

Special Report: The Lasallian Mission in Cuba

For several decades, the mission of the Catholic Church on the island of Cuba, and in particular the Lasallian Educational Mission, has been profoundly affected by various internal and external factors arising from the Cuban Revolution (1953), which led to the exile of numerous religious congregations.

“Today we remain concerned about the socio-political situation on the island and, of course, that of the four Brothers who make up the community in Santiago de Cuba, as well as the community that is part of our Formation Centre in this city”, comments Br. José Francisco Flores, Visitor of the Antillas-México Sur District, following his most recent visit to this community.

Shortages and deterioration in the country

Over the last eight years, the situation in the country has deteriorated increasingly due to constant power cuts, shortages of petrol and diesel - which are sold at exorbitant prices -, a lack of cooking gas, water rationing and a general shortage of all kinds of supplies, such as medicine, clothing, tools, spare parts, cash and food. In short, “the rationing system using ration cards in state-run shops, through which the state provided food to the population, has collapsed”.

This year, following the complex geopolitical conditions imposed on the region since January, this situation has worsened. The shortage of supplies and food has led to an unprecedented rise in prices, whilst the government’s fuel rationing limits options for motorised transport. “Even electric motorbikes cannot be used, due to the long hours without electricity and the brief periods of power after two or three days of ‘blackouts’”.

“All that’s left is to walk to get basic consumer goods. What’s more, people have been cooking with coal for almost a year now, because there’s no domestic gas supply”.

Added to all this is the gradual reduction in various services provided by state-run companies, due to the lack of conditions to operate, and the consequences this

has on people's lives.

For example, from a public health perspective, "the accumulation of rubbish in urban centres - as is the case in the city of Santiago - due to the lack of a public collection service, has become a potential source of disease and the proliferation of harmful pests".

In the face of all this, whilst it is clear that the people are desperate, they are also showing resilience and no violence is apparent.

Solidarity and trust in the Church

"The Catholic Church receives some aid, but it is never enough to alleviate the needs of so many people. It is the only organisation that people trust to ensure aid reaches its intended recipients", comment the Brothers of the Santiago de Cuba community.

This community, in fact, has shown great solidarity with the teachers and students at the centre, and with the missionaries and neighbours with whom they share catechesis at weekends. "People greatly value the limited educational service the centre can currently provide, the sharing of the few resources the community has, and, above all, its presence in solidarity", emphasises Br. José Francisco.

To enable the Lasallian Mission to continue, albeit at a slower pace, the Brothers have been rationing the small amount of fuel they have saved to ensure that the generator runs for short periods, so that some of the activities at the Formation Centre can continue. Neighbours also take advantage of these brief periods of electricity to recharge the batteries of their devices. The Lasallian community also shares with them the small amount of consumer goods that reaches them.

"None of the Brothers, nor the community as a whole, have asked to leave Cuba", emphasises the Visitor of the Antillas-México Sur District. "They remain united in solidarity, saying that God is our strength and the Spirit guides us", he concludes.

** Report prepared in collaboration with the Antillas-México Sur District. Photos: private archive.*