

married them here. When Victor Toranzo knew that the revolution was victorious in Cuba, he immediately came back to Cuba and he was appointed to the local Baptist Church in *El Cristo*, very near to *Santiago de Cuba*. He had a very good connection with Raul Castro, Juan Almeda, and all the leaders he was with while they were together in the *Sierra Maestra* when there were only eighty or one-hundred people. He continued his ministry but, more or less, in this difficult time, maybe 1960, he heard that one of his friends in the *Sierra Maestra*

large farms, businesses, and that kind of thing. Did they do the same thing to the churches? In other words, did they seize the church grounds and the structures? Did they take those over? How did that work? Was it a slow process or was it all at once?

R: It was a long process. They took the colleges and schools in one year. The year after that there were different confrontations with different churches. For example, Fidel sent one-hundred sixty Catholic priests out in a ship. He also had a very big confrontation with the Assembly of God Church and took their seminary in *Manacas*, in *Santa Clara* province, and put some American missionaries in jail as well and he said that the church was to only have services in official sanctuaries. What does that mean? We had a lot of missions and congregations in houses and he stated that there would be no more of that. We were free to have services but only in official sanctuaries, not in private houses, not in rented houses, and not in houses that were the property of the church; if it was a house and not a sanctuary, we could not have services in that place.

picture of John Branscomb in this church. And, you know, for me to see the picture of John Branscomb, because I knew that he was a great Methodist leader and he loved the Cuban Methodist people, this was a challenge for my personal spiritual life. As you asked me, at that time we were living in a continual struggle of every aspect of life. We had the reality of the church. Many people thought, at that time, that to be in a socialistic society or country, the

but she was born in Tampa, had more than twenty missions during her appointment. In *Báguanos*, I was the substitute of Eulalia Cook and she had the *Parroquia Mayor*, the main parish, organized there and there were fifteen or twenty missions. We had the *Escuela Agrícola Industrial* in *Preston* with a great number of missions. We had the Mayari Church, where Morel Robinson, an American missionary, had fifteen or twenty other missions. Then we did pastors and we had more than one hundred churches and missions in *Oriente*. God guided me to call the young people and we had a plan that we called *sembradores del evangelio*, to put the seeds in the air. We sent the young people with Christian literature to participate in the illiteracy *Jesus'*

History, and many other materials from the Bible for people to learn how to read and write. We sent hundreds and hundreds of these young people to all the *Oriente* mountains and rural areas to visit house by house and preach the Gospel to every house, which, at that time, was not prohibited. They also gave the people the Christian literature. In six months they visited ninety-five thousand homes, but not in the cities and towns, only in the rural areas and *Oriente* mountains. This was a great experience for me. When I was working with this group of young people, I think about political problems and about the economic and social future of Cuba; I was only thinking about my task of distributing the word of God to our people, especially in the rural areas. My plan was to have the *compaña de lo segadores*, or the harvest, after six months with the daily reports that were made to me telling me how many houses everyone visited. Our plan was to have 324 young Methodist people working for six months as harvesters in one *barrio municipal*, or neighborhood. But, when the first group of sixty or seventy *segadores* (harvest) for the first experience, we trained this sixty or seventy young people and sent them to the same number of *barrios municipales* to work, eat, and live; it was at that time that Fidel spoke and said that we could only have services in the official sanctuaries. Maybe I had some responsibility for this situation.

D: In other words he said that for you?

R:

D: Were other churches doing the same thing?

R: Well, especially the *Bando Evangelico de Gedeon*; a Cuban native evangelical denomination. They had more or less the same program and I think that we were both responsible for the restrictions.

D: Do you remember the year and the month that Fidel did that?

R: . . . actually but . . .

D: So that pretty much brought the whole program to an end. How long were you able to do that program before it was discontinued?

R: Well, we had the six months of *sembradores de evangelio*; visiting every day and going house by house. Of course, God helped me in a special way. Why, because at that time, or before that time, the government Health Department campaigned to end the malaria problem and

to exterminate the Egyptian Mosquitoes. The chief of this campaign in all of *Oriente* province was a very, very good Methodist, Dr. Manuel Garcias. After that, he came to the United States and he now lives in East Florida. He did great work and they successfully rid the *Oriente* province of the malaria sickness and the Egyptian Mosquito. The government, under his leadership, made a specific map of the *Oriente* province and he gave me a copy of this work and, because of this, I now knew how to get to all the rural areas, how many houses there were, and how many people lived there.

D: So it was almost like a census?

R:

because all the other district superintendents and church leaders were only thinking about when we would leave the country. **[End of Tape]**

D: **[Beginning of new tape]** So they were already trying to leave the country.

R: I was sorry for them because I knew that they had a great fear about the future and they had the same sentiment as we had before about the future of their children.

D: They were distracted by that to the point of not being able to think ahead in Cuba?

R: In Cuba, and they did not think about the future of the Cuban church and so. When I had the

D: So you were very proud about explaining what you accomplished and they were not receptive to it at all. They just pointed out to you the fact that Castro had put an end to this.

R: They felt that we did not have a future with this kind of work and that I was crazy and that I was an idealist and not thinking with common sense. But when I went back to *Holguín* and was with the group of young people, I felt like a new person and we said that together we would go ahead.

D: Regardless of what they said in *Havana*.

R: I got away from them in *Havana*. I only asked of them one thing; that they permit me to promote and receive the offering that the Methodist Churches in *Oriente* gathered for the advancement plan. Since that was my region, they permitted me to do so. Then we asked all the Churches, because they saw all our work and how the young people sacrificed their time and their daily life, and they answered our calling in a big way and we had twenty-five cents for each one every day.

D: Let me make sure I understand here. So, when you instituted this program and it was working successfully, Castro ended it. Did he end it before you went back to *Havana* to explain what you were doing or was the program still underway when you went back to *Havana*?

R: No, he made the new restrictions when we were in the experience step of the harvest. We visited all the rural areas and mountains and distributed the literature and Bible and New Testament, but when we were preparing the six months of harvest, to have the young people now in one place for six months instead of visiting one place a day, that was when Castro made the restrictions. At

How many of you would like to volunteer full-time for two years as lay missionaries in Cuba

D: So that kind of work was allowed?

R: Yes, because they would be appointed to an official sanctuary. That way we had a person living in a parsonage because, if not, the government could take an empty parsonage.

D: So, if the parsonages are empty that means the government takes them, but if somebody is living there, even a volunteer, they would leave it alone.

R: Not a volunteer but a pastor, a leader, or a preacher.

D: As long as one of your missionaries was in the parsonage, even if they were only eighteen years old or nineteen years old without any real training, they could still say that they were the pastor? You make them a pastor, they were a pastor? And the government recognized this?

R: Yes, they were the pastor. We began a new time in our ministry at that time. Every year and every month more people left the country, more restrictions from the government were passed down, and more executions took place. However, despite all of that activity, we were giving a message of salvation and hope; not in political matters but in spiritual matters.

D: Let me ask you about the degree of support for the revolution in *Holguín* *Holguín*
very close to *Oriente* province? How close was it?

R: *Holguín* is two-hundred kilometers from *Santiago de Cuba* and . . .

D: Would you say that *Holguín* was supportive of Castro and very involved in the guerilla movement? How was that area affected by the revolution or rebellion?

R: In *Oriente* it was a difficult situation. For example, the chief of the army in *Oriente* remember who it was at that time, but he was a very important army chief for Batista, was killed in the streets of *Holguín*. This was a very difficult time because the government put a group of people in jail and executed five or eight people they said

strong in our principles and very clear about what our task was during this difficult time for Cuba. For that reason, we were happy to be in Cuba in that situation. We saw how God took care of us in every bad situation. Everything was for the glory of God. I said that my file in the secret police of Cuba must be a very big file because I was in jail different times and so.

D: We will talk about that in the next few days.

through the special program that you put together, which had a degree of success but then was curtailed by Castro. Can we take that up to 1963 and what you were doing in the Methodist Church up to that time?

R: At the same time that we were having the great, wonderful, and victorious experience, the general situation in the Methodist Church in Cuba was very disappointing. For example, I think annual conference because all of the pastors were thinking about the political situation and about other matters, not about preaching the Gospel in Cuba. We only had one pastoral retreat in *Matanzas* seminary. The cabinet made the appointment of the new leader for the New Year, but it was during a very disoriented situation. Thanks be to God that I could have a different situations in my life. As I told you, when I went back to *Holguín* and *Oriente* and I met with the wonderful group of young people, I was in another world; not in the world of the fear that the other Methodist Churches in Cuba had. At the same time, I had some family difficulties. For example, my wife was a public school teacher for primary school in *Holguín*. It was nice for us to have two salaries because a good amount of both salaries went to the budget for the twenty-five cents for the young people. But the political situation in education was very hard and the government told every teacher that they much teach communism and atheism in the schools and we said, this is not for us. Also, in December of 1963, our fourth child was born, Armando Jr., the pastor here in Christ United Methodist Church. So we had four children and my wife unable to work in the school and take care of the children and she did not want to teach the communist curriculum and she resigned her teaching position. This created a more difficult family budget, but we were happy to do that because this was for the best. We also had, at that time, a three family house. One of my brothers, he was married after the death of my mother, lived on the farm with my father and my oldest sister lived in *Yaguaramas*. One of my other brothers, Manolo, worked in *Cienfuegos* and was married and had a home in *Cienfuegos*. As a pastor, I was in *Oriente*, but I learned many of their problems.

D: So when they left the country, your father particularly, did he go to live with your other brothers and sisters? Where did they go?

R: They went mainly to Orlando.

D:

R: No, 1965 to 1968.

D: So they all, more or less, came to Orlando.

R: Yes, they came to Orlando and one of my sisters went to Puerto Rico. Her husband was a dentist and they worked there but eventually moved to Miami. My two youngest sisters, Oilda and Idelisa, were blessed by God and by the Methodist Church. In 1957 or so, when we had an international evangelical campaign with more than one-hundred twenty American preachers for one week in every Methodist Church in Cuba, there was a pastor from the Methodist Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan that visited the *Cienfuegos* Church where they were members. When he went back to his church in Grand Rapids, he made a report of what he did and saw in Cuba and there was a Methodist family, the Thomas family, that told him they would be delighted to have Methodist young women with them in their home with their family. When he told our pastor in *Cienfuegos*, my sister, Oilda, the second youngest sister, was selected and she went to Grand Rapids to study in high school. One or two years afterward, the family said that they would like to invite the other sister. And our youngest sister, Idelisa, went to Grand Rapids and studied also. Oilda is a widow now, but she has three children and four or five grandchildren in Orlando and Idelisa, who turned seventy-one years old last April, is living in San Diego and has a very nice family. She married a very, very nice American man. But they like to live here in Florida, speaking Spanish. (laughter)

D: So, by 1968 you were probably the last one in your family that remained in Cuba, correct?

R: No, I had two brothers and one sister that remained in Cuba even when I came to the United States in 1990. One of them, Jesus, the only one of us who has died at this time, was a very important person in the government. He worked in the diplomatic office for the government in Canada, France, and Panama. That was very hard for my father because, as a revolutionary official, he could not have any communication with our father. This was very hard for my father, but this is the life and this was no different than every other family in Cuba. My father in th3n e(e)4(st s)3 Tm[]

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