

# Baylor partners with seminaries in Cuba; will provide books to students

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WACO—Officials with the ministry of religious affairs for the Cuban Communist Party’s Central Committee granted Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary permission to establish a broad-based partnership with three Cuban Baptist seminaries and authorized Baylor University Press to provide a basic theological library for every Christian seminary student in Cuba.



Participants at a historic meeting of seminary educators from Texas and Cuba included (left to right, back row) Gabriel Ocariz Goodrich, academic dean of Santiago Baptist Seminary; Todd Still, dean of Truett Theological Seminary; Carey Newman, director of Baylor University Press; Alberto Ruio, academic dean of Santa Clara Baptist Seminary; Dario Izquierdo, professor at Santa Clara Baptist Seminary; (front row) Abdiel Morfa, academic dean of Havana Baptist Seminary; Barbaro Murrero, president of Havana Baptist Seminary; and Felix Gonzalez, president of Santa Clara Baptist Seminary. PHOTO / Courtesy of L.M. Dyson Cuban governmental officials met in Havana Oct. 6 with Todd Still, dean of Truett Seminary; Carey Newman, director of Baylor

University Press; and Tom Hill, associate director of Baylor athletics; along with the presidents and academic deans of Havana Baptist Seminary and Santa Clara Baptist Seminary and with the academic dean of Santiago Baptist Seminary.

The Havana and Santa Clara seminaries are affiliated with the Baptist Convention of Western Cuba, historically related to the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Santiago seminary is affiliated with the Baptist Convention of Eastern Cuba, historically related to the American Baptist Churches, USA.

### **'Historic meeting'**

The gathering—uniformly described as “a historic meeting” by all the Baylor representatives who attended—grew out of relationships L.M. Dyson, a retired professor in Baylor’s Hankamer School of Business and layman at First Baptist Church of Woodway in Waco, established. Dyson has traveled to Cuba more than 40 times since 1999, working in partnership with Cuban Baptists to deliver shipping containers filled with ministry supplies.

In the summer, Dyson helped facilitate a trip by officials from the Cuban seminaries to Texas to attend a three-day conference for Latin American Christians at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth and to meet Baylor President Ken Starr and other university officials in Waco.

Newman, Still and Hill subsequently accompanied Dyson to Cuba for the October meeting with seminary and government leaders.

### **Multifaceted proposal approved**

Still presented a multi-part proposal regarding an ongoing relationship between Truett Seminary and the Cuban seminaries, as well as a continuing relationship between Baylor athletics and Cuban Baptists’

sports outreach.



Todd Still, dean of Truett Theological Seminary, speaks to a Christian gathering in Cuba. PHOTO / Courtesy of L.M. Dyson “We told them the work we want to do is for the churches, through the Cuban Baptist conventions and with the full affirmation of the government. They were appreciative and supportive of it,” Still said.

The proposal included Truett faculty providing support for their colleagues at the three Cuban Baptist seminaries in teaching, curriculum, research and academic writing. By 2020, Truett hopes to help establish a theological and biblical studies society in Cuba, where scholars at the seminaries can submit manuscripts for review, with Baylor University Press eventually publishing the peer-reviewed scholarly papers.

“We want to work with the Cuban professors on academic writing from a Cuban perspective,” Newman said.

### **Strengthen Baptist seminaries in Cuba**

Baylor and Truett plan to provide computers loaded with Bible software to the three seminaries; offer opportunities for Cuban seminary faculty on research leave to pursue doctorates or post-graduate study; and involve Texas students in short-term immersive missions experiences in Cuba and internships of longer duration.

Truett also hopes to work with Texas Baptist Men to identify Cuban Baptist churches that could benefit from mission teams to renovate or remodel their facilities, as well as raise money to provide scholarships for students and financial support for professors. Total cost for one instructor's salary and one student's tuition and expenses for a year is \$500, Still noted.

"Some folks spend that much at Starbucks in a year," he said. "Maybe this is something we can do together as a Texas Baptist family."

### **Provide students theological library**

Beyond the scope of the three Baptist seminaries, Baylor University Press received government permission to provide a seven- to 10-volume basic theological library in Spanish for each student at every Christian seminary in Cuba.

"The ministry of religion of the Communist Party Central Committee authorized us to distribute about 15,000 theological books to seminary students in Cuba," Newman said.

The books will cover biblical studies, theology, church history, preaching and pastoral ministry. Translating and contextualizing the books, printing them and shipping them to Cuba likely will cost at least \$750,000 and perhaps \$1 million, Newman estimated.

### **Shape a generation of Christian leaders**

While he speculated one or two Texas Baptists with financial means could fund the project, given its potential impact for shaping a generation of Christian leaders, Newman hopes a significant number of churches or groups within churches will contribute and develop relationships with churches and seminaries in Cuba.

Although he acknowledged his projected timeline may be overly optimistic,

Newman hopes to have books in the hands of Cuban seminary students within 18 months.

“I want them printed and on the boat tomorrow,” he said.

“This is a historic moment,” he added, noting many groups will be “rushing in while the doors are open” to Cuba. But unlike those who seek to profit from a new market, Baylor has the opportunity to influence young Christian leaders positively.

“We are not there to take something from Cuba but to give something to Cuba,” he said. “It’s a privilege to be at a place that sees this kind of project as its mission.”

### **Continue sports outreach**

As part of the recent trip to Cuba, Baylor athletics also discovered ways to help Cuban Baptist churches strengthen and expand sports ministries.

A few years ago, Baylor sent its baseball team to Cuba on a sports evangelism mission. Through the relationships that developed, Baylor athletics was able to work with the Baptist Convention of Western Cuba to help churches start sports ministries, Hill noted. Baylor anticipates sending its softball team—and possibly either its men’s or women’s basketball team—to Cuba, he added.

Baylor also developed a relationship with the Havana Industriales professional baseball team when Baylor’s baseball team first traveled to Cuba. Several Industriales team members subsequently professed faith in Christ, and at least five became members of Iglesia Bautista El Calvario in downtown Havana.



L.M. Dyson, retired Baylor University professor and layman at First Baptist Church of Woodway in Waco, presents a bat to Carlos Tabares, centerfielder for the Havana Industriales professional baseball team. PHOTO / Courtesy of L.M. Dyson On the most recent trip to Cuba, Dyson presented team members, along with their new manager and assistant manager, bats and Bibles with their names imprinted on them.

“The manager told me: ‘I’ve seen Bibles in places when I have traveled—even seen them in hotels—but no one ever gave me one. I am going to read it,’” Dyson recalled.

Dyson also took to Cuba three duffels filled with health-care equipment and medication for pastors who serve bivocationally as physicians, as well as baby-care items for ministers’ families and supplies for a nursing home operated by the Baptist Convention of Western Cuba.

“I’ve received approval to send in a container with 305 bicycles for rural missionary pastors,” he added. “I hope we can deliver it prior to their annual Baptist convention early next year.”