

## **Making Our Way Together**

By Javier Pérez Pérez

*Although I walk in the valley of the shadow of death*

Psalm 23

"When the goldfinch cannot sing, when the poet is a pilgrim, when it is useless to pray. Traveler, there is no path, the path is made by walking." These verses by the Spanish poet, Antonio Machado, and set to music by Joan Manuel Serrat have served as inspiration for our community of faith. The poem is a precise accompaniment for the difficult moments that we are living through today. There are those periods of history when prayers are lifted up to God, but the answers are accompanied by fear, frustration and uncertainty. The present reality that we are living has a great deal of uncertainty. Today I dare to think like never before. Covid-19 has locked us in our homes, has distanced us and has made us wait for a vaccine that "solves everything," and this phenomenon applies to the entire world. However, it is not the only problem. Our country has embarked on an economic restructuring that makes the situation even more distressing. The Cuban family, faced with the dilemma of the pandemic, also faces a horrible challenge to put food on the table for their children and to obtain basic necessities, including medicines. Churches have been meeting intermittently for almost two years, and some have barely been able to meet at all. In addition to this situation, the church in Cuba must pay high prices for electricity and telephone services. On the other hand, the support of pastoral families has become a vital question, and there are no answers to the urgent needs before us. Faced with these difficulties, today the church of Guanajay is taking up projects that helped us significantly in the past: the project of Ecological Family Patios and the Cooperative "Joining Hands." These actions have helped us overcome the crisis and allowed us in a short term to help the families of the church, as well as helping us achieve the sustainability of other community projects.

The scenario that we have had in recent months has put various groups that want to be seen to be liberated in the media. The point is that the atmosphere feels increasingly fragmented, each group focusing on its own goals and objectives. There is a certain hegemonic power that tries to make sure that the struggles stay this way. When women raise their voice demanding an end to gender violence, or the LGBTQ+ community organizes a pride march to claim their rights, they are fighting for the same thing. When black people demand respect for their voice, they are fighting for the same purpose as another group demanding freedom of expression. It is urgent to understand that the issue at stake is human dignity, freedom, justice—all summed up in human rights.

So, not only is a vaccine against Covid-19 necessary, there is also a need for a vaccine of love against racism, intolerance, hatred, rage, selfishness and pride. Marches are needed so that people can think differently and still feel like brothers and sisters. It is alarming that after so many years, with so much technological development and with so many communication possibilities, we still have so many prejudices that divide us. With respect to these divisions, our sister churches in the United States and Cuba have shown love and respect despite how our governments act. That is why even in the midst of this crisis facing our world, we continue to make real the dreams that Martin Luther King envisioned, the dream that black

and white children could live without prejudice in his country. Translating the liberating spirit of this Baptist pastor to current times leads us to look at each other with kindness, invites us to respect differences and turn them into possibilities that can make us grow as human beings. It is the deeply spiritual feeling that the image of the God of Jesus is in the face of our neighbor, even in the differences that seem most scandalous to us.

Our church, The Baptist Church of "The Way," wants to unite its voice with people from all over the world who work for peace. It is our purpose to continue strengthening the bonds of friendship and solidarity that we have built over the years with the Alliance and First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C. It will only be possible to cross the "Valley of the Shadow of Death" that we face today with the presence of God that is manifested in the hand extended with love, the tender embrace and the word of encouragement that invites us to carry on.



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