

ECONOMIC CHANGE RAISES CONCERN FOR THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF CUBA



A small group of office staff members celebrating Christmas 2020

WHAT IS CHANGING IN CUBA TO RAISE CONCERN? WHY ARE THINGS CHANGING NOW?

The economy of Cuba has been suffering greatly since COVID-19 arrived on the island. The country relies heavily on tourism to keep their economy afloat but since travel restrictions have been put in place, tourism has become almost non-existent, even including Cubans living outside of the island. In addition, many international businesses that Cuba has come to rely on have shut down as well. Companies like Western Union have been ordered to stop sending wire transfers which cuts off any support Cubans would have received from family living off the island. Given these two main support systems have halted, the Cuban government is trying to boost the economy in another way; by changing their currency and increasing minimum salary.

The Cuban government has had 2 types of currency for many years; Cuban Pesos and CUC. The government has decided to eliminate the CUC because it does not hold any international value. They have decided to only deal in Cuban Pesos for those living in Cuba and US dollars. Yes, they are now accepting USD because the government recognizes that it is an international currency that is stable and widely used. The government hopes that by dealing in USD it will help the economy become more stable because the USD is so widely used and accepted. Accepting USD might also have something to do with the fact that many Cuban families has a family member or friend living outside of Cuba that sends aid.

Another dramatic change in the Cuban socialist economic system is raising the minimum salary considerably. The average minimum salary was anywhere from \$20-\$25 USD monthly but has now jumped to an incredible \$100 USD monthly. While that may sound like a turn in the right direction, it fails to account for the incredible increase in cost of living expenses. Food, electricity, water, Internet and phone prices are a few of the many things that have skyrocketed leaving the Cubans with the same struggle they were in before, possibly even worse.

HOW ARE THESE CHANGES IMPACTING THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF CUBA?

We have received updates from Pastor Yordanys Diaz, President of the CRC Church in Cuba, telling us of the changes and how it will impact the church and our fellow brothers and sisters in Cuba. He writes: The National Office and CRC supported community programs will be letting go of several employees due to the increase of minimum salary. The Church does not have enough money to meet the government's mandatory salary increase. The National Office will be letting go of 14 of their 20 office employees. Many of those employees carried out the following duties; administrators, president's secretary, office secretary, cooks, cleaners, and chauffeurs/drivers. Without these employees, the office will struggle to maintain their pastors, missionaries, and their families. The Cuban Church will see impacts to their connections to international churches, possible inability to host missionaries and international visitors and maintain their community support and evangelical programs. Without the jobs provided by the CRC, the employees will struggle to feed their families, maintain their households, and find jobs elsewhere that will support them.

The CRC has several community programs that will be negatively impacted. The Cuban CRC has provided services to the elderly and disabled in their communities. Similar to Meals on Wheels in the States, the Cuban CRC has provided Cooking and Cleaning for the Community. They have also run an Elderly Nursing Home, and provided support for families in need and Summer Camps. The Cooking and Cleaning for the Community program will have to let go of 19 cooks and 6 cleaners/washers. The program has also had to reduce the services they provide due to the now higher prices of food and supplies.

The Elderly Nursing Home program had to reduce the services and number of people they are able to serve. They were providing complete care for 6 patients and are only able to provide complete care for 3 of those patients. This program also brought food and care to 17 other elderly patients but have had to withdraw their services due to lack of employees that normally would provide medical care, transport, cleaning and cooking of their meals. This is one of the larger projects the church supports that will greatly be affected by these changes.

The Families in Need program has also had to cut back on their services due to the increase in cost of living expenses. The program helps families with any expenses that they may need assistance with including food, bread, meat, grains, electricity, water, and gas. They report that the cost of most items are 6x higher than in the past therefore limiting what they are able to buy, if it is even available in stores.

The Summer Camps program has felt the effects of the virus and of the economic struggle as well. The participants of summer camps have not been able to gather and participate in several of the camps such as; music camp, youth retreat camp, special needs camp, marriage camps and evangelical camps. The CRC fears for the future of the church if they cannot hold these camps. Not only will the members and participants not be able to interact with other members and grow in fellowship, but also, they will not be able to host evangelical camps, reach new people in the community and help grow the church.

The last major group that will be impacted are the pastors, missionaries and their families. In the past, the pastors and missionaries have received their salary from a combination of tithes and offerings from their members as well as from outside donations from international churches. Since the virus has caused the churches to close and unable to hold in person services, tithes and offerings have decreased considerably. Also, due to the travel restrictions, many international churches have not been able to travel and bring much needed donations that would contribute to their salaries.

HOW CAN WE HELP THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF CUBA?

It is difficult to provide direct support to the Cuban Church at this time, but prayer support is one of the most important things we can do right now. Our brothers and sisters in Christ need our prayer support more than ever before. They can also benefit from any encouragement people can provide via Facebook and/or email. One way to help now is to help raise donations for the Cuban CRC so that when Cuba opens again, the donations will be ready to send via online or in person with mission groups. With donations ready to be sent, the CRC church is hopeful that they can re-instate staff members in both the office and community support programs. The CRC church is confident that while the restrictions are temporary, they will be able to hold services in person soon and with that they will be able to collect tithes and offerings once again. The Cuban CRC has faced many trials over the past several decades, but the church remains faithful and blessed.

Written by: Alissa & Jonatan Gonzalez Alfonso

Emails: ar.vusse11@gmail.com

Jonatan.glez2003@gmail.com

Feel free to contact us if you have any questions or comments.