

First Missions – Cuba

First Missions – Pioneering Workers – Cuba

Cuba

June 2, 2024

CUBA

When did the workers first arrive? 1948

Who were the first brother workers? Roy Lacy, Tom Law and Clarence Anderson (1944); perhaps Wilbur Walker (1949)

Who were the first sister workers?

Who was the first to profess?

Who were the first native workers to go in the work and When?

First Native Brother Worker:

First Native Sister Worker:

When & Where was the first Gospel Meeting?

When & Where was the first Sunday fellowship meeting?

When & Where was the first baptism?

When & Where was the first convention?

Where have subsequent conventions been held?

Where is the convention now held?

Who have the Overseers been?

NOTE: After Fidel Castro imposed restrictions on religious activities, from 1959 to 1961, 80% of the professional Christian priests, missionaries and ministers left Cuba. For 15 years, Irishman Willie Pollock was the only worker able to go in and visit the friends in Cuba.

In July 1992, restrictions were eased, Workers returned and meetings resumed.

Willie Pollock

1989 Glencoe, Australia Convention – Keeping a Keen Spirit

(from Ireland laboured in the West Indies and Cuba for many years).

There was an investigation in that Island, on our Friends, one by one, a man alone and then his wife alone. Written down was what religion, when they professed, and so on. The investigator said to us, "I have the testimonies of all your Friends here, and I cannot find any books, literature or buildings. All answered the same thing, and they all believe the same thing, and there is something holding them together. I don't understand what it is, but they all know one another and all look alike."

You people here all look alike too. We are very thankful that the spirit of God is holding us together. The love of God brings a unity and we want to keep that before the world. We have a united Ministry, a united front and there is no contradiction of truth.

This investigator said, "There is one thing missing. I have not been able to find a membership book." I said, "You won't find it." He said, "Is there one?" "Yes." "Don't you have it?" "No." "Who has it?" "God has it." "I would like to see it." "So would I—to see if my name is on it." We explained to him that man counts the heads but God counts the hearts and has His Book of Life for those who have life from God.

As a result of that investigation, we were counted out. The verdict was, "You are rejected. You don't qualify for a religion or a party." Our work was no longer legal so we went underground. We went out on the street with no Workers, no Conventions, no meetings. That was the finish. When thinking of, "You don't qualify as a religion," a joy came into my heart, and I thanked God that we don't qualify as a religion, and I hope we never will. "You are rejected." That was a comfort. It is like the Master, the stone that was rejected by the builders.

For thirty years those people have had no Convention, no fellowship meetings, special meetings or Workers. The door is closing, but one door cannot be closed, the door of the secret place. God is doing more listening these days to that country because our Friends are praying more to make up for what is lacking. There is no liberty to have fellowship. Our Friends said, "Would you make us a study list. We cannot meet together but we can study at home, and just to think all Mexico and Central America are studying the same chapter or subject this week, it should concentrate our thoughts on the Workers and Friends. It draws us into fellowship in meditation." They cannot have fellowship in legal meetings, but they have fellowship. Friends, we can have fellowship without meetings and meetings without fellowship if conditions are not right. I hope we would not take for granted the liberty we have.

Willie Pollock – Work in Cuba
Hiroshima Batch, February 9, 1990

The word “manna ” means “What is this?” Christ said that He was the true bread that came down from Heaven, and people said “Who is this? ” Manna was not given as a diversion, just as a change, or for pleasure. It was given for their existence, and so was Christ. Jesus was called our Great High Priest. In Latin it’s “Pontifus” which means a bridge. Jesus was the only bridge, or mediator between God and man.

Jesus didn’t make himself a priest. He offered himself, and God made him a priest forever. Jesus said, “No man takes this honour on himself. ” Saul in the Old Testament was anointed of God and David wouldn’t lift up his hand against him. God had made Saul the king, and it was God who removed him.

Paul said. “God enabled me, putting me into the Ministry.” I didn’t get into the Ministry by myself. We are all a little bit like the son who said to his father, when asked to go and work in the vineyard, he said “I won’t!” but afterward repented and went.

Willie told us he offered for the Work on VJ Day – Victory over Japan. The day the Japanese surrendered, was declared a holiday and everyone was celebrating. There was no gasoline available and he and some others went quite a distance on their bikes. they always went to the midweek Bible Study, but that day it got later than they intended and they were afraid they weren’t going to make it back in time, but they did. Wilson Reed was at that meeting (August 15, 1945). I had felt the tug of the Work from age 22 to 25 but because of the war, no young men were going out in the Work. I was fighting against God but He won and I lost. God put me in the Ministry. God put us in. He will keep us. He will take us out. David wouldn’t lift his hand to harm the Lord’s anointed one; Saul.

Jesus said, “I have power to lay down my life, and power to take it again. ” Did He mean God gave Him power to take His life off the altar? No. He meant to take it again at the resurrection. God doesn’t give us power to take our lives back off the altar.

Mother was a Presbyterian, but not satisfied. She wanted a son like Hannah to give back to God, and she prayed, meaning she would give her son to become a Presbyterian preacher. But when I was three years old, Mother professed. Then she made a vow she would be willing to give me to God as one of His servants. Over 35 years ago Mother died. She was calling for me at the end of her life. But I was deep in Mexico and didn’t get the message till weeks afterward that she died and had called for me. I remembered that Mother had made a vow to God she would lend me to Him, to serve Him as long as I lived. I felt Mother must have died satisfied, keeping her vow. I enabled Mother to keep her vow to the Lord. It’s a wonderful thing if we can encourage others to do this.

We had Gospel meetings in Cuba, where a circus was travelling. A clown in the circus professed and also some spectators. His wife was a dancer, and she also professed. That clown became the elder of the church with meetings in his home. Three young girls who were spectators at the circus also made their choice, and all three offered for the Work. They’ve never had the opportunity to start out, but they care for others with the heart of Workers, encouraging the flock.

We visited the friends one time and asked them “Why do you go on?” You aren’t allowed to have meetings and no Workers can labour in Cuba now. ” The clown said, “Because God’s servants left me in the Way, and when they return I want them to find me where they left me—going on.” There have been no legal meetings in Cuba for 30 years. Restrictions have been lifted recently for tourists only because Castro needs foreign currency.

I would like to tell you of the time I was called into police headquarters for investigation. They said, “You’re deceiving the people. ” They said I couldn’t visit their homes, even if I didn’t have meetings. I must stay in a hotel which they appointed for me. The official said, “I’d advise you to just go down to the beach and have a good time.” He said if I went to the homes of the friends I’d talk to them at the dinner table the same as I would in meetings. So that night as many friends as could all went down to the beach and had a baptism. There were spies and informers everywhere pretending to be fishermen. We knew we were being watched. One of the saints had been a guerilla in Castro’s army and he told us, “This is too dangerous. We can’t stay here!” But I said, “We’ll stay. We’re going to have this baptism.” Suddenly there was a power failure and everything was blacked out. We quickly had the baptism – the lights came on again, and we all scattered.

The officials want to separate the Workers from the Saints. They think if they smite the shepherds, the sheep will be scattered. But the sheep won’t scatter. The end of fellowship doesn’t come at the end of meetings. When the clown was questioned by the authorities he said, “What harm are we doing?” We’ll encourage each other if only two of us meet together.

The brother who was baptised that time said he had never met a Worker before, but workers among the friends encourage them, and he said, “The fellowship is even better when a Worker is here.” Friends don’t sing in the meetings in Cuba, lest they be reported. The guerilla told us he used to risk his life in Castro’s army, for nothing. “Now I’m risking is for a purpose.” He said, “When I professed it was because of fear. I could be killed at any time. But now I go on because of love.” He visits the friends just like a worker would. He has written a few very touching hymns. One says, “Midst shame and scorning, pressing onward ever onward.” This guerilla has a meeting in his home although it is against the law. His neighbour is a government official, and he raises pigs which is also against the law. So neither of them squeal on the other one.

(Willie was only allowed to visit in the City of Havannah, Cuba one week every three years. He was severely restricted. It was in 1956 Willie arrived in Cuba from England, right during the revolution when Castro overthrew the former dictator.) Clarence Anderson told me of one brother who was going through a tunnel, and asked if I would go and take his place. When you enter a tunnel, the entrance looks big but it seems to get smaller and smaller, like you might get stuck in there. But when you finally come out, you find the exit is just as large as the entrance was.

When Castro turned the government into communism, all Americans had to leave, but I had British citizenship so I could visit though I was the only one for 15 years. One time I landed at night and everyone in that town was so friendly. The reason was that one of the communist officials had two daughters professing. He came and warned me of one home not to go to. My telegram saying I was coming had been intercepted and the officials said, 'We know these servants aren't doing anything wrong. I'll take the responsibility for them.' But this one family of saints were in bad favour with the government officials, so I just didn't go there during that visit.

Only once the officials wouldn't let me leave Havannah. Saints came 18 hours by bus to see me. We couldn't have meetings, but we walked through the park, and went to the zoo, and spent time visiting about the things of the Kingdom. Those who have the Lord in their hearts will find a way for fellowship. We can have fellowship without meetings. (It is also possible to have meetings without fellowship.)

The friends asked for the same Study List we were using in Mexico and other countries. They said it would help them to know others were studying the same subject they were. When God's time comes, no politician can hinder God's work.

Willie Pollock
Sharon, Ohio Convention – 2000

In Cuba, for years there was no tree. During the revolution, a circus was moving around, and the same people that were in the circus went to our mission. The clown and his wife professed, and some of the people that watched them professed, and the church was in the clown's home and he was the elder of the church. There were two girls that went out into the work from that little church. But when Communism came, they were arrested. Their Bibles and hymn books taken, they were arrested one day and released the next day. They told our friends, "We will find a way that two people cannot meet together to talk about the Bible." That shows us the importance of fellowship. That shows us that if two people can get together they can encourage one another.

They found a way and for thirty years there were no meetings, no conventions, no workers. During the dark years of the early 60s, two girls offered for the work but there was no work. We had asked them before that in an earlier visit, in a little talk around the table, because we couldn't meet together, we asked them, "Why do you go on?" There are no meetings, no workers, no conventions. Magdalia answered, "We go on because we haven't come to the end yet." Emaylda said, "We go on so we won't miss what is yet ahead." If we don't go on, we lose the past; we miss the future, because the best is yet ahead. The man of the home said, "Those who have often encouraged me were those that simply went on," and if I just go on, maybe I can encourage another.

Friends, we do not know the impact there is in just going on, just being in our place. Those girls asked, "What can we do?" We said, "There is no hope right now. You could develop the heart of a worker and live as a saint and go the extra mile, and if someday you can be in the work, you will have the heart of a sister worker," and for 30 years they did that. The anchor of hope is used not only in the storm but also in the waiting time...the elders asked if we could make up a study list for them. They said we can't meet together to study, but it would draw us into fellowship and meditation just to know that all the workers and friends in Mexico, Central America, and Panama are studying this chapter and so we did that. Those were the difficult years.

One of the two girls who offered for the work. Emaylda felt she was too old to go into the work after 30 years, but she said, "I will go with Magdalia as a saint, just filling in." She went with a heart problem and said, "I will look after that problem next week when I come back. It is more important to go with Magdalia to have visits and make the rounds, and have the meetings." After a busy day she sat down and died. She wasn't in the work but her heart was. Today there is a tree in Cuba

Willie Pollock

In one place in Cuba during the revolution...One Sunday morning they were arrested by the army and taken to the cartel, or whatever you call it. They were warned and one soldier told one of the girls, we're going to take away your meetings and your Bibles, your liberty, and we will see to it two people can't meet together to talk about the Bible. This girl (who afterwards offered for the work) told him, "You may take away our meetings and our bibles, but you can't take away what God has put into our hearts." That is the root. In that island, there is no open work. Three girls offered for the work, they can be in the work but can't be on any lists. They said, "What about us now? They canceled our meetings, our conventions. What about us?"

We said there is no legal work, but you can work and not be on any workers' list, but you can live as saints and have a worker's heart and do that little bit more to keep the unity of the spirit amongst God's people. For years they have been doing that. That is the root. They hope that someday there will be workers again and there will be open work again and gospel meetings. The baptisms have to be done in secret. It is against the law and punished if they get us, but so far they haven't gotten us yet. They hoped that this country would liberate them, but they have lost hope. Their prayer is, "Come, Lord Jesus, come."

Clarence Anderson
Special Meetings – Canea, Western Australia, 1977

A few years ago, in 1950, my companion and I were in Cuba, where in the first two years a little church was formed and it continued until it was not permitted by the Government to have meetings any longer. But after the Communist took over one of our brothers went over for a visit and he wanted to talk with the authorities in connection with continuing meetings, with their permission; He even gave

his testimony and told of the way we met together and that it was all a service of love. He was told, "It's something we have never met with before, you will have to take it to the higher authorities".

So, he did and he went over the whole thing again, but they hadn't heard anything like it either and he was told to go higher again – which he did. They could hardly believe what he was saying and he was asked for the names of the people so that they could investigate them one by one. Then they would give him their answer. We are thankful there are 45 or 50 there who are faithful, loyal brothers and sisters. He was told he could do what he wanted to do and that they could have their meetings while they investigated. That was over ten years ago, but you couldn't do it now. Their inspectors went ahead and asked different questions and everything was written down.

It took nearly three months and finally it happened to be that this brother was in the hotel when the inspector called – it was the last place. The man who had done the investigating said, "We have investigated them all and we are astonished. We have investigated young folks, asked them questions and tried to pin them down. We have talked to the elderly people, people that don't know how to read or write, those in business and in all of your friends, we haven't met with one contradiction. Everyone has answered exactly the same. How do you do it? We cannot do anything like that."

Our brother said, "It is not of us; we have no books or church rules and regulations". But they had received the same spirit, the same thing that we have received, and they had been taught by the same spirit. The inspector said, "It is a remarkable thing. You are a better Communist than we are". Our brother told him, "We are not interested in being a Communist, we are a united people, but do you think we can still have the meetings?" The inspector said they couldn't see why not as they hadn't heard anything from the report as it hadn't been turned in to them.

But when our brother went down, he was told that it was alright and that the matter had been shelved, he said, "No, we want the permission from the authorities". This time he had to pass over the Cubans, they were the highest men of the Communist party, the Russians. They would not even come out to meet him but sent a message to our brother stating – "This movement cannot be recognised by the Government because they don't pay any taxes and we cannot keep up with them".

Our brother was then ordered to leave. That was a Saturday. So, our brother returned to where some of the friends were gathered. One lady who had been a Communist said, "You had better go, because the authorities will come and check on us". And he said, 'Alright I'll go, but if you say stay, then I'll stay'. She said with tears in her eyes, "You had better go". And so, he left the country.

That Sunday morning, as they were gathered together, the Communists came in, just as they were on their knees praying. They were all taken off to jail and held there for 48 hours in solitary confinement. After their release they were told they could no longer have the meetings as they would be considered as enemies of the country. One little sister spoke up, "Mr. Officer, you can take away our meetings, our Bibles and our hymn books, but you can never take away what God has written on our hearts". The officer was silent because no one could deny that.

Now 16 years have come and gone and that is as true as true can be. No meetings – but by the living of a life silently; speaking and living with those that enquire. Some have been won and added to the flock. There are hopes that there will be 3 more baptised. It is a risk, but it's a wonderful thing what the Lord can do. At one baptism three years ago, a policeman stood there and he said to our brother, "I know what you are here for. I'll just look the other way so you had better hurry and go ahead with it".

Willie Pollock Booyong Convention – 1994

Last year in Cuba, the government brought out a new law permitting home meetings. We were asked to apply. We applied with the fundamentals, with doctrine. The registrar said it was not complete. We went back to the coloured lady where we were living. She said, "I will fix that." She is very expressive and very explosive and she poured herself into that.

As a teenager looking for truth, she met God's servants. She said, "This is life to me. This means everything to me. I wouldn't give it up for anything. I am willing to give my life for God's servants, not for their nationality, but for their sacrifice and for their love amongst us here." W

We took that in and the registrar said, "Yes, that is what I needed. Doctrine is theory, but the testimony of your people, that is life. That is the relationship of you people to your church." They gave us permission for three one-hour meetings in three homes weekly. We are very thankful for that.

TTT Editor's Note: In the absence of a written account, the above information has been compiled by the TTT Editor from various sources. Corrections or additions are most welcome; as well as other historical accounts for this country [Email TTT](#)