.S. law allowed humanitarian aid in the form of food and medicine by private groups, *the average Cuban lost 20 pounds.*
- Cubans resorted to eating anything they could find. In the Havana zoo, peacocks and buffalo disappeared.
- Cats disappeared from the streets—and appeared on dinner tables.

Before 1959, Cuba had as many cattle as people. Today, meat is so scarce that it is a crime to kill and eat a cow. To combat illegal cow eating, the government established harsh penalties. A person can get more jail time for killing a cow—10 years in prison—than killing a human. Those who sell beef without government permission can get three to eight years in prison. Eaters of illegal beef can get three to 12 months in prison.



World Link Ministries



Cubans finally got relief from their “Special Period” in the year 2000 when Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela emerged as Cuba’s primary trading partner and diplomatic ally. (This also happened to be the year that our ministry first arrived in Cuba.) Then the Obama administration somewhat normalized relations with Cuba. As a result, multitudes of American tourists flooded the country. The island’s economy improved.

But last week while I was in Cuba, we heard dramatic news. The U.S. government has changed its position. As I drove by a major port, I saw two cruise ships. By the time we got to the center of the island, our Cuban friends had heard the worldwide news reports: *No more tourist ships would be allowed.*

The man who gave me the news is not a believer (yet). I was surprised by his perceptive take on the international situation. “We know that Mr. Trump is good for the U.S.,” he said. “The economy is the best it has been in 70 years. We know that unemployment in the U.S. is at an all-time low. We here in Cuba, can do nothing but grin and bear it.”

The fact is that the influx of U.S. tourism drove prices sky-high— and drove European tourists away. Now, without the Europeans, and with no Americans, the outlook is grim. And Venezuela has collapsed; that country can no longer come to Cuba’s rescue.

Their situation is impossible.

The word everywhere is that they are in for something *worse* than the “Special Period.” It might be called “Extra Special.” *Extra agonizing.*

As I reflect on the desperation of the people today:

There is no bread in the easternmost province, far from the normal supply chains of Havana. There are long lines wherever people try to buy any goods. What do you do if you are waiting a couple of hours in a line and then you’re told they ran out?

There is no gas for cooking. There is no oil for cooking either. It used to be, if there was no oil for cooking, people would fry an egg using lard from pigs. But what do you do when there is no oil and no egg—and no pigs? In one interview, a poor lady offered the only alternative: “We will have to eat grass like horses.”

In the months of December and January there was a flour crisis. No bread. A man told a reporter: “If I have lunch, there is no dinner. If I have dinner, there is no lunch. But it is worse than that. I have not eaten lunch or dinner the last two days.” *And this man is the local baker.*

For years it has been thought that Cuba’s economic problems were due to their own choices. But moving among them for many years now, I can assure you that their problems are more complicated. The fact is that we have all inherited a sin nature. We cannot shrug off their suffering simply because of politics. *We must do something to help them.*



Our ministry arrived in Cuba at the tail end of the Special Period. Thousands upon thousands have come to Christ. They have a precious, childlike faith. Today **the believers of Cuba are determined to make something good of this crisis. We must stand with them.**

A pastor friend in our network says, “We know this is worse than the Special Period. We know that the U.S. president is making moral and even biblical choices. We are therefore called to suffer and to make the most of this window of opportunity for the Gospel.”

I never expected to see Cuba go from the Special Period to the Extra Special Period. The very thought is burden to my heart, yet again.

I think of the apostle John on the island of Patmos. In Revelation 10, in his God-given vision, he was given a little book—and told to eat it. It would be sweet in his mouth, the angel predicted, but bitter in his stomach.

What does this mean? It means that we can feel good about ourselves, even superior, as we hear the latest news, and gain a perspective on world events—but bitterness comes as we pause to digest the reality of the ramifications . . . as we come to understand the suffering, the tears of the ones actually living in those difficult circumstances . . . the parents who can’t feed their children . . . the families who can’t escape their poverty.

Focusing clearly on their reality should give us a “sharp bitterness” or a “piercing bitterness,” according to the original Greek. We can’t settle for just hearing the news out of Cuba and nodding knowingly. When we ponder the devastation of so many people, when we understand the tragedy of the eternal destiny of anyone who doesn’t know Christ, it should bring a piercing bitterness to our hearts.

In Revelation God reveals to John the catastrophic nature of the days ahead and then gives John something to do about it: “You must prophesy again.” The commandment is forceful; it indicates not just a “one and done” approach to ministry, but a “continuous present”: *You must prophesy again, and again, and again until the very end! No time-outs, no walking away.*

This is why I’m going back. I am due to head back the day after tomorrow. And as painful as it is to see Cuba in this crisis, I can’t wait to go!

In fact, I say to you: Please come with me! If you can’t come with me physically, you can come spiritually! Whatever you do, please come and be part of what God is doing in this amazing Extra Special Period.

The Christians in Cuba, in the midst of their suffering, are very soberly aware of their role. *Are we also aware of our role—we, the church that God has appointed as the greatest missionary church on the globe?*



We must prophesy again, and again, and again. This is our calling in Christ, just as it was for John:
John first heard the Great Commission in Galilee.
He heard the Great Commission again at the Mount of Olives.
Finally, the Revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ brought this “beloved disciple” to a level of awareness of human history until the end.
The Christ who initially called him was the same Christ who declared that he must keep proclaiming the truth to a desperately needy world—which he did, by writing down the Revelation!

Likewise, you and I must continue.

I can’t remember when it has been so hard to write a letter like this to you, but this has been particularly hard for me today. It deeply burdens me. The statistics, the information, may be just “data” for most folks. But for me, images of actual Cubans fill my mind. To imagine the pain what the figures really mean—is pretty hard.

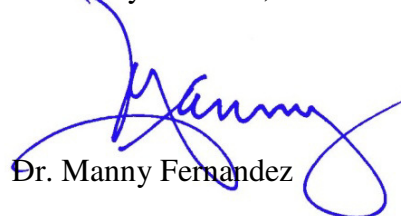
Now I am sharing this with you and asking you to pray before the Lord that He may direct you and me to discover what He wants us to do about this. How would He have us respond? What would Jesus do? Obviously we need your help because they need help. The churches in Cuba are becoming the only resource for the people. Many people can go there just to find aspirin or Tylenol or outdated drugs that are scarce. Everything helps. And the church again becomes God’s Agency to meet both the physical and the spiritual needs.

Please let us join hands together and proclaim like inspired poets that our God saves. Let us proclaim to the Cuban people that the Son wants to walk into their lives and show His mighty arm to save.

How about sending a loaf of bread to hundreds of families through our workers? I’m speaking both literally and figuratively. Due to the urgency of the need, a longtime friend has enabled us to add 100 more workers to the Cuban harvest effort. But our teams need our support more than ever. Please do what you can.

There is a famine in Cuba: Can you spare your loaves and fishes?

Gratefully in Christ,



Dr. Manny Fernandez

P.S. Send help soon. Please come running!