



WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

Prepared by the Cuban WDP Committee

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“Receive children. Receive me.”

Background Country Information

Geography

The Republic of Cuba is a beautiful, green archipelago in the shape of a caiman (alligator). It is comprised of 4,195 islands, cays and islets of various sorts, including many that are covered only by mangrove. It spans a surface area of 110,860 km², and is the largest Caribbean island located at the entrance of the Gulf of Mexico, and is therefore called “the key of the Gulf”. The oldest cities date back to the sixteenth century, and were founded during the expansion of the Spanish metropolis in our territory. The first seven towns are worth mentioning: Nuestra Señora de la Asunción de Baracoa (1511), San Salvador de Bayamo (1513), La Santísima Trinidad (1514), Santa María del Puerto Príncipe, in Camagüey (1514), Sancti Spíritus (1514), Santiago de Cuba (1515) and San Cristóbal de La Habana (1519).

Cuba is divided into 15 provinces and 168 municipalities. It has a population of 11,116,000 persons. The capital is Havana, with approximately 2 million inhabitants. Havana is a cosmopolitan city, filled with charm and fascination. Founded in its present location in the year 1519, in 1553 it became the principal center of the country’s political, economic, cultural and social life.

According to the National Census of 2012, the population self-classified themselves as 64.1% of white skin, 9.3% black and 26.6% mestizo. The data indicates a decline in birth and population growth rates. There is an increase in emigration and an increase in the population aged 65 years and over. Life expectancy is 77 years for men and 80 for women.

The official and only language of Cuba is Spanish. Our National Symbols are the Flag of the Solitary Star, the Anthem of Bayamo and the National Coat of Arms; all loaded with identity and deeply rooted in the traditions and conscience of the people.

The climate is warm, humid subtropical, with an average temperature of 25.5°C. Cuba’s geographical location and elongated shape favor the passage of hurricanes, like Sandy, for example, that caused serious damages to the city of Santiago de Cuba and the whole eastern section of the country in 2012.

The flora and fauna are marked by the gradual decline of various species, especially birds, insects and mollusks like the Polimita snail. Nevertheless, species such as deer, almiqui (Cuban Solenodon), bats and hutias are preserved, mainly in places like the wetland of the Ciénaga de Zapata, where the rearing of Cuban crocodiles and manjuarí, an autochthonous fossil fish, among other species, has been promoted. The UNESCO declared the wetland of the Ciénaga de Zapata a Biosphere Reserve. Of particular importance among the great variety of birds are the Cuban trogon, which is the *National Bird of Cuba*, whose feathers reproduce the colors of our flag, and the mockingbird, which due to its peculiar song, has served as a symbol of popular singers. One

of the native scorpions has an anti-cancer element in its venom, and is successfully employed in Cuban and international medicine.

The flora is rich and diverse, in correspondence with the climate. The royal palm, which abounds throughout the country, is the *National Tree of Cuba*, and appears on the Coat of Arms as a symbol of the fertility of this land. The *National Flower of Cuba* is the white butterfly jasmine. Our women have used it in days gone by, not only as an adornment for their hair, but also to transmit messages during liberation wars, and as a sign of their being Cuban.

Brief historical review

Cuba is an indigenous word which means “cultivated land”. The native Arawaks from Venezuela and Guyana crossed the Caribbean Sea and settled here because of the fertility of the soil. With the onset of Spanish expeditions to this continent in search of wealth, in 1492 Christopher Columbus reached this island, where he found a native population.

The autochthonous population was submitted to hard work in slave-like conditions by the Spanish colonizers, resulting in their gradual and almost complete extinction. They were therefore replaced by large numbers of slaves who were bought in various parts of Africa, brought to Cuba and resold to landowners. This situation lasted until the mid-nineteenth century, and a web of relationships was being formed among families and strata of the emerging society, giving rise to the term “criollo”, men and women, born on Cuban soil, who created a new way of living and thinking about their identity, country and nationality. On October 10, 1868, one of these criollo landowners, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, freed his slaves, and the first struggle against Spanish colonialism was initiated. This epic feat is known as the “Ten Year War”, which did not fulfill the aspirations of seeing Cuba free of Spain.

The apparent failure of this long war strengthened another group of valiant Cubans who, headed by José Martí, Antonio Maceo and Máximo Gómez, retook arms in 1895, to start a second conflict, known as the “War of Independence”. The end of the war with Spain was mediated by the government of the United States of America, which secured its interests in the process of rupture with Spanish colonialism. This meant a new failure for the pro-independence ideals of the Cuban patriots, who now found themselves submitted to North American interference.

In 1902 the Republic of Cuba was constituted and the nation was organized, though conditioned by the “Platt Amendment”, which gave the United States the right to intervene in the internal matters of the island whenever they thought it convenient.

In 1934, due to the pressure of labour and student movements, this law was abolished by a new treaty between the two governments which repealed the United States’ right to “intervene”, although the rights over the Guantánamo Naval Base were maintained by lease. Even today this piece of national territory remains under the control of the North American government, in spite of reiterated demands of the Cuban government, with the support of various countries, that this area be returned to the Cuban people. The Guantánamo Base, the largest naval base in the Caribbean, is ranked among the prisons that most violate human rights in the world.

The entire first half of the twentieth century was characterized by many governments, some more inept and others more authentic; but the longing for liberation from all foreign interference grew within the people.

In the decade of the 1950s, a dictatorship devastated the most humble and vulnerable of Cuban society at the time, and poverty was widespread. It was then that a new set of youth resolved to

take the country out of that situation. A new movement, formed under the leadership of Fidel Castro, started what is known as the National Liberation War and, after innumerable attempts, triumphed on January 1, 1959.

Fidel Castro was accompanied by other leaders, such as Ernesto Che Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos, Celia Sánchez Manduley, Haydée Santamaría, Melba Hernández, and Vilma Espín. The triumph of the Revolution became the starting point for the history of the most disadvantaged sectors: peasants, workers, children, women and the poorest of the population. Illiteracy was eliminated, large companies and foreign monopolies were nationalized, and large estates were eliminated by the Law of Agrarian Reform, which divided the land among the peasants, who were the ones who really labored to cultivate it. Public health was offered to the whole population, and the people's dignity was restored.

The Cuban Revolution, supported politically and economically by the countries of the "socialist block", through the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), diverted more and more towards Marxist-Leninist ideology. So from the fall of the "Berlin wall" in 1989 and the great political and economic change among socialist countries, up to today, Cuba found herself in a deep crisis. Cuba has lost the help she used to receive in important areas such as food, transportation, fuel, domestic items, etc. This was the start of what Cubans call the "Special Period", a time characterized by the worsening shortage of basic products, intensified by the reinforcement of the embargo that the United States government has maintained over the country since the triumph of the Revolution in 1959.

In 1998 we were visited by Pope John Paul II, who was knowledgeable of the crisis the Cuban people was experiencing, and commented that it was essential that "*Cuba open up to the world and that the world open up to Cuba.*" This statement gradually became a reality, and today Cuba has the respect and solidarity of almost all the countries in the hemisphere. The nation occupies an important place among the countries of the association of nations in Latin America and the Caribbean, and has been supported by the United Nations Assembly, with 98% of votes in favor for the end of the embargo maintained by the United States over our people.

Form of Government

Since 1961, the Republic of Cuba has maintained a democratic socialist government, led by the National Assembly of People's Power, which is the only organ with constituent and legislative authority in the country. Its members are representatives elected by secret, direct, universal vote of the electorate in each municipality and province, and are responsible for organizing, directing and protecting the nation's social, economic and political life. This Assembly holds elections every five years, and any citizen may nominate their grassroots candidate, regardless of gender, race or creed. The National Assembly of People's Power is in charge of ensuring compliance with the Constitution of the Republic, its legislations and projects. Since 2008, Raúl Castro Ruz has been the president, and he is also the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba.

Women are amply represented in the Constituent Assembly and make up 43.3% of delegates, and 29.5% of presidents of municipal governments are women. According to the Interparliamentary Union, Cuba occupies 4th place in the world on the scale of countries with the most women in their Parliament.

The State is led by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, the only party in the country, and whose philosophy is Marxist-Leninist. Its main objective has been to preserve the achievements of the Revolution, especially the defense of the freedom and absolute sovereignty of the nation, the equality of rights for all citizens, particularly in important aspects such as education, health, food, culture and sports.

Cuba stands out for having signed the main International Conventions of the United Nations Organization (UN), such as the Convention on the Rights of Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example, and created mechanisms for compliance throughout the whole country. With much effort, she has maintained her policy of solidarity with more than 150 countries, through programs of internationalist collaboration. Outstanding among these are the massive Literacy Program in countries with high illiteracy rates and the health program that sends doctors, nurses and other Cuban technicians to the most remote places of Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. All these missions include the outstanding work of Cuban women who have saved lives and have taught thousands of persons throughout the world.

Economy

The Cuban economy has passed through periods of fluctuation between improvement in the population's standard of living, the growth vs. reduction of the external debt and increase of the gross domestic product. As occurs in the rest of the world, we face a difficult economic crisis in which we struggle to maintain the benefits achieved by the people, through a more socially just economy and necessary changes in light of the international economic crisis. Wages are not in keeping with needs of the people, and on repeated occasions there is a lack of products such as medicines, food, personal hygiene items, transportation, and others, that the family cannot afford.

As a result of the island's recent changes in economic policies, the most significant contributions now come from international tourism, co-operative movement and small private businesses. The exportation of coffee, nickel and tobacco, the rise of co-operatives in the agricultural sector and small private service initiatives, are noteworthy.

The national currency is the Cuban Peso, regularly emitted by the National Bank of Cuba, but there is also the Freely Convertible Cuban Peso (CUC) which is approximately equivalent to the United States Dollar. This duplication of currency has resulted in serious problems for the family, given that the majority of the population receives their income in Cuban Pesos. The country is working towards the adoption of a single-currency monetary system.

The social successes achieved since 1959 have been threatened over the years by the embargo that the United States government has maintained over the Island. This reality is clearly manifested in the shortage of raw material and other resources required for industry, like the production of medicines and food, equipment and many other innumerable actions that affect the Cuban people. Moreover, international navigational companies are forbidden to dock in our ports, as they are sanctioned in various ways. The commercial, economic and financial embargo of the North American government on Cuba began in 1960, and the breakdown of diplomatic relations, in 1961. The humanitarian and social impact of the embargo has affected all spheres of life of the Cuban people, including the churches and family relationships. Close to 70% of the Cuban population was born under the embargo. More than 50 years later, it continues to be said that the embargo is humanitarily unjust for the whole Cuban people.

Society

The social formation of Cuba is marked by *mestizaje* and transculturation, typical of the relationships produced throughout history among Indigenous people, Chinese, whites and blacks. Up until the mid twentieth century, the Cuban society was divided into strata, whose most powerful classes were the owners of the means of production. In 1959 the life of the Cuban society changed drastically, as the people became the ones who manage the means of production, workers and peasants being the protagonists of the main achievements of the society.

Central aspects of national traditions are currently being reintroduced, with emphasis on the recovery of values, integral education and the strengthening of Cuban culture. There is insistence on the improvement of the quality of life of the people, particularly that of senior citizens, women and children. However, the changes in economic, social and political relationships continue to affect the majority of the population and chart new courses for the socialist Cuban society.

The family, maternity and marriage are institutions that have received the protection of the State since 1940, when the Second Constitution of the Republic was approved. Since then, both spouses have absolute equality of rights, and the marriage may be dissolved when any of the parties expresses his or her desire to do so.

The traditional model of the family, governed by European Christian canons, has been altered by new legal issues, such as divorce and separation, and by limited access to housing for new married couples. Phenomena such as very young couples, single mothers, women as head of the household and gender equality reflect a heterogeneous panorama in family relations in Cuba.

Family life has been affected by many shortages noted in daily coexistence. There is discontent, inconformity and violence. Sons and daughters are worried by their continued economic dependence on parents. The female heads of households bear a situation of anxiety and uncertainty, which at times they do not know how to resolve. Another challenge the Cuban family currently faces is the aging of the population, coupled with the emigration, mainly of younger persons, to developed countries.

The women's societies or departments in some Churches, as well as the Woman and Gender program of the Council of Churches of Cuba, have tackled these challenges, and carry out training programs that contribute to the strengthening of the multiple models of the Cuban family.

Education

The educational system was structurally organized in 1522, when the first schools for primary education were opened. In the 1700s, important centers that enriched Cuban thought and nationality were founded: Seminario Conciliar de San Basilio Magno (Conciliar Seminary of Saint Basil the Great) in Santiago de Cuba, Colegio San Ambrosio (Saint Ambrose College) and Real y Pontificia Universidad de San Jerónimo (Royal and Pontifical University of Saint Jerome) in Havana. Thinkers such as José Agustín Caballero, Félix Varela, José de la Luz y Caballero, José Martí and Enrique José Varona passed through these institutions.

In the period between 1902 and 1959, illiteracy increased due to a lack of teachers, the governments' mismanagement of resources allocated to education, and the atmosphere of poverty in which the majority of the population lived. There were only three universities in the country.

After the triumph of the Revolution, in 1961 the “Literacy Campaign” was carried out. Since then, there has been a cultural and educational explosion. All types of schools were opened, from primary to specialized, technical and university levels. Due to the high enrolment levels, schools were diversified, to the point that there is currently a University Campus in each municipality, providing opportunities to study free of charge for all who so desired. There are also various distance education programs, and the mass media, especially television, are used to impart courses and programs that can reach the entire population. The Faculties of Medical Sciences, to which students who pass the aptitude tests have access, and in which a considerable number of women enroll each year, are outstanding.

Currently in our country women are a majority in the educational system, not only as students, but also as educators at all levels.

Culture

Cuban culture is like its typical dish, known as ‘ajiacó’, which unites the flavors of various meats, vegetables, banana, cassava, sweet potato, dasheen and corn. It received the influence of the great mother cultures, specifically Spanish and African, as well as the heritage of the indigenous people who were practically exterminated on the arrival of the Spanish. The influence of the Chinese and French values, the richness of the Latinos and Caribbean settlers in the Greater Antilles and those from North America, are evident. All have left their lasting trace in the sentiments, forms, character, idiosyncrasies, lifestyle and art of Cubans.

Music has a privileged position and plays an important part in both the traditional and international classical genres. Musical nationalism and the appearance of the typically Cuban such as the punta, the rumba, the danzón, the danzonete, the mamba, the chachachá, the Cuban song and the guaracha are expressed in very rhythmic and syncopated dances. It is very well known the song “La Guantanamera” attributed to José Fernández with the verses based on the collection of the *Versos Sencillos* by José Martí the “National Hero of Cuba”.

Some churches in Cuba have incorporated into their celebrations a musical language with the percussion and string instruments which are ever closer to our culture. Here you have a description of some of the instruments to which we refer in the Worship service:

Bongó: A percussion instrument which is played simply by the hand. It comprises two small drums joined by a piece of wood; the smaller is called the *macho* (male) and the larger the *hembra* (female). It is widely used in small musical groups, since it greatly enriches the polyrhythmics on combining with the other percussion instruments. Originally the drum skin was tautened with fire and later by keys. The bongo combines the evolution of the twin drums.

Maracas: A percussion instrument which is a kind of rattle. It is typical of our musical world although not of Cuban origin. Before the arrival of the Spaniards the Cuban aborigines played them at their *areitos* (celebrations or festivities). They are made from a fruit called *güira* and also of wood or leather. They are used by the traditional musical groups.

Claves: A percussion instrument composed of two resonant cylindrical hardwood sticks which are played by hitting them against each other. It is very common in small musical groups.

Tres: A typically Cuban string instrument. It has three pairs of strings and is played using a plectrum. It is characteristic of traditional musical groups and essential in the *guajiro punto* (a kind of typical musical expression of the Cuban peasants).

Dance expressions include rumba, son, zapateo, salsa and danzón, the National Dance of Cuba. The National Ballet of Cuba, directed by Alicia Alonso, the National Folkloric Troupe and Liz Alfonso's Dance Company are three representative groups of dance culture in Cuba.

In the field of literature, it is worth highlighting Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda in the nineteenth century, Dulce María Loynaz, who received the 1993 "Miguel de Cervantes y Saavedra" prize in Spain, and Fina García Marrúz, who was awarded the "Reina Sofía" prize for Latin American Poetry in 2011.

Film makers, stage actors and playwrights, singers, painters and craftspeople daily contribute to the elevation of national art. We can mention Amelia Peláez and Zaida del Río, in plastic arts, Rita Montaner, in cinema and music, Celina González, in popular traditional music, and Raquel Revuelta, in theatre.

Recipes for lemonade and coffee

Lemonade is a very refreshing drink in hot countries like ours, and is easy to prepare. There are different ways to make it depending on family traditions. There are some who prefer it made with refined or white sugar, others with brown sugar.

One of the ways is to extract the lemon juice, add the sugar, and later the water. Another way is to add the lemon juice to the water, and later add the sugar. You can also put a slither of lemon into the glass you are going to use or leave it on the rim of the recipient.

These recipes can be made using water at room temperature and later refrigerated. If it is to be taken immediately you can use cold water taken from the fridge or ice chips can be added frappe style.

The majority of Cuban families welcome their visitors with a cup of fragrant coffee. In Cuba coffee is taken very strong, with sugar, and served in small cups.

In the past it was prepared using a coladera. This is a cloth sieve which is used mainly in rural areas on the most easterly part of the island. The coladera can be used in different ways.

Ways:

1. Water is boiled in a pot together with sugar and this liquid is poured into the coladera where the ground coffee has already been placed.
2. Water together with sugar and coffee is boiled and is poured through the coladera.
3. There is also the coffee known as "carretero", very common in the most easterly part of the country. Water with the coffee and sugar is boiled and left to infuse. The coladera is not used.
4. Nowadays, the majority of Cuban families prefer to use the Italian style coffee makers, since they offer us an excellent espresso coffee.

Health

Cuba has a health system designed to satisfy the needs of physical and emotional well-being of the people, with numerous programs of prevention, health promotion and early diagnosis, for infants, adolescents, women, persons with disability and senior citizens. These health services are offered at different levels; from primary health care in the area of residence, to secondary care in hospitals and tertiary care in Specialty Institutions.

Mother-child care provides the security of being observed from the gestational stage, and the prevention of breast and cervical-uterine cancers. Sexual and reproductive health includes the essential right of the woman to assume control and make decisions concerning her body and sexuality, a fundamental right for her development. In addition, all deliveries must be carried out in health institutions. As a result, the country has one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world.

The immunization program begins at birth. Nine preventable diseases have been eradicated with vaccines, and the incidence of others has been decreased, thanks to biotechnological development.

Careful attention is paid to all transmissible infections that are not yet vaccine-preventable, including HIV/AIDS. Patients receive personalized attention and the supply of latest generation antiretroviral drugs, produced mainly in our pharmaceutical industries, as well as all types of social benefits. Cutting-edge research on the diagnosis and treatment of cancer is carried out, although it is difficult to obtain raw material and selective medicines from overseas for the treatment of some oncological pathology.

Other programs of vital importance include the prevention of chronic non-transmissible diseases and the Program of Attention to Senior Citizens.

Cuba is the country with the most doctors per inhabitant. Doctors and other health specialists and technicians travel as collaborators to various countries, offering service in places where no doctor had ever been before. Through scholarships and agreements, hundreds of youth from all over the world study in our country. One of the principles of Cuban medicine is that each individual who requires medical attention is treated free of charge, regardless of creed, ideology, race or sex.

Religion

In Cuba, the profession of faith is a socio-spiritual component of the life of the people and forms part of the culture, in spite of having passed through a period in which persons who practiced any religion were marginalized by the atheist policy that was made official.

As of the 1990s, the Constitution reestablished the lay character of the State and guaranteed religious freedom. The people returned to the public practice of faith, as many persons who had previously held their faith in secret began to do so openly. Today there is considerable growth in Christian congregations, some of which had survived thanks to the extraordinary women who were capable of occupying leadership positions, including ministry, as many pastors emigrated to the United States of America or were conscripted into Military Service.

Of the Cuban faith traditions, the most deeply rooted religion is Christianity, in its diverse manifestations. The Roman Catholic Church, which now has over 600 churches across the country, arrived with Spanish colonization in the fifteenth century. The Catholic patroness of Cuba is La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre (Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre). The second half of the nineteenth century saw the arrival of various protestant and evangelical churches, which now include over sixty denominations ranging from the more historic like Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal and Baptist to the Pentecostal, Neo-Pentecostal and Orthodox Churches.

In most Cuban congregations, women are pastors, missionaries, nuns and laywomen. Many are ordained to holy ministry and have high-level responsibilities, such as the episcopacy of the Anglican or Episcopal Church of Cuba and the Pentecostal Holiness Church. Various Seminaries

have had women deans. There is also a movement of women theologians that has been outstanding in the life of the church in Cuba.

It is impossible to conceive the existence and continued presence of the church without women, who are the majority in the congregations, in spite of the fact that within the church, as in other sectors of social life, the prevalent patterns are those that minimize the presence and worth of women.

The Council of Churches of Cuba is a highly prestigious ecumenical institution that brings together most protestant and evangelical denominations. Among its various programs is that of “Women and Gender”, which has developed strategies for the integral education of women and the family. Other institutions that also deal with this issue include the Christian Centre of Reflection and Dialogue, in Cárdenas, Matanzas; the B.G. Lavastida Center, in Santiago de Cuba; the Gender Institute, in Matanzas and the Martin Luther King Memorial Center, in Havana.

There is great popular acceptance of Afro-Cuban religions, which have their roots in the religiosity brought and cultivated by enslaved Africans. In a process of safeguarding their spirituality, the slaves produced a religious syncretism with colonial Catholicism, causing religions with African characteristics to survive until the present day.

Islam, Judaism, Spiritualism and New Christian Religious Movements with fundamentalist tendencies are also present in Cuba, albeit in lesser proportions.

Situation of Women

The Cuban woman plays an important role in the society, church and family, although she faces a long chain of suffering and discrimination. The first indigenous Cuban women were trampled and abused by the colonizers. Today there are still patterns of behavior that denote a patriarchal and male chauvinist culture at all levels of social relations.

Women have defended their rights to work and to fight, even on the battle fields, demonstrating their limitless courage and intelligence. In 1869, during the Constituent Assembly, the town of Guaímaro heard the voice of the distinguished fighter for Cuban independence, Ana Josefa Betancourt, who exclaimed, “The time has come to liberate the woman!” Later, in 1923, women began to organize themselves in groups to discuss the problems that affected them and to promote changes that favored their role as women.

After the Revolution in 1959, women were incorporated as an active force in the construction of the new society, broadening the opportunities to improve their scientific-technical and professional training. In 1961, the Federation of Cuban Women was formed by Vilma Espín, a young chemical engineer and leader in the Revolution. This female organization is composed of 4 million Cuban women of all professional categories, qualified technicians, skilled workers and peasants. The Federation maintains its demands in favor of the rights of women, children and the family in general.

In order to achieve the Federation’s objectives, a series of measures were proposed to lay the foundations for the satisfactory insertion of Cuban women into the labor force. Among them were the change of the employment system and structure to allow women to overcome cultural, technical and professional obstacles and occupy posts traditionally assigned to men; the diversification of jobs; changes in the Constitution of the Republic and the Labor Code to

guarantee equal rights for men and women; and the creation of Daycare Centers for the children of working mothers.

Among the results obtained, it is found that today more than 46% of persons employed in the public sector are women; women constitute 68% of the technically and professionally qualified labor force and 39% are managers. The percentage of women has increased in all work sectors of the country. Nevertheless, the supremacy of the man is seen in the management positions in some sectors, and the abilities of women are not recognized during elections for key positions in economy, politics and religion, with the excuse being given that their assigned role is that of protagonist in the family.

HISTORY OF THE WOLD DAY OF PRAYER IN CUBA

The first reference we have concerning the celebration of the World Day of Prayer (WDP) in Cuba dates back to the year 1930. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Cuba celebrated it for the first time with a program sent by women from the United States of America, according to information in the book entitled “Salvadas para Servir, Memoria Histórica de la Unión Nacional de Mujeres Presbiterianas de Cuba” (Saved to Serve, Historical Account of the National Union of Presbyterian Women).

The Methodist Church celebrated the WDP for the first time on February 20, 1931, according to information in the Methodist Church publication “El Evangelista Cubano”, number 21 of that year. According to the verbal testimony of some women, in 1972 the Salvation Army was already celebrating the WDP. These three denominations were the first to have direct contact with the World Day of Prayer, thanks to the fact that their counterparts in the United States sent the program directly to them. The first Friday of March each year became a very special day among Methodist, Presbyterian and Salvationist women, many of whom joyfully recount the rich experiences they had as a result of the programs carried out.

In 1975, the International Year of the Woman, promoted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the then Council of Evangelical Churches of Cuba organized its Women’s Department, and sister Dora Valentín (1925-1992), of the Presbyterian Church, was elected as its first president. The work of this Women’s Department gained the recognition of the Cuban female evangelical world. According to sister Valentín’s own testimony in the book “Dora Valentín, una Cristiana en Revolución” (Dora Valentín, a Christian in Revolution), “For the first time, we celebrated the WDP ecumenically in 1981, and we sent it to the sisters. Sister Lois Kroheler translated it into Spanish, and so it was distributed to the churches.”

Lois Kroheler, the only United States Presbyterian missionary who stayed in Cuba after the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, and Dora Valentín, promoted the celebration of the World Day of Prayer. They were joined by others, such as the Methodist sisters, Rita Oliva and Ana Luisa Puertas, in the work of translation, printing and distribution of the program.

That is how the celebration of the WDP first spread throughout the evangelical and/or protestant world, and then reached some of the Catholic parochial. The successive directors of the Council of Churches’ Women’s Department maintained the celebration of the WDP as part of its activities. So we have more than 20 places of celebration, with the participation of approximately 30 different denominations.

In 2011, a WDP Strengthening Workshop was held, during which the National WDP Committee was organized. Since then, this program is promoted by its Committee, although we continue to work closely with the Women and Gender Program of the Council of Churches of Cuba. The Committee has been chaired by Ormara Nolla Cao, from the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba; Isis García Basulto, secretary, Roman Catholic Church, Noemí Manrique Arango, treasurer, Church of Christ, and Sandra Zaldívar Ferrer, for program and projects, Salvation Army. We have regional coordinators for eastern Cuba, Rosario Concepción Fernández, Church of Friends (Quakers), central region Amelia Pérez Muñiz, Eastern Baptist Convention and for the western region Aleida Palacios Cuny, Apostolic Church of Jesus. Together, with more than 20 others WDP women and resource persons from ecumenical organizations in Cuba, we developed the worship service and resources material for the celebrations of WDP 2016.

In the last few years, each first Friday of March, women and men, of over 30 denominations, come together over 20 locations throughout the country, at the invitation of the program received from the WDP International Committee to prayer, reflection, unity and action.