

THE BRIDGE

Connecting the Fair Haven Community

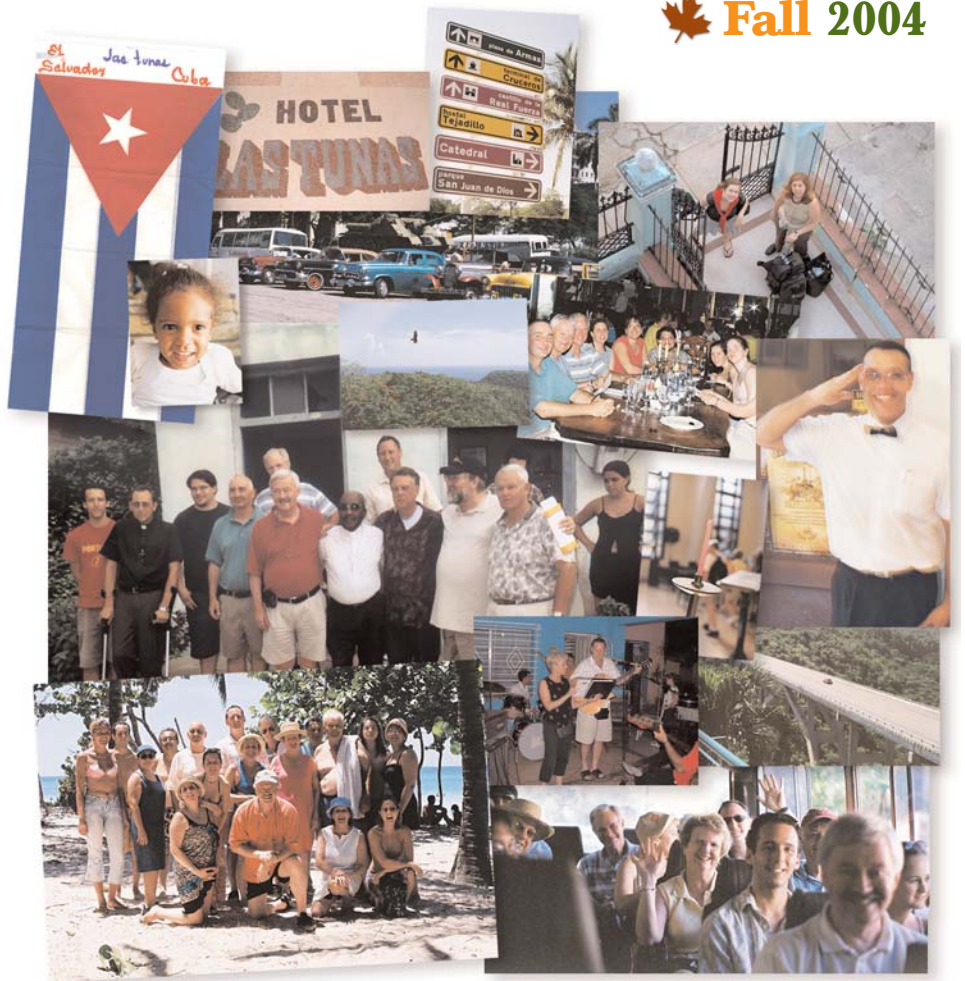
Fall 2004

GOOD NEIGHBORS

Difficult, But Not Impossible...

Travelers to Cuba tell a tale of joy and discovery.

ST. JAMES' CHURCH WHOLE-HEARTEDLY EMBRACES THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY THAT DEFINES FAIR HAVEN. It has long welcomed newcomers arriving from far-off lands simply looking for a friendly church in which to express their faith. In extending that intercultural tradition, St. James' formed a mission with a sister church in Las Tunas, Cuba. This summer two church groups from Connecticut traveled together to visit the people of *Mission El Salvador*, a house church with a large congregation and an even bigger heart. These travelers came back with a fascinating story, contrasted against the experience of their own daily lives here in a much more affluent United States.



Kim Zarra, Raffaele Zarra and Sarah Kenney all kept visual diaries during July's travels in Cuba.



For nearly all the travelers from St. James' and St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Riverside, this was going to be a unique opportunity. These pilgrims were excited by the prospect of meeting face-to-face those far-away folk they had only seen in photographs, and perhaps even a little more than curious to visit Castro's Cuba. Most members of the two Connecticut churches primarily knew their sister church in Cuba through the letters and news that the three congregations share and by the prayers and financial support they have provided the mission since 2002.

The roots of the relationship date back to 1997 when Blanca Little, the group's guide, was a member of St. Paul's. Returning to Cuba for the first time since leaving as a girl, she was inspired by the spirit of the people. Seeing a way to help, she began a cultural exchange to introduce the two communities. On a 2002 trip with her husband, The Rev. Geoff Little, they met this special congregation in Las Tunas and together developed a mission partnership.

The group of eight from St. James' and nine members of St. Paul's all flew together from JFK on July 19, 2004 for a nine-day odyssey. Toting ten suitcases of donated goods, they arrived in Havana for a three-day stopover. They got their first glimpse of the notorious old capital, now totally transformed by the Socialist revolution begun forty years ago. In certain respects, time has stood still. Most cars are now relics, large American cars dating back to before the fall of the Batista government in 1959. Held together by spit and wire, and coaxed to continue running, they are a precious commodity. With the revolution came isolation from much of the world, making Cuba an extremely poor country. Yet despite the economic hardship, the people are better fed and educated than on many neighboring islands.

In Havana, the single travelers stayed at the dormitories at the National Cathedral, while couples opted for the *casas particulares*—a rented room in a private home. It is common for homeowners to rent their

own primary rooms to tourists and opt to sleep on the couch in order to earn extra income. A curious type of capitalism condoned by Castro has helped those with entrepreneurial spirit to do better in an economy where skilled professionals might only take home about \$25 a month. An underground economy flourishes, and so the best restaurants are often in private homes that do not sport signs, but rely instead on word of mouth.

After a daylong bus trip from Havana the group reached their primary destination, the small city of Las Tunas and its Mission El Salvador. Here people are fond of remarking, "*Difícil pero no imposible*" meaning "Difficult, but not impossible" which alludes to the possibility of getting something done in a society where material goods are scarce, order is unpredictable, and resourcefulness counts for a lot. The American visitors found a church markedly different from those typical of the U.S. In fact, the church is in a house too small to hold all the members who attend services and so the worship and celebration spill into the street, which is also where all the festivities begin.

The group was particularly impressed with the strong lay-leadership that makes things work at Mission El Salvador despite the challenge of frequent power outages and other common infra-

structure failures. A part-time priest who must also serve other parishes visits the church on alternate Sundays to serve Communion. The Rev. Evelio Perez Rubí is a strong-willed individual who, because of physical disabilities, walks on crutches. He often sleeps in the large 1954 Cadillac that he drives two hours each way to deliver communion in Las Tunas.

One of the highlights of the four-day stay in Las Tunas was meeting The Right Reverend Miguel Tamayo, Bishop of Cuba. He reflected on the Latin root of the Spanish word *compañero* or companion, which contains *pan*, the word for bread. He thought of the sharing of bread as a great metaphor for the companionship forged by the three churches.

Safely home after a whirling nine days of various other fascinating stops in Cuba, the travelers to Las Tunas returned bearing witness to the amazing bounty of faith and love held by people they met there. In spite of the lack of material wealth and comforts so often taken for granted here in the U.S., the Cubans have amassed a fortune treasuring the simple basic things and rich in the love that comes from working together to solve the common problems. As one traveler remarked, "Perhaps living day-to-day has given them the spirit and freedom to live in the moment."

✠ St. James' Response Card Please, let us hear from you!

I would like to make the following comments on this issue of *The Bridge*:

I would like to request prayers from the church for the following:

I would like a pastoral visit from the church.

I would like to make a tax-deductible donation to the ministry of St. James' Church in Fair Haven. Enclosed is a check for the following amount: \$ _____

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Please clip and mail to: St. James' Church, 62 East Grand Avenue, New Haven, CT 06513 (Or, better yet, drop it by the church office anytime.) **Thank you!**



HISTORICAL HAVEN

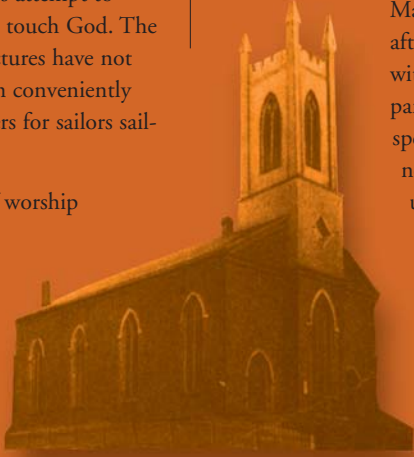
“SPIRES WHOSE SILENT FINGER POINTS TO HEAVEN...”

American poet William Wordsworth might have been looking at Fair Haven when he chose those words. Over the years, a number of impressive churches have risen up along the streets of this historic old neighborhood. Symbolically appealing to heaven with their elaborate spires and large steeples, they have, in one way, symbolized man's attempt to reach upward towards the Heavens and touch God. The most elaborate and grand of these structures have not only defined the skyline, they have even conveniently provided handsome navigational markers for sailors sailing upon the Quinnipiac River.

From the beginning, the first houses of worship built in the area now called Fair Haven have continued to influence place names. East Grand Avenue's original name is Church Street and the site of two of Fair Haven's most distinctive and established churches.

St. James Episcopal Church was the first church in Fair Haven built on the east side of the Quinnipiac River. On a plot of land donated by Captain Isaac Brown, the cornerstone was set July 8, 1844. Workers acquired the beautiful sandstone used in completing the original box-like Gothic structure from the Brown's quarry. The finished church was dedicated July 17, 1845 on what soon became known as Church Street (and later East Grand), pre-dating the larger Second Congregational Church erected across the street by nearly ten years.

Over the years, St. James' Church saw many additions, improvements and enhancements. The 1850s saw the completion of the chancel at the back of the church. In 1862, during the Civil War, much work began enhancing the interior in significant ways. The addition of a cathedral roof, carved woodwork, new stained glass, carpeting and a beautiful, large pipe organ made St. James



an especially magnificent house of worship!

In the early thirties, the basement at St. James' underwent expansion to accommodate the growing church school. During the infamous and disastrous hurricane of 1938, the church's tower was nearly demolished, and consequently modified, lowering the original height. On March 18, 1943—nearly five years after the sturdy, but aging church withstood the devastating storm—the parish marked its centennial with a special service and celebration. It was not until the sixties that the church underwent any major changes again, with the addition of the annex, which has continued to see improvements in the past years.

When a large group of worshippers left with the blessing of the over-crowded First Congregational Church of Fair Haven to found a new church in Fair Haven, they called it the Second Congregational Church. In early June 1851, the congregation started building their sanctuary at 65 East Grand Avenue, almost directly across the street from St. James' Church.

After nearly a year, the large Greek revival structure with tall columns and large spire was finished and the Second Congregational Church dedicated March 31, 1852. Fifty years later, long after a Third Congregational Church formed, split off and subsequently returned, the church formally adopted the name Pilgrim Congregational Church as it is still known today.

*The following sources were the basis for this article:
Fair Haven: A Journey Through Time by Doris B. Townshend
To learn more about the neighborhood and its fascinating history, visit the Whitney Library's New Haven Colony Historical Society.*

RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER

Living *La Vida Latina*

Situated in the handsome Georgian-style building at 169 Grand Avenue is **Junta for Progressive Action, Inc.** the oldest Latino, community-based non-profit organization in New Haven. According to their friendly and energetic executive director, Kica Matos, "Our mission is to provide services, programs and advocacy that improve the social, political and economic conditions of the Latino community in Greater New Haven, while nurturing and promoting its cultural traditions as it builds bridges with other communities."



Kica Matos, executive director

The first female director of the organization, Kica brings along experience and great passion for the work. With more than a dozen years in non-profit organizations like Amnesty International, she came to Junta after working in Philadelphia as an Assistant Federal Defender. The well traveled and bilingual Kica was born in Puerto Rico, educated in New Zealand, earned her M.A. from the New School in Political Science and her law degree at Cornell. She leads a diverse staff and board represented by members from Argentina, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain and the U.S.

Founded in 1969, the hard-working organization strives to address the unique needs of Latinos and immigrants from Latin countries. Junta offers a variety of free services including English as a Second Language (ESL) and GED classes. It also runs a food pantry, gives clothing to the needy, registers people for energy assistance programs, advocates for fair housing practices and provides interpretation and translation services. Last year Junta served 4,000 clients including 650 students who enrolled in their Adult Education program.

To learn more about how Junta can benefit some one or to help, please call (203) 787-0191 or visit their website: <http://www.juntainc.org>

Pastoral Reflections

Running into the God of Ambiguity on Our Trip to Cuba



BY THE REV. GEOFF LITTLE
PASTOR, ST. JAMES' CHURCH

This issue's main article recounts St. James' recent mission trip to Cuba. Here let me communicate in excerpts from my diary how God granted me a bigger vision of the way he sometimes works in our lives:

Day 1. We arrived at Havana Airport with ten suitcases full of donated clothes and medical supplies. Having read all the travel literature before arrival, I was certain we would not have to pay any fee. Then the customs officer demanded a \$300 importation fee. "But this was not in the papers...we have limited funds...this is for charity, for God's sake!" (Oh, did I mention I had my clerical collar on?) Fortunately, Blanca, my Cuban wife, anticipating doom, placed herself between me and the official, talked him down to \$150, and told me to pay the man. My complaining was wasted, and the unexpected expense did not affect us in the least.

"The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore" (Psalm 121:8).

Day 2. On our first morning in the Havana hostel, breakfast was late. Everyone else waiting outside the dining room was seated and in conversation. I was pacing and mumbling to myself, wondering what I could possibly do to hurry things. Suddenly, a portly young man named Alejandro pulled me aside. He knew I spoke Spanish (I guess I was mumbling in Spanish), so he asked me about me and rest of the group. He went on to tell me that he was a Christian man studying and working in Havana to support his family in Haiti. The offhand conversation turned into a ministry moment for both of us. We had just finished praying for one another when, in what seemed like no time, the door opened for breakfast.

"Martha, Martha... you are worried about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42).

These two entries make the point. In Cuba, I learned again that our Lord is a God of ambiguity as well as order. He is active when things make sense and when they don't. He works with us during our scheduled time and in off times too. Knowing this to be true, we can be less afraid to step out and serve him.

Family Matters

Help Our Children Read

BY BETSY HAUGH
DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN
AND FAMILY MINISTRIES,
ST. JAMES' CHURCH

We are very excited about the fall kickoff of the **St. James' Literacy Program**

on September 11, 2004. The program is open to all children of the neighborhood in grades K-2 who could use some extra help learning to read.

As part of the annual **Pastor's Picnic for the Neighborhood** that day, we will be registering children for this important program. If you know of a child who might benefit, please encourage their parents to bring them to enroll.

The literacy classes begin the following weekend, Saturday, September 18, at St. James' Church. Classes are held afternoons from 2 PM to 4 PM every Saturday, except holiday weekends.

In addition, we are looking for volunteers to help us. If you can contribute two hours occasionally on a Saturday afternoon, please call for details.

Our weekly Sunday worship program for children will begin on Sunday, September 12. We meet during both the English and Spanish services. For further information please call (203) 467-6958 or send e-mail to: elizabethhaugh@hotmail.com.



School kids we met on our recent trip to Cuba.

Created for the Fair Haven community by


ST. JAMES' CHURCH
Episcopal + Evangelical + Intercultural
62 East Grand Avenue, New Haven, CT 06513
Voice: (203) 467-6958 ■ Fax: (203) 469-0564
E-Mail: GLittle.CMS-USA@snet.net



COMMUNITY AND CHURCH CALENDAR FALL 2004

Services every 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays
10 AM: Bible teaching and Holy Communion, English language.
12 NOON: Bible teaching and Holy Communion, Spanish language.

Service every 1st Sunday
10 AM: Bible Sermon and Holy Communion, bilingual. Community lunch following the service.

Pastor's Picnic for the Neighborhood: Saturday, September 11, 12-4 PM, St. James' Church.

St. James' Literacy Program: Saturdays, 2-4 PM, St. James' Church. September - June. For kids ages 5-8. ESL for adults too!

Boy Scouts: Mondays 7-9 PM, St. James' Church. Call Bill Mason at (203) 469-0786

Quinnipiac River Community Group: every 2nd Tuesday, 7 PM, Yacht Club

Alzheimer's Support Group: every 1st Wednesday, 7 PM, The Mary Wade Home, 118 Clinton Ave.

THE BRIDGE FALL 2004

Managing Editor: Tom Shultz
Editor: Geoff Little
Contributors: Betsy Haugh, Geoff Little, Tom Shultz
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On the web at: tomshultz.com

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