

Nation & World



News throughout our nation and world relating to United Methodists of the Holston Conference

Cuban pastors spread gospel on 400 new bicycles

By Mike DuBose



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Blessing of the Bikes:

▲ The Rev. H. Eddie Fox (second from left) and Bishop Ricardo Pereira Diaz of the Methodist Church in Cuba (right) bless bicycles donated to Cuban lay pastors during by World Methodist Evangelism.

HOLGUIN, Cuba (UMNS) – One after another, green Chinese bikes that can carry a passenger and 16-speed mountain bikes in a rainbow of hues were rolled to the altar, all of them answers to the prayers of Methodist lay pastors. To the Americans who donated most of the \$40,000 for the bicycles, the two-wheelers were a way to reach out to the growing Christian minority in one of the world's last communist countries. But to the missionary lay pastors who will ride them, the 402 bikes are a way to reach out to neighbors.

"A pastor on foot can go to one mission. One with a bicycle can go to two or three missions," said Bishop Ricardo Pereira Diaz of the Methodist Church in Cuba. "Those bicycles are like a seed, a seed that will bear much fruit, and we will have many missions as a result of that."

The bicycles were bought in Cuba in mid-December, courtesy of World Methodist Evangelism, a Nashville, Tenn.-based unit of the World Methodist Council. The Rev. H. Eddie Fox, who heads the program, led a fund-raising effort after visiting Cuba in May and learning of the need.

Methodists around the world donated money, Fox said. "People I have never met read about missionary

pastors in Cuba who needed wheels."

The program, dubbed "EvangeBicy," takes its name from the three-wheel "bicy taxis" common on the island.

"In Cuba, most classes of people cannot afford a car," Pereira said. "Bicycles are one of the main means of transportation."

Students in a Bible study class at Asbury United Methodist Church in Corpus Christi, Texas, raised more than \$1,100 after their pastor agreed to kiss a pig if they reached their goal of \$800. "He kissed the pig," Fox said.

Fox, a Holston Conference member, visited churches in Havana and Holguin, presenting about 150 bikes in each location. The bikes were earmarked for about 200 lay pastors and 170 professional clergy in Cuba's Methodist Church.

About 100 of the bikes were shipped from Havana to J.W. Branscomb Methodist Church in Holguin, some 12 hours east of Havana by truck, to be used as the centerpiece for a service of consecration and sending forth of the lay pastors. Just hours before the service was to start, however, the bikes had not arrived.

Pereira had the waiting pastors begin a prayer vigil,

seeking the safe arrival of the bicycles. Dozens of the missionaries, some of whom had traveled for two days to Holguin from their remote districts, knelt throughout the church.

The bikes arrived just a few hours after the vibrant and emotion-filled service ended near midnight. More than 700 people filled the church to overflowing. Curious onlookers peered through the open windows from outside.

The bishop personally invited several of the onlookers inside during an altar call that claimed about two dozen new Christians.

Using a token sample of bicycles already on hand, Fox and Pereira prayed over the two-wheelers that lined the altar. Eyes closed and arms raised, the pastors made their commitments to serve.

"I would like our missionary pastors to come forward," Fox said. "I want to give them wheels so they can go faster and do more for the Lord." He sent each pastor back down the aisle of the church astride a new bike.

"These are 'good news' bikes," Fox said. "They will be used to spread the Gospel. God has blessed a dream." ■

World Evangelism