

Brief Report

From Dewayne, Rita, and Antonio Shappley

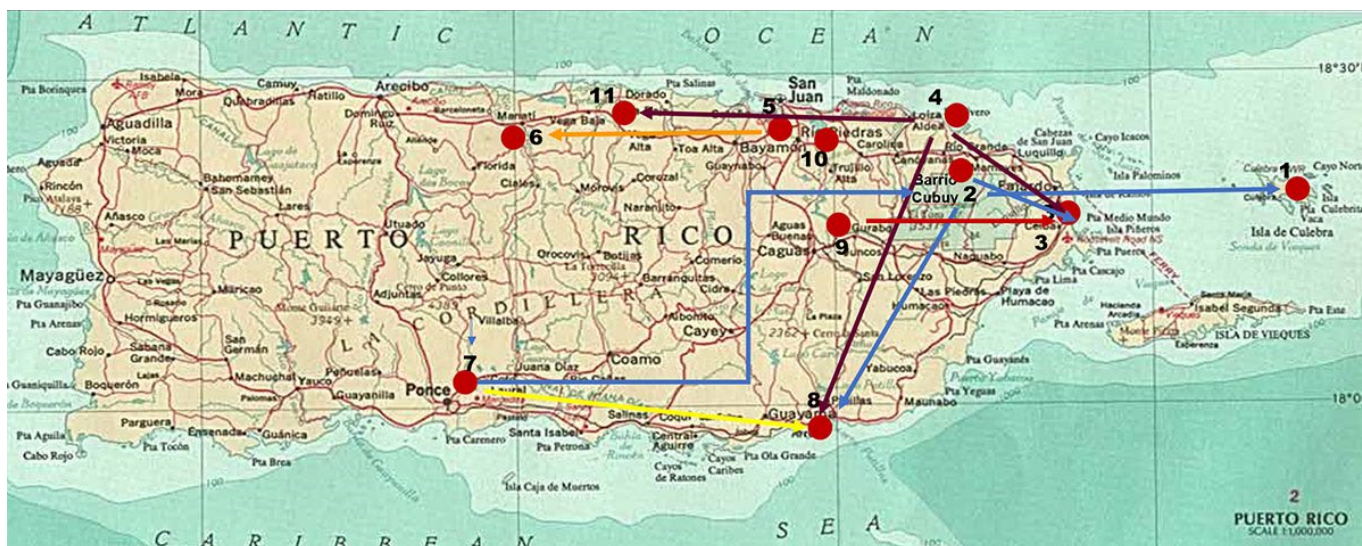
February 9, 2022

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A “Snapshot” of evangelism by some churches of Christ in Puerto Rico during the COVID-19 pandemic as of December 2021 and January 2022



Dear Fellow Christians, while talking with some brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico during the first three weeks of January 2022 to wish them a “Happy New Year,” several spontaneously told me what they and their congregations are doing to encourage one another and evangelize amid

the complicating circumstances of the present pandemic. In early January, up to 40% of the 3.1 million people on the island were diagnosed with variants of COVID-19. Several hundred died and deaths continue to be registered. For example, 24 yesterday, February 8, according to Bro. Eulogio Pantojas, of the Sabana Hoyos congregation.

The **Bayamon church leadership (No. 5 on the map)** decided to suspend meetings in the building for four Sundays in January as a measure to help protect elderly members. They have continued to transmit services and classes during the whole time of the pandemic, the **Barrio Cubuy church (No. 2 on the map)** also doing the same. As we conversed, a “**Snapshot**” formed in my mind of their activities and I would like to share it with you, using the above map to plot them. Puerto Rico is about 100 miles long by 35 wide. The little island of Culebra, a part of Puerto Rico, is some 30 miles to the East of the main island. Thirty more miles will take you to St. Thomas, Virgin Islands.

The arrows identify which congregations help sister congregations. A different color for each assisting congregation.

Starting with **No. 2, Barrio Cubuy**, in the high eastern mountains of the island, members have helped revive the congregation in **Culebra, No. 1**, where 6 Christians now meet. The original members in Culebra, converted some 40 years ago, had moved away and some had died. Then, not long ago a few moved back, and just recently **2 were baptized**. A couple from the Dominican Republic who had spent 30 years in Panama, then moved to Culebra. Almost an hour and half from Barrio Cubuy to Fajardo on the eastern coast, and a 30-mile ferry trip to Culebra. Rita and I made that trip a number of times to participate in the establishment of the congregation there, a work in which the Barrio Cubuy church also played a major role.



As indicated by the blue arrows, the church in **Barrio Cubuy** also aids the church in **Ceiba, No. 3**, on the eastern coast. In its earlier stages, the Ceiba church, having its own fine meeting place completely paid for by the congregation itself, contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars for various works in Puerto Rico and also for some in the Dominican Republic. As the years went by, many faithful members died in the Lord. Never blessed by a number of younger members, the once dynamic congregation now finds itself in need of assistance. Not only the Barrio Cubuy church has responded admirably, but also the **Loiza church, No. 4**, the **Gurabo church, No. 9**, and the **Bayamon church, No. 5**. Recently, a **young man from Ceiba was baptized**. About a year ago, a brother converted in New Jersey moved to Ceiba and is now helping in the services. Another brother converted in the US moved to the city of Humacao, to the south of Ceiba, and is attending.

Members of the **Barrio Cubuy church, No. 2**, also go frequently to **Guayama, No. 8**, on the southeastern coast. A trip taking one and a half to two hours, one way. For many years, a small group of Christians has been meeting in the **Patillas-Guayama area**, the churches in Barrio Cubuy and Loiza faithfully helping them. Recently, a **twenty-year old young man was baptized there**. Now for a marvelous circumstance in these digital times: **He was evangelized over the Internet** by a brother in **Quito, Ecuador!** That brother contacted me about a person he was teaching in Puerto Rico who said he wanted to be baptized. He did not tell me who or where. I advised him to consult the Directory of churches of Christ in Puerto Rico we have on the site www.editoriallapaz.org, and the rest is history!

One of the men meeting in Guayama was converted in a tent-meeting I preached in that city at the beginning of the church there some 45 years ago. He was a Pentecostal preacher at that time, with a small congregation, and invited me to preach for them one night.

Again, focusing on the **Barrio Cubuy church, No. 2**. For many years, members of the congregation have been **spending Easter week in El Salvador**, doing evangelistic and benevolent work. On one of the trips,



the daughter of a member in the southern Yauco-Ponce area of Puerto Rico accompanied the group, though she herself was not a Christian. Returning, she told José Rodríguez, of the Barrio Cubuy church, that when she decided to be baptized, she wanted to be baptized by him. **She did decide a short time ago to be baptized** and traveled from **Ponce, No. 7**, where there is a congregation, to Barrio Cubuy for that purpose. José, with a small group, took her to the **Loiza coast on the Atlantic, where he baptized her!**

While we are on the southern side of Puerto Rico, I will add still another development: A young brother from the Yauco-Ponce area who has become active in the work there, is also going regularly from **Ponce, No. 7**, to encourage and edify the group in **No. 8, Guayama**.



Members of the **Bayamon church, No. 5**, continue to help the **Manati church, No. 6**, with services every Sunday and classes each week. The Bayamon church also continues to sponsor a 30-minute radio program every Saturday morning that can be heard throughout the island. The cost of the program is covered by churches in Puerto Rico. Before the explosion of the Omicron variant, preaching brethren of the Bayamon church also assisted the churches in Río Piedras, Ceiba, and Sabana Hoyos.

No. 10 indicates the **Park Gardens church in Río Piedras**, a part of metropolitan **San Juan**. This is the first congregation we helped to establish in Puerto Rico. In a conversation at the beginning of the year with one of the ladies of the church, she informed me that several sisters were striving to continue evangelistic work in this difficult time of the pandemic. Last year, I helped them obtain 20 copies of the excellent eleven-lesson Bible Correspondence Course “¿Qué dice la Biblia?” – “What Does the Bible Say?” **Eight people had completed the Course** and a “**Graduation Ceremony**” was being planned for the **third Saturday of January**, if I remember correctly. Remarkable, I thought, in these times of COVID-19.

Incidentally, that is the BCC we obtained from Costa Rica about a year after we arrived in Puerto Rico, put a little ad in a daily paper, and within a short time had up to 3,000 students all over the island. It was then I began thinking about the need to print tens of thousands of lessons in-house and took steps to obtain the first commercial printing press, an AB Dick 360, for what would become, by the grace of God and the tremendous generosity of so many brethren, a far-reaching printing ministry in Spanish.

No. 11 identifies the church in **Sabana Hoyos**, one of the oldest on the island. A preaching brother of the **Loiza church, No. 4**, assist there once monthly, circumstances permitting during the time of the pandemic. The Sabana Hoyos congregation has not suspended services during the pandemic.

As this “**Snapshot**” formed in my mind, again I was greatly impressed by the same two attributes I have observed through the years in so many Christians I have known and worked with in Puerto Rico.

First, the willingness of not a few to travel repeatedly, **at their own expense**, distances that take up to five hours, or more, one way, to assist congregations in need of their help, and do it, not for a few months, or a couple of years, but **even for decades! Relishing the adventure of evangelism, and fellowship with very thankful brethren.**

Second, the **resilience of small groups of Christians**, especially when they can count on such help, and of some even if they are not so blessed. As already indicated, some such small groups have been meeting for decades.

There are a number of additional places in Puerto Rico, not covered in this “Snapshot,” where the saints meet.

70 more boxes of food and medical supplies for Christians in need in Venezuela



These were packed Jan. 29, 2022, by Antonio Shapple and about 20 volunteers of the West Broward Church of Christ, Plantation, Florida. Some had already left when this photograph was taken.

This year, Motorola provided matching funds of \$7,460.00 to be used for the purchase of food. \$3,006.00 of that contribution covered the cost of the food in these boxes. The company gave similar funds last year for the same purpose.

Antonio is in his 30th year with Motorola.

This report was prepared by Dewayne Shapple