

*Matanzas* at the sugar mill. Now we are about to move into another phase of your life. Can you tell us about the transition of leaving *Matanzas* to going to Havana? What was that like?

R: This change was very good for my life and it was a great blessing, because I changed not only from the rural area to the big city of Havana, but in my life I had a lot of new opportunities there. And I am sure that God was preparing me for the ministry.

D: What year did you leave to go to Havana to work in the new offices?

R: This was in 1952. And then, when I was in the sugar mill in the rural area, I learned a lot, especially in the human relationship. I learned a lot from the workers in the company. I learned a lot from the land owners in the sugar mill. But, when I moved to Havana I was living in the home for evangelical university students in Havana, near the University Church in *El Verdado*. The pastor was a great servant of God, Reverend Ernesto Vasseur, and he helped me a lot in my spiritual life. But also, in the students home where we lived, we had a very, very intensive spiritual life. Every evening after dinner we had a service for all the students and employees, and the sermon was the responsibility of each student and this gave me the opportunity to develop my ministry.

D: How many students were there at the same time and what were the age levels or groups?

R: There was, I suppose, about thirty or thirty five students. This was the first project that I know in this way; to have a home for Christian students studying in the university. In that way,

the Christian students, when they were in the university, could develop a pretr

D: Can you summarize what people were thinking about in terms of politics in 1952? There was an upcoming election, I think, at that time. Were people optimistic, pessimistic . . . ?

R: Before that, let me tell you that when Eddie Chibas died, I was in the university. At his funeral I was with all the high level leaders of the Party. And I remember when we had the internment for Chibas, at the cemetery, an

asked themselves if the 10 of March of 1952, the Batista Coup of State, was with the blessing of the American

people. The Cuban people thought that this was the leader that Cuba needed. For that reason, he gained more and more and more support from the Cuban people. But, you must know that his speech, the people cannot have this today and many years ago bec

D: How many Methodists were there in Havana? How many people would

R: There were three main congregations in Havana. The University Church in *El Verdado* was the new one. This Church was founded in 1950 or so and there was a very strong university student work, and for that reason, this congregation grew very fast and we had a congregation of maybe two-hundred members. But there were other Churches, the Central Havana, in the old city, that was the first, and also there was the Church of *Maríanao* where the Candler and Buena Vista Colleges were started.

D: What would the numbers have been?

R: One thousand, twelve hundred or so.

D: Were there other Protestant Churches organized in Havana?

R: Yes, there are a lot of different denominations in Havana; the Baptist, the Presbyterian, the Episcopalian, the Assembly of God, the Nazarene Church, and many others.

D: In the Methodist Church, what was the degree of American participation in those Churches?

R: There was, in this new sanctuary, the University Church, we had two congregations . . . three congregations; the Cuban congregation, the West Indian Congregation, and also the American congregation, and this was a very strong congregation, the American congregation. They had their own missionary pastor and they had a very nice organization, very good work.

D: How did your co-workers, where you worked at the mill, how many of them were Christians and were involved in the Church like you were? Were there any or just a few?

R:

and they belonged to

a Catholic Parrish somewhere. Of course, when I was converted, at the time I was in the sugar mill, many of them criticized me because I was a very good Christian. I changed all my way of life. For example, before I smoked as the other young people in the office did and then I stopped smoking, I stopped drinking alcoholic beverages, I stopped going to the *Bailes* and the popular fun and they criticized me a lot for that reason. There was a little child in the sugar mill that, her mot

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Protestant Churches there and, when they heard that I would be a Christian and I would go to the seminary, they had a bad joke about me about that.

D: Would you like to express any other

R:

D: What date was that?

R: September 23, 1953. A little less than two months after the *Moncada* Barracks attack.

D: So, where did you go from there? Did you investigate the idea of going to a seminary?

R: Yes, I spoke immediately with my pastor, a very good pastor. I thank God for the two pastors I had in my Christian experience at that time. The first of them was Reverend Luis



five years my brother, I felt like the most happy person in this world being a Methodist pastor. The arrangement was that, at this moment, I had a very good amount of savings. I had more than two-thousand pesos in my savings account, and this was more or less the same in U.S. Dollars

matters, but also in the life of the people and the Christians and so. And, of course, I had other big blessings at that time. It was, as they called at that time, field work. Every one of us, as a student, had one place to preach, and I worked with a very saintly American missionary, Miss Lorraine Bock and she was a very nice to me. The first year I was her helper in the *Boca de Camarioca* mission. That was about twenty-five miles east of *Matanzas*. At that place I preached every week and I had a great blessing because in the last two years of my studies, I was alone in the work. Miss Bock was not working there and I was the pastor of this mission. I had a great, great experience on that occasion. I can tell you that I had more success that I could think in the pastoral work. I visited every week the community and the children, and I was very identified with the people. In this place, *Boca de Camarioca*, it was the first place that a large amount of Cubans came to the United States at the time of the revolution. This was, more or

American government are called to have the flag of liberty from *Varadero* to Miami. But, at that place, the people lived only as fisherman and also there was an American enterprise of henequen. This is some agricultural matter. And there was a fabric factory maybe four or five miles from there and they had maybe eighty or one-hundred workers there. And then there was an occasion when there was no rain and the factory stopped for two or three months, and this was a very dangerous situation for the people there. Then I had an idea. I spoke with the workers and I

enterprise. We can have a special price for food and, if you would like to invest your money in

went to the capital of the province, to *Matanzas*, and they stated the same, but the people answered the same and they

R: At the seminary, we had a pretty good number; about . . . there was a group of full-time professors. There were about six or seven and there were another five or seven that were part-time professors.

D: Were there other professors that left the country or stayed?

R: We had both. Of course, we had an American professor name of one of my professor, Dr. David White, but the director, the president of the seminary was Dr. Alfonso Rodriguez Hidalgo, and he was a very intelligent Presbyterian professor and his life, his concept of ministry, his theologian teaching, was a very hard challenge for me. Really, he made a great contribution to my Christian life. He, and of course all the American professors, left the country because they s. But there was one other special professor, Dr. Sergio Arce, who was a very hard, very good supporter of the revolution. He said that socialism was akin to the Kingdom of God. And he was, until this last year, for five or more years, a member of the National Populist Assembly. You can ask why.

D: Why would that be?

R: There was in both sides, we had professors in both sides.

D:

R: A professor that, when the revolution took the power left the country and a professor that was a strong supporter of the revolution. And, of course, he was, for many years, for eight or ten years, the president of the *Matanzas* seminary, where, in my understanding, is in a very left line in Cuba. And, for that reason, two years ago, the Methodist Church there, left the seminary of *Matanzas* and they are starting their own Methodist seminary in Cuba.

D: Would there be anything more about your seminary years that you would like to share?

R: Yes, a very important occasion. When I finished my second year, this was in 1956, the bishop, that was Bishop John Branscomb, the same bishop that was here in Florida was our bishop, approved that I was married in the way that my wife Alida can profit my last year in the seminary learning Christian education and this was a very special experience for me to be a married student. In the end, April 7, 1957, my first daughter was born, Alidita, and this was a very good experience.

D: Were there any women in your seminary? When you attended seminary were there women also?

R: Yes, there were women students and men.

D: One or two or three?

R: There were a pretty good amount of them. Maybe a third of the student population was women.

D: How were they treated by the male students? Did they treat them well? Also the professors, did the professors treat them well?

R: eology, they studied Christian education. They thought that women could not be a pastor. But, of course, many of them, with their Christian education studies, became pastors, especially in the Methodist Church.

D: Can you tell us a little bit about your thesis?

R: O.K. I had to write a thesis and it was a very nice experience for me as I was an accountant. I selected a subject of one study of the self-support of the Methodist Church in Cuba during the ten years before my thesis. And I studied the Christian stewardship in my Church and then I compared this study in the Methodist Church with other Churches, for example, with the Baptist Churches, with the Presbyterian Churches. In that way, I learned an important lesson; that faith is very important in the Church, the theology and Bible study is very important, but all these Christian stewardship.