

## SW DISTRICT CUBA CONNECTION

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### Be Thankful

Isaiah 6: 8: Then I heard the Lord asking, “Whom should I send as a messenger to my people? Who will go for us?”

*And I said, “Lord, I’ll go! Send me.”*

I just returned from two weeks in Cuba. I write this monthly article and I am sure my wife would say, “You are always just returning from Cuba.” The on going joke is I live in Cuba and come to the United States to visit. I cannot really disagree with this comment but because of Hurricane Matthew I did have to cancel one eight-day trip. For me to cancel a trip to Cuba there had to be a major catastrophe either in the United States or Cuba. There was....Hurricane Matthew!

We knew the storm was going between Haiti and the eastern tip of Cuba in the Baracoa area. I think it is human nature to say, “I pray for them and hope for the best.” But then it all disappears in the sunset. The next day you see pictures in Haiti of the destruction and devastation and a short comment Baracoa in Cuba also had damage. You never really see any pictures out of Cuba because of the lack on communication but we knew there was some damage. Immediately there are fund drives and UMCOR drives for Haiti and justifiably the destruction was terrible. No news, no fund drives for Cuba nobody talks about it because no one knew much other than there was “some damage.”

November 15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> I was in the Guantanamo mountain range area. From the city of Guantanamo the road to Baracao was winding and twisting gradually up the mountainside. On arrival to Baracoa, an old city built right on the coastline of Cuba. As the locals say, “right in front of the wide-open angry sea.” There are no beaches, the rock cliffs serves as a shoreline about twenty to twenty-five feet below the city street. The days I spent in Baracoa you could see the roll of the wave’s crashing into the cliffs below, not a place you would want to be during a hurricane. You could see where the term “angry sea” came from.

Each twist and turn going there you could see more damage and the tree's that were still standing were stripped of any leaves or palm fronds. On the arrival to Baracoa, a roofless city.... 25,000 homes without roofs or walls, I was not prepared for what I saw. I am no means a storm expert but my eyes were seeing damage I have never witnessed before and my heart aches knowing this is Cuba. What I mean by that is I know there are no hurricane relief efforts and no resources to repair damages.

I saw pictures and heard stories of waves going over the top of five story buildings. The single story buildings on the coastline are gone. The five-story buildings are uninhabitable and have no front left. We walked the streets one night the eerily site of candle lights in some of these apartments just because they had no where else to go, made you sick to your stomach. Life was not easy before the storm but now this is the new norm. There 25,000 homes without roofs or walls and the Cuba government have told the people that they can repair 1,000 a year. Run those numbers real quick and you can see why it's the new norm.

On the edge of town was a bridge that stood thirty to forty feet above the water line that had been washed out. A temporary cable shuttle boat has been installed but we all know this is Cuba; this bridge will never be rebuilt. What we have now is the new norm.

We took the "cable boat" across the river to a church on the other side. We walked off the road about half a mile, through mud, over down trees, across fallen trees and on each side all we could see were roofless homes and downed trees. We finally reached this very humble home....we could call it a shack but it is someone's home. You could see daylight through all the walls and roof but this was home for this family. We sat and talked with the pastor, he told me about his family of four sons and his wife. I asked him where he went during the storm. This home had no bathroom so many times even in a shack they go to the bathroom. He stood there and said everything he had was here in this home. He stayed right in his house and prayed. I could barely speak knowing this man's faith and what he must have gone through.

Through all of this there were no deaths, only two missing; one the Cuban government and the other the National Party of Cuba.

From Baracoa we left to Maisi the best way to explain this road is straight up with more twists and turns. Tens of thousands of royal palm trees on the mountain side were blown flat on the ground. I have seen these pillars of strength trees standing tall throughout Cuba but they were no match to the winds of Matthew.

We stopped at a little Methodist church in Maisi talked and pray with the Pastora. We left her some funds for reconstruction and some other items I am sure were needed. One item we left was a blanket, it was late afternoon and I knew that blanket would feel very good in the cool night mountain air.

We could not stay any longer because we wanted to get down the mountainside before dark. So we held hands and prayed, "God give them strength to face the many challenges that lay ahead of them."

We headed down the mountainside with memories and scenes in my mind I will never forget.

I tell this story because it needs to be told or you would never know what is happening on the mountainside in Guantanamo, Cuba.

If this has touched a place in your heart and you want to assist them, please email me at: [dancc@comcast.net](mailto:dancc@comcast.net)