

# The Road To Justice Starts Here

## humanitarian mission trip

### TO CUBA AFTER HURRICANE IAN

By Juan Jose Rodriguez, Attorney Liaison

After responding to calls for help in Central Florida, Ft. Myers, and Puerto Rico, where our firm contributed to help the victims of Hurricanes Fiona and Ian, we received a special request. It was from our friends and relatives in Cuba. Hurricane Ian devastated the zone of Pinar Del Rio.

Here is an important fact: contrary to our communities that might receive compensation from Insurance companies, or FEMA or Small Business administration loans, the folks in Cuba have no assistance at all. After the quick approval of our boss, Michael T. Gibson, a group of missionaries got in contact with Jose Ballester, one of the ecclesiastical leaders in Cuba. He told us about the necessity for food, hygiene products and the fact that schools were destroyed in Pinar del Rio by the hurricane.

In the short time we organized this trip, we received contributions from several places, including: Juan Salgado from Urban Strategies who donated backpacks, Pastor Victor Arriaga and wife Lourdes Ramos from Ministerio GIVE who donated school supplies, Pastor Anibal Calderon and assistant Hector Rodriguez from Iglesia Cristiana Casa de Refugio De Zion, Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal MI of St. Cloud and Pastor Obed Rivera with mission's leader Hector and Minerva Cintron and Ladies leader Catherine Flores, and missionaries Felipe Encarnacion and Norma Santos, and other organizations such as CitiServe. Thank you to all of you, for your time and donations to help our folks in Cuba.

When we arrived at Habana, we were shocked by the flexibility and non-harassment treatment at the airport by government officials, something that is normal of customs in most foreign countries. We took 16 bags of luggage and they only opened one. We took food, clothes and school supplies, and nothing was taken away from us.

As soon as we arrived, we started the distribution of everything we were able to pack in our luggage. Rev. Ballester and his group took us where the help was most urgent, among them the area of Pinar Del Rio. This area depends of Tobacco and sugar cane production, both of them completely destroyed by the hurricane. Therefore, the source of income of this area was gone, and the need was clear. Besides taking food and small economical assistant to be distributed among some families, we have a special day for the kids in this affected area. Our firm provided cake, candies, and entertainment for them. In the middle of this suffering, we could see the joy on the kids' faces.

During our stay in Cuba, we also provided a business seminar. The government of Cuba has now given the opportunity to private citizens to have their own business, but some of them lack the basic knowledge to start a business. We rented a restaurant in old Habana, and had a full house of attendees. We gave orientation on some basic topics and universal tips to be considered while opening a new business.

I need to finish with this observation. The citizens in Cuba are brave with a lot of courage. It does not matter

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# viaje misionero humanitario

## A CUBA DESPUÉS DEL HURACÁN IAN

Por Juan Jose Rodriguez, Abogado de Enlace



Después de responder a las llamadas de ayuda en Florida Central, Ft. Myers y Puerto Rico, donde la oficina legal contribuyó a ayudar a las víctimas de los huracanes Fiona e Ian, recibimos una solicitud especial. Era de nuestros amigos y parientes en Cuba. El huracán IAN devastó la zona de Pinar del Río.



Aquí hay un hecho importante: Contrario a nuestras comunidades que podrían recibir compensación de las compañías de seguros, o FEMA o préstamos de la administración de pequeñas empresas, la gente en CUBA tiene muy limitada asistencia. Después de la rápida aprobación de nuestro jefe, Michael T. Gibson, un grupo de misioneros se puso en contacto con José Ballester, uno de los líderes eclesiásticos en Cuba. Nos habló de la necesidad de alimentos, productos de higiene y del hecho de que las escuelas fueron destruidas en Pinar del Río por el huracán.

Necesito hacer una pausa aquí – es tan poco tiempo que organizamos este viaje, recibimos contribuciones de varios lugares, individuos y instituciones como Juan Salgado de Urban Strategies que donó mochilas, el pastor Víctor Arriaga y su esposa Lourdes Ramos de Ministerio Give con donaciones de útiles escolares, el pastor Aníbal Calderón y el asistente Héctor Rodríguez de la Iglesia Cristiana Casa de Refugio De Sion, Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal MI de St. Cloud y pastor Obed Rivera con los líderes de misiones Héctor y Minerva Cintrón y la líder de Damas Catherine Flores, y los misioneros Felipe Encarnación y Norma Santos, y otras organizaciones como CITISERVE por su tiempo, contribuciones y donaciones para ayudar a nuestra gente en CUBA.

Cuando llegamos a La Habana, nos sorprendió la flexibilidad y el trato no acosador en el aeropuerto por parte de los funcionarios del gobierno, algo que es normal de las aduanas en la mayoría de los países extranjeros. Llevamos 16 maletas y solo abrieron una. Llevamos comida, ropa y útiles escolares, y no nos quitaron nada. Contrario a lo que algunos medios noticiosos nos informan sobre Cuba, fuimos recibidos con gran hospitalidad.

Tan pronto como llegamos, comenzamos la distribución de todo lo que pudimos empacar en nuestro equipaje. Ballester y su grupo nos llevaron donde la ayuda era más necesaria, entre ellos el área de Pinar del Río. Esta zona depende de la producción de tabaco y caña de azúcar, ambas completamente destruidas por el huracán. Por lo tanto, la fuente de ingresos de esta área había desaparecido, y la necesidad era clara. Además de llevar comida y una pequeña asistencia económica para ser distribuido entre algunas familias, tuvimos un día especial para los niños de esta zona afectada. El bufete de abogados les proporcionó pasteles, dulces y entretenimiento. En medio de este sufrimiento, pudimos ver la alegría en los rostros de los niños.

Durante nuestra estancia en Cuba, también ofrecimos un seminario para negocios. El gobierno de Cuba ahora otorga la oportunidad a los ciudadanos privados de tener su propio negocio, pero algunos de ellos carecen de los conocimientos básicos para iniciar un negocio. Alquilamos un restaurante en la Habana Vieja, con casa llena, dimos orientación de algunos temas básicos y consejos universales para ser considerados al abrir un nuevo negocio.

Necesito terminar con esta observación. Los ciudadanos en Cuba son valientes con mucha intrepidez. No importa cuál sea la crisis, están listos. De la misma manera que enfrentamos una escasez de alimentos y dificultades de inflación en Estados Unidos, Cuba está teniendo lo mismo que el resto del mundo. Sin embargo, están manejando esta crisis con una capacidad perdurable y listos para el desafío que se avecina. Por supuesto, su fe en Dios y saber que Dios está en control, tienen mucho peso en esta aptitud.



Como resultado directo de este viaje, hemos desarrollado relaciones estratégicas que esperamos faciliten y agilicen a cualquier asistencia adicional a esta Isla, a solo 90 millas de nuestra costa. **QUE DIOS BENDIGA A CUBA Y A SUS CIUDADANOS. ■**

“Humanitarian mission trip to CUBA after hurricane IAN” continued from page 1.

what the crisis might be, they are ready. The same way we are facing a shortage in food and inflation difficulties in USA, Cuba is having the same as the rest of the world. However, they are handling this crisis with an enduring ability and ready for the challenge ahead. Of course, their faith in God and knowing that God is in control, have a lot of weight in this aptitude.

As a direct result of this trip, we have developed strategic relations that hopefully will facilitate and expedite any further assistant to this Island, just 90 miles from our coast. **MAY GOD BLESS CUBA AND THEIR CITIIZENS. ■**

# IT'S THE BUSIEST time of the year

By: Attorney Michael T. Gibson

The Holidays have come and gone, but not before the Gibson household did its best to get everyone where they needed to be, when they needed to be there. I truly believe that Jen and I have reached the stage of parenting, where we are more of our kid's Uber drivers, than parents. But, knowing this time is limited and precious, we do our best to make sure that our kids get as many holiday memories and experiences as possible.

We start with our annual Thanksgiving trip to Hilton Head, South Carolina. For us, this trip is always the calm before the storm that is the end of the year at the office, and all of the holiday events. We had a wonderful time. We were very grateful to bring Jen's Mom and Dad along with us. Her Father is doing great after his recovery from a stroke, but the recency of that event sure made us grateful for the health of all of us. The boys golfed. The girls shopped. And we ate all the southern barbeque we could handle. I hope and pray we can make it back again next year.

Once we were back, it was onward with hockey for the boy, and dance for the girl. Eme's dance schedule really picked up, with two, all-day holiday performances. She did great and is really enjoying her experience as a Company dancer this year. Jen also accompanied Emery on a school field trip to Saint Augustine. They had a great time and took in all the history Eme had been studying in school.

As for hockey, Brady's team ended the first half of the year right above five hundred. We are currently in a position to make the playoffs in March. It's been a lot of hard work, and we have had some real ups and downs, but we are battling through it, and will do our best to help the team finish strong.

The Holidays can be a little exhausting with all the school and extracurricular parties, but we enjoy our time together as a family. We hope you and your family got to enjoy them, too. ■

**"The Firm Celebrates Another Successful Year with its First Holiday Party in Three Years" continued from page 4.**

From there, our Office Manager, Patty Lopez, with some assistance from Jen, picked a wonderful location, planned a great menu, and worked hard to make sure the event was better than ever. This party had a different feel than the ones in the years past. This time, we weren't just celebrating a successful year, but we were celebrating surviving and thriving through the largest crisis in our lifetimes. It was a chance to look back at everything that had happened, and all we had been through in the last three years. And it was a chance for us to thank God, and each other that we pulled through, and that our firm survived. So much about the last couple years was surrounded in uncertainty, and there were many times that none of us knew how this would all end. To look around the room and realize that we all made it, together, and we are still here, doing what we love, that meant a lot to everyone.

As I looked around the room, while delivering my state of the union speech, I realized just how many people in our office have been with me for a very long time. We have a number of ten year employees now, and even more five year employees now. We even now have two who have been with me throughout my entire 20-year career. That is remarkable, and I am blown away by that type of loyalty. There were a number of times over the last few years where I questioned my own ability to lead us through such a challenging time. I felt like I spent all of 2020 just guessing and praying that the plans I made and put in motion to get us through the pandemic would work. Every decision had far-ranging consequences, and if I was wrong at any point, I worried what the outcome would be. I didn't want to have to lose anyone. So again, to look around and to see that so many stayed and we're here still, that meant the world to me.

They say that adversity reveals character. And if that is so, I saw the true character of our firm during this time. We never gave up, and we never stopped working. We pushed through the hard times, and we never let any of the challenges we faced deter us from working hard and doing the best we can for our clients. To say that I am extremely proud of this group is an understatement. I am blessed to have them at our firm. Having worked side by side with them, through these difficult years, I can tell you that I am certain we have the best staff in the industry.

And with this party, I hope we can close the chapter in our history that was the Covid pandemic and all its attendant challenges. It was great to see everyone and especially, all their families, after a prolonged absence of getting to do the same. Sometimes, we take things for granted. If the last couple years taught me anything, it is to enjoy everything. Every day and every year are a blessing, and I am grateful for the blessing that is our wonderful firm staff. ■



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# THE FIRM CELEBRATES ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL YEAR WITH ITS first holiday party in three years

By: Attorney Michael T. Gibson

Three years ago, on an early December evening, I stood up at our annual Firm Holiday Party, and delivered my usual, state-of-the-union address to all our firm members and their families. Back at that time, the Holiday Dinner was an annual tradition, and one we had kept every year since opening in 2009. So, it had gotten a little bit predictable, and I think of all us just kind of took the event for granted.

Then came 2020, and the Covid-19 pandemic. And due to the same, we did not hold a Holiday Dinner in either 2020 or 2021. Quite simply, I could not figure out at either of those times how to safely gather all of us and our families, without the risk that we would get everyone sick. So, two whole years passed, and we did not host a single firm event.

Throughout the history of our firm, I have always tried to host two events annually for our staff and their families. The first is some type of beach, weekend getaway in the summer. This is where we pick a spot in either Daytona, or New Smyrna Beach, and take the entire firm and their families to a beach hotel for a weekend. The second is our Holiday and End of Year Dinner in December. As the firm has grown, it certainly is more costly to put these events on. But, I have always found them to be well worth the cost of doing them. You have all seen us on TV talk about the importance of family to us. For me, these events help incorporate our staff and their families into our firm family. They also break up the monotony and routine of daily office work.

So to go from having these events every year for 10 years, to having none for two full years, it was a culture shock, and the events were missed by all. It gave me great pride, earlier this summer, to announce to our firm leaders that I would be bringing these firm events back, starting with the Holiday Dinner this year.



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