



## THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF FLORIDA

# Cuba Companion Parish Ministry

## Travel Guidelines for Diocesan Parishes

May 2026

### How to Use This Document

This reference sheet is designed for clergy, senior wardens, and parish mission committees planning a companion parish visit to Cuba. It is organized in three parts: Guidelines (what to do and consider), Things to Think About (discernment questions for your leadership team), and the Pre-Departure Checklist. For fuller context and background, see the May 2026 Executive Briefing and the Diocesan Cuba Committee Minutes. Questions may be directed to Cuba Committee Chair Julie Sullivan or to the Office of the President of the Standing Committee.

## Part One: Guidelines

### A. Before Any Planning Begins: Required Coordination

- Contact Cuba Committee Chair Julie Sullivan ([jmsullivan32301@gmail.com](mailto:jmsullivan32301@gmail.com)) to integrate your trip with the diocesan network and benefit from current ground-level knowledge.
- Communicate directly with Bishop Angel's office or your companion parish leadership to confirm the visit is welcome, the timing is appropriate, and your planned activities serve their actual needs.
- Ask your companion congregation what they are requesting most: a physical visit, financial support, solar infrastructure, water purification, priest salary support, or some combination. Let their answer lead.
- Review the current U.S. State Department Cuba Travel Advisory ([travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov)) and OFAC guidance before setting dates.
- Notify the Office of the President of the Standing Committee.

### B. Legal Framework (OFAC)

Travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens is governed by OFAC's Cuban Assets Control Regulations (31 CFR Part 515). Tourist travel remains prohibited by law. Companion parish visits qualify under the General License for Religious Activity (31 CFR 515.566), which authorizes travel directly incident to a program of religious activities. No separate OFAC application is required, but compliance is the parish's responsibility.

- Every traveler must carry a letter from their Rector on church letterhead stating their name, the trip's purpose, and the companion parish relationship. This is essential for entry into Cuba and re-entry into the United States.

- Itineraries must reflect a genuine program of religious activity. Free time and recreational tourism must not be the primary purpose of any day.
- Travelers must maintain records of all Cuba travel transactions for up to five years.
- Lodging must not appear on OFAC's Cuba Prohibited Accommodations List. Diocesan facilities and parish guest houses are strongly preferred.
- U.S. credit and debit cards cannot be used in Cuba. Bring sufficient U.S. dollars in cash for the entire trip.

### C. Delegation Size and Composition

- Current conditions strongly favor smaller delegations. The March 2026 Christ Church (Exeter, NH) model of eight participants on a Havana-centered, flexible itinerary is instructive.
- Select participants based on gifts for accompaniment, capacity for flexibility and physical discomfort, and specific contributions to the companion congregation's current programs.
- Any participant who is immunocompromised, on dialysis, dependent on refrigerated medications, or otherwise medically vulnerable must consult their physician before committing.
- Ensure adequate pastoral coverage at St. Francis during the trip if clergy are traveling.

### D. Itinerary Design

- Plan itineraries centered in Havana rather than the interior, given current fuel shortages and the difficulty of inter-provincial transportation. The Diocesan Center is in excellent condition following recent renovation.
- If your companion parish is in the interior, discuss with Bishop Angel's office whether a Havana-based visit paired with a direct gift to the companion congregation is more appropriate than attempting in-country travel.
- Build generous contingency time into every day. Twelve-hour or longer power outages are routine, not exceptional. A plan that cannot absorb them is not an adequate plan.

### E. Safety and Logistics

- Confirm ground transportation with the Diocese of Cuba or a vetted driver before departure, including explicit verification that fuel can be secured.
- Prepare for extended power outages: battery packs, flashlights, medications not requiring refrigeration, and supplies to function for twelve or more hours without electricity.
- Identify which diocesan water purification systems are accessible from your lodging before departure.
- Bring non-perishable food for your group. Do not plan to source food reliably from local markets; shortages are significant.
- Carry all prescription medications in original packaging with a buffer supply beyond the trip length.
- Purchase evacuation insurance that is confirmed as valid and operational in Cuba before departing.
- Do not display signs of wealth. Exercise awareness in public spaces, particularly at night. No participant should move alone through unfamiliar areas.
- Avoid protests or public gatherings. Freedom of assembly is not a protected right in Cuba, and foreigners have been detained near protest sites.

- Enroll every traveler in the U.S. State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program ([step.state.gov](http://step.state.gov)) before departure.

### **U.S. Embassy Havana**

Calzada between L and M Streets, Vedado, Havana | +53 (7) 839-4100 | [ACSHavana@state.gov](mailto:ACSHavana@state.gov) | U.S. citizens abroad emergency line: +1-202-501-4444

## **F. Ethical Stewardship and the GAESA Question**

Most Cuban hotels, currency exchanges, tourist transportation, and state supermarkets are controlled by GAESA, a military-run conglomerate whose revenues do not flow to the Cuban people. Parishes should structure spending intentionally.

- Stay at diocesan facilities or parish guest houses rather than state-managed hotels.
- Direct financial gifts to PDM programs, companion parish projects, priest salary support, and solar installations (\$3,500-\$4,000 per system) rather than to state vendors.
- Ask honestly whether a substantial financial gift, sent alongside or in place of a larger delegation, would more faithfully serve your companions in this season.

## **G. Spiritual Formation**

- Prepare participants with substantive formation on the Diocese of Cuba's history, the 2020 reunification with The Episcopal Church, and the current humanitarian context before departure.
- Form participants in the theology of accompaniment: the Cuban church does not need rescue. Visitors are invited to witness, to stand with, and to carry the Cuban church's witness home.
- Establish a clear group covenant covering behavior, photography, social media, and the protection of the dignity of those encountered.
- Plan pastoral care for participants after return. Exposure to acute suffering produces spiritual and emotional disorientation that should be tended.
- Create a structured opportunity to share what was witnessed with the broader parish, and establish concrete ongoing commitments: prayer, financial support, advocacy, and continued correspondence.

## Part Two: Things to Think About

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These questions are offered for prayerful discernment by parish clergy, mission committees, and vestries. They are not meant to predetermine the outcome, but to ensure that no significant dimension of the decision is overlooked. Take them slowly, ideally across more than one conversation.

### Discernment and Calling

- What is the specific purpose we believe God is inviting us toward in a trip to Cuba at this moment, and how would we articulate that purpose to the parish, to the vestry, and to our companions in Cuba?
- Are we drawn to go because of an authentic call to accompany the Cuban church, or are we responding primarily to inherited patterns and prior commitments? What does each motive ask of us?
- What would faithfulness look like if the answer, for this season, were to send funds, prayer, and presence by other means rather than to send a group?

### Coordination with the Diocese and the Cuban Church

- Have we engaged with the Diocesan Cuba Committee to ensure our planning is integrated, and have we invited their counsel on timing and scope?
- Have we spoken directly with Bishop Angel's office or companion parish leadership to confirm that a visit at this time genuinely serves their mission rather than burdens their already strained capacity?
- What is our companion parish currently asking of us, and how does a physical visit address that ask?

### Lodging and Hospitality

- Where will participants stay, and can we identify alternatives to GAESA-controlled hotels?
- Could we lodge at diocesan facilities or parish guest houses in a way that places our spending into the hands of the Cuban church?
- What is our contingency if lodging loses power or water for an extended period?

### Travel, Fuel, and In-Country Logistics

- How will the group travel from the airport to lodging, and what is the backup plan if transport cannot secure fuel?
- If the itinerary calls for travel outside Havana, how realistic is that travel given current fuel availability and the limitations of in-country transportation?
- Should we plan a Havana-centered itinerary, following the model of Christ Church in Exeter, given the difficulty of safely moving groups across the island?
- What is our evacuation plan if a participant requires emergency medical care, and have we secured evacuation insurance that is valid in Cuba?

## Electricity, Water, Food, and Health

- Given that power may be absent for the majority of our visit, how will we manage medical refrigeration, communication, and basic comfort during extended blackouts?
- What is our plan for safe drinking water if local supply is interrupted, and have we identified which diocesan water purification systems we can access?
- What food provisioning will we bring, and how will we ensure we are not taxing the host community?
- Are any prospective participants on medications requiring refrigeration, on dialysis, immunocompromised, or otherwise medically vulnerable in ways that make current conditions imprudent for them?
- Have we identified the nearest functional medical facility that would receive a foreign national in an emergency?

## Safety and Group Covenant

- In light of reported rising desperation and theft, what are our group safety practices, particularly for women and younger participants?
- What is our group covenant for behavior, photography, social media, and the protection of the dignity of those we encounter?
- How will we ensure our presence does not inadvertently contribute to dynamics of desperation the Cuban church is laboring to address?

## Ethical Stewardship of Funds

- What proportion of our trip budget will flow to GAESA-controlled vendors, and can we restructure spending to minimize that share?
- How much of our total investment in this companion relationship should be redirected toward solar systems (\$3,500-\$4,000 per installation), water purification, priest salary support, and direct parish gifts?
- Would a substantial financial gift alongside a smaller delegation, or in place of a larger delegation, more faithfully serve our companions at this moment?

## Group Composition

- What is the appropriate size of our delegation given current conditions?
- Who, by gifting and constitution, is genuinely suited to this journey, and who would be better served by participating in a future season?
- Will clergy travel with the group, and if so, what is the pastoral plan for the parish during their absence?

## Formation and Communication

- What spiritual and educational preparation will participants receive before departure?
- How will we form participants in accompaniment and listening rather than rescue?

- What pastoral care will be offered to participants upon return, given the likelihood of spiritual and emotional disorientation after exposure to acute suffering?
- What will we say to the parish about what we witnessed, in a way that honors the Cuban church's complexity without romanticizing its suffering?
- What ongoing commitments will the trip generate, and how will we hold ourselves accountable to them one year from now?

## Part Three: Pre-Departure Checklist

No group should depart without having attended to each item below. This checklist is designed for the trip leader and may be submitted to the Diocesan Cuba Committee upon completion.

### Governance and Coordination

- Contacted Cuba Committee Chair Julie Sullivan and integrated trip with the diocesan network
- Confirmed the trip directly with Bishop Angel's office or companion parish leadership in Cuba
- Obtained vestry approval and fully briefed the senior warden
- Notified the Office of the President of the Standing Committee

### Legal and OFAC Compliance

- Confirmed travel qualifies under the OFAC General License for Religious Activity (31 CFR 515.566)
- Prepared itinerary that reflects a genuine, full program of religious activities (no purely recreational days)
- Verified proposed lodging is NOT on OFAC's Cuba Prohibited Accommodations List
- Established a records-keeping protocol for all travel transactions (required for 5 years)
- Reviewed current OFAC Cuba sanctions guidance at [home.treasury.gov](http://home.treasury.gov) prior to departure

### Documentation

- Every traveler has a Rector's letter on church letterhead (name, trip purpose, companion parish relationship)
- Every traveler has a valid U.S. passport with at least six months of validity beyond the return date
- Copies of all documents stored digitally and in physical form for each traveler
- Emergency contact information collected for every participant
- All travelers enrolled in the State Department STEP program ([step.state.gov](http://step.state.gov))

### Logistics and Safety

- Ground transportation confirmed with Diocese of Cuba or vetted driver, including fuel availability verified
- Lodging confirmed and verified as not on the OFAC Prohibited Accommodations List
- Sufficient U.S. cash secured for the entire trip (no U.S. credit or debit cards usable in Cuba)
- Evacuation insurance purchased and confirmed as valid and operational in Cuba
- Medical kit assembled, including prescription medications with buffer supply
- Medically vulnerable participants cleared by their physician

<input type="checkbox"/>	Emergency protocol established: U.S. Embassy contact, designated U.S. home contact
<input type="checkbox"/>	Contingency plan prepared for extended power outages (12+ hours)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Contingency plan prepared for transportation failure
<input type="checkbox"/>	Safe water access identified (diocesan water purification system locations confirmed)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-perishable food supply prepared for the group

### Formation and Ethics

<input type="checkbox"/>	Pre-trip formation sessions completed: Diocese of Cuba history, accompaniment theology, current conditions
<input type="checkbox"/>	GAESA ethical stewardship question discussed; trip budget reviewed to maximize spending to the Diocese of Cuba
<input type="checkbox"/>	Group covenant established and acknowledged by all participants
<input type="checkbox"/>	Post-trip pastoral care plan in place
<input type="checkbox"/>	Plan established for sharing the experience with the parish upon return
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ongoing commitments identified: prayer, financial support, advocacy, continued correspondence

### Key Contacts

<p><b>Diocesan Cuba Committee Chair</b>          Julie Sullivan   <a href="mailto:jmsullivan32301@gmail.com">jmsullivan32301@gmail.com</a>   <a href="http://diocesefl.org/mission-ministry/diocesan-ministries/cuba-diocese">diocesefl.org/mission-ministry/diocesan-ministries/cuba-diocese</a></p>
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<p><b>U.S. Embassy Havana   OFAC Religious License   STEP Enrollment</b>          +53 (7) 839-4100   <a href="mailto:ACSHavana@state.gov">ACSHavana@state.gov</a>   <a href="http://ofac.treasury.gov/faqs/705">ofac.treasury.gov/faqs/705</a>   <a href="http://step.state.gov">step.state.gov</a>   <a href="http://travel.state.gov">travel.state.gov</a>          (Cuba Travel Advisory)</p>
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