

INVITING CUBAN COLLEAGUES TO VISIT THE U.S.

Step One – Consult the Cuban Church

- Hosting a Presbyterian partner from Cuba can be a wonderful experience for a congregation or presbytery. If such a visit is being contemplated, it is important to first consult the church in Cuba. Problems can arise when a visit is seen as personal rather than a function of partnership.
- If you are seeking a representative from the Presbyterian-Reformed Church or one of its presbyteries for an event or a Mission to the USA program, the Cuban entity will name that representative. If you are planning for a partnership visit, it is also a courtesy to ask your Cuban partner to designate their representative. With well-established partnerships, you may wish to request a visit from a specific person in consultation with your partner.
- Either way, after receiving the “go-ahead” from the appropriate entity of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba to invite one or more specific individuals, proceed to **step two**.

Step Two – Send the Letter of Invitation

- Your Cuban colleague(s) will need an invitation letter to present at the time of the Visa Interview at the U.S. Embassy in Havana. A separate letter is needed for each individual you are inviting. The letter may be sent to tramitadora Lucy Zuazo at trampres@enet.cu or directly to the person you are inviting. (*Lucy is employed by the PRCC Synod to “tramitar” or process visas for partnership visits to Cuba and maintain the list of Cubans invited abroad.*) A scanned copy is acceptable but sending a hard copy with someone traveling to Cuba is better. *Jack Kern, jackckern@sbcglobal.net, maintains the Cuba Visit Calendar which contains a list of planned partnership visits with the dates and contact person for each. It is accessible on Jack’s Drop Box Share or contact him directly.*
- The letter should be on the church or organizational stationery and signed by the pastor or other official, and preferably notarized. **A sample is included in this resource document.**
- When you have the name of the persons or persons you are inviting, you should notify tramitadora Lucy Zuazo of the names and dates so that she can enter it into her calendar: trampres@enet.cu. Also remember to notify Jack Kern so that he can enter the information, including the name of the contact person, into the Cuba Visit Calendar.

Step Three – Schedule the Visa Interview

- **BEFORE PROCEEDING TO SCHEDULE A VISA INTERVIEW:**
 - * **Check to see if the person you are inviting already has a U.S. Visa.** Some Cubans are receiving extended visas, for as much as five years. You would not need to schedule an interview for them.
 - * **Check to see if the person you are inviting has a Spanish passport.** Spain is one of 37 countries in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) of the U.S. A few years ago, Spain changed the requirements for citizenship so that anyone who had a Spanish grandparent is eligible. A sizeable number of Cubans have taken advantage of that and obtained Spanish

passports. The VWP allows Cuban holders of Spanish passports to enter the U.S. without a visa, if their passport meets the requirements. However, they must obtain an authorization to travel under the VWP through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA). **Jack Kern is familiar with this process and can guide you through it:**
jackckern@sbcglobal.net.

■ **If neither of these conditions apply, you are now ready to schedule a visa interview!!**

■ **IMPORTANT NOTE: The process for obtaining a visa for your Cuban visitor changed on September 27, 2014. It is now done online from the United States. The process is really much simpler than in the past, but you must now have more information than before and the requirements are in a different order than before. Please read this section carefully before beginning the process to be sure that you have all the information you will need. Remember that your Cuban visitor needs your Invitation Letter before the process begins!**

* First, your Cuban visitor must complete the DS-160. The DS-160 must be completed and filed electronically. Though it has been simplified, it still requires information that only your visitor will have, in addition to a passport photo. Most Cubans do not have access to the internet in order to complete and file the DS-160. **Lucy Zuazo has identified a person in Havana with internet access who will fill out and submit the form for a fee of 20 CUC, around \$24 USD. Your proposed visitor will need to travel to Havana for this and you will need to be prepared to pay the transportation cost and fee. NOTE: Internet access is becoming more widely available in Cuba so your visitor should check for other locations. There are also now several providers across the street from the U.S. Embassy.**

NOTE: The DS-160 must now be completed and filed before a visa interview date at the U.S. Embassy in Havana can be obtained. This is a change from the previous process in which an interview date could be obtained and the DS-160 completed subsequently and presented at the time of the interview.

Though it is not absolutely necessary, it is a good idea for your intended visitor to have the Invitation Letter in hand before completing the DS-160. He or she will soon need it anyway!

* Next, when your intended visitor has completed and filed the DS-160, he or she will receive a Confirmation Page, which must be emailed to you! It will contain the photo of your visitor, the name, date and place of birth, passport number, the purpose of the visit and the type of visa: B1/B2, and an all-important ten character Confirmation Number in red. **NOTE: There is some confusion in the website concerning B1/B2 non-immigrant visas. It may come up as “Business/Conference” or “Business/Personal” or “Tourism/Family Visit.” The point is to find the screen that will get you to the B1/B2 Visa.**

* Next, when you have the DS-160 Confirmation Page, **log on to: ustraveldocs.com/cu.** You will be asked, “Is this your first time applying for a visa and/or visiting our site?” Answer “Yes.” Then you will be asked: “Are you applying for a nonimmigrant or immigrant visa?” Answer “Nonimmigrant.” The next screen contains an “Overview” and a section on “How to Apply.” You may wish to review this material, though the necessary

information is contained in the document. **A column on the left of the screen, highlighted in blue, contains a number of options: select “Schedule My Appointment” under “Nonimmigrant Visa Application.”** (Note: the use of personal pronouns “my, you, yours” throughout refers to your Cuban invitee, not to yourself! This confused me at first.)

* Again, the screen contains information on the process, the most interesting thing being “Supporting Documents.” You may wish to review it, though the necessary information is contained in this document. **At the bottom of the page, under “More Actions”, select “Schedule an Appointment.”**

* The screen will contain a form that is for the use of “Registered Users.” Ignore this form; do not select “Login.” **Select “New User?” in red at the bottom of the form.**

* The next screen asks for the email, first and last names, and a password for your invitee’s email. You need the full passport name of your invitee, which may include two first names and two last names in the Cuban pattern. You can create a password for the email address, since it will never be used for anything other than access to this site. Of course, whether you have a password from your invitee or make one up, it is important to keep a record of it. **There will be a “Catcha” at the bottom of the page that requires you to reproduce what you see (which can be very squiggly! You may have to try more than once.)** Select “Submit”.

* The next screen is a bit confusing, but look for the “Update Profile” link and select it. You will have much of the necessary information from the DS-160 Confirmation Page, but you will also need their email address with a password and the date of issue and date of expiration of their passport. And, of course, as in the past, their address (street, city, province and postal code), telephone number and cell phone number if they have one. Your visitor may not have a password for their email, but you can make one up (with the standard minimum of eight characters with a mix of letters and numbers) since it will be used only for the purposes of this profile. As noted above, it is important that you keep a record of the password. **NOTE: the form requests entries for some things that most Cubans may not have, such as cell phone number. I simply put NA in those blanks and it was accepted.**

* On the next screen, under “New Application,” select “Schedule Appointment” and “Continue.”

* On the next screen, select “Nonimmigrant Visa” and “Continue.”

* On the next screen, select “Family Visit/Tourism” and “Continue.”

* On the next screen, select “B1/B2” and “Continue” at the bottom of the long page.

* On the next screen, you will be asked to “Please make sure all personal information is correct before continuing.” This will reproduce information you listed previously; **you must also enter the DS-160 Confirmation Number!** Then select “Continue” of course.

* The next screen will ask if you need to add a name other than your invitee. Ignore this of course and select “Continue.”

* The next screen will ask you to enter the MRV number (Fee Payment Receipt). **To get that number, you need to select “Payment Options.”**

* The next screen gives you the option of paying the \$160.00 USD Visa Interview Fee by either a Visa or Mastercard debit card. (There is also an option for an on-line bank transfer.) **Credit cards may not be used.** When you complete this transaction, you will be given a receipt number, which you should write down, though the system will remember it. **Enter this MRV Confirmation Number in the appropriate blank, if the system has not done that for you. Then select “Continue.”**

* The next screen shows a three-month calendar and the next available interview dates and times. There will probably be a choice of at least two times on the date you select and it is important to select both the date and the hour. **Select “Schedule Appointment.”**

IMPORTANT NOTE: The number of Cubans requesting visas has increased dramatically and the first available date may be a month or more ahead, so starting early is very important.

* The next screen is “Appointment Confirmation.” It shows the “Application Details” including the DS-160 Confirmation Number, the “Appointment Details” and the Visa MRV Payment Confirmation Number. **It also allows you to send an email of the “Appointment Confirmation” to your invitee, yourself and others.**

Congratulations! Your invitee now has his or her appointment for the visa interview.

■ **Expedited Appointment.** If the earliest interview appointment date you could get for your invitee seems too close to the date travel is to begin, you can request an earlier date. First, you must log in to your invitee’s profile again. **You will need their email and the password you developed originally.**

* On the left table, click “Emergency Request”

* You will see criteria for making the request. “Business” is one possibility. I used “Not enough time to make travel arrangements” and that worked.

* Fill out the request form and click “Submit”. You will be asked to upload supporting documents. A copy of the program with travel dates may suffice. Perhaps an appeal letter.

* It may be some days before you receive an answer. Of course, the answer will be sent to your applicant. **If the request is Denied**, the applicant will be instructed to proceed with the regular appointment.

* **If the request is Approved**, log onto the applicant’s profile again and click “Schedule an Expedited Appointment.”

* Select an earlier available date and confirm that appointment. You will need to ask the system to notify the applicant and send a copy to you, of course.

*For more information on Expedited Appointment qualifications and essential documentation, go to: www.ustraveldocs.com/cu-niv-especitedappointment.asp.

- The Visa Interview at the U.S. Embassy in Havana will ordinarily result immediately in either approval or rejection. If the request is sent to the State Department in Washington for review, this may take as much as two months. **This potential delay underscores the importance of starting the process very early.**
- If the visa is approved immediately, the invitee will be informed as to when he or she should return to pick it up. If there is a delay, the invitee will be informed by telephone when the visa is approved.

Step Four – Travel from Cuba to the U.S.

- All air travel between Cuba and the U.S. by Cubans is by charter flights for those who have a U.S. visa, except for those who have either a U.S. or Spanish passport. The round-trip travel can be arranged by tramitadora Lucy Zuazo, and that is probably the best way to go since she can determine the best arrival and departure times. However, it is possible for Marazul Travel (1-800-223-5334 or 1-201-319-1054) to arrange such travel, for which you can pay directly with a U.S. credit card. **NOTE: all charter tickets for round-trips originating in Cuba cost more than for those originating in the U.S.** You may also obtain current charter schedules from Marazul to assist in your own planning.

Most Cuban Presbyterians will continue to use Havana as their departure city from Cuba. However, there are an increasing number of charter schedules from Santa Clara and some will find that more convenient. Also, Miami has been the traditional choice for the U.S. gateway. There are now an increasing number of charter schedules from Tampa, both to Havana and Santa Clara, and Tampa may be more convenient and less costly unless family visit factors are important.

Step Five – Waiting and Planning

- At the present time, most requests for visas are approved or denied by the U.S. Embassy in Havana very quickly. However, as noted above, some requests may be held up for review by the State Department in Washington. If this happens, you may receive a phone call from the State Department requesting verification of the information provided in the Invitation Letter.
- If the visa request is referred to Washington, it could complicate planning for domestic travel. If you make domestic flight reservations before the final approval, you risk losing your money if the visa is denied or delayed. If you purchase flight insurance, be sure that it covers such situations!
- **Once the visa is approved, you should purchase health/accident insurance for your visitor.** Some partners who have not done this have found themselves with substantial medical bills!

You may contact Duaine Owings to purchase this insurance. Duaine is President of Missionary Services Agency; office 816-224-9466 or cell 816-616-4400. His email is duaineowings@gmail.com. He has served the PC (USA) for more than 15 years and writes that he has “three very reputable international travel medical companies that I can use to tailor the best coverage for those traveling in and out of Cuba. Tell the Cuba Partners to

please feel free to call me since it is always better to get a live person who can answer your questions.”

- **IMPORTANT NOTE:** When a Cuban Presbyterian travels to the U.S. under the authorization of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba, **you must reimburse the Cuban Church** for completing the DS-160, perhaps for a Cuban passport, for internal travel in Cuba for the Visa Interview and to the airport, the Airport Departure Tax, and the Cuba-U.S. Charter RT flight if purchased in Cuba. Tramitadora Lucy Zuazo, trampres@enet.cu, can provide you with an accounting for these costs. **The Cuban Church has to pay up front for these costs.** If at all possible, reimbursement should be made in advance through another U.S. Cuba Partner visiting Cuba, and, in any case, as soon as possible.

SAMPLE INVITATION LETTER

Letterhead

Date

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to inform you that (*name of host entity*) has invited (*full name of Cuban invitee as on passport*) to visit the United States to (*purpose of visit – conference, particular event, fraternal visit, meetings, etc.*) for (*period of time, such as a month, three weeks, etc.*) beginning on or about (*date*). All costs of this visit will be covered by (*host entity*).

(*Name of person invited – can be Rev. XYZ or Ms. ABC – full passport name not necessary*) is (*pastor, professor, general secretary, moderator – as many titles as you can dredge up*) of (*name of institution or church or organization as appropriate for each title*). The (*name of the inviting institution*) has had a close mission partnership with (*name of partner entity or institution*) for many years (*or since a certain date if known.*)

The program for (*name of person invited*) includes (*outline program- number of preaching engagements, visits to partner congregations, speaking engagements, attendance at presbytery meetings, leadership of Bible Studies, etc. with illustrative dates – the more detail the better*).

The program contact person (*or persons – give name or names with titles, phone numbers and email addresses.*)

Very truly yours,

Signature

Title

Notary Seal

September 7, 2015
Dean H. Lewis