

MCC sends relief to Cubans in crisis

by [Jason Dueck](#) in the [February 9, 2022](#) issue



Clara Rodríguez holds two cans of canned meat that she received through the Brethren in Christ Church of Cuba. (BICCC photo/Ramon Guisa)

Over the last two years, pandemic travel restrictions have deprived Cubans of one of their most important sources of income: tourism. That plus new 2020 restrictions that have made it harder for Cubans abroad to send money back home have put Cuba in what some are calling a dire situation.

Without a steady stream of beachgoers coming in and out of the country, Cuba's already hampered economy is barely hanging on. The country hasn't seen scarcity like this since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s.

"People have told me they haven't had an egg or any kind of meat for six months," said Bonnie Klassen, Mennonite Central Committee's area director for South America and Mexico. "They're out of toothpaste, so they're brushing their teeth with soap."

So when the Brethren in Christ Church of Cuba distributed some 44,000 pounds of MCC relief kits, hygiene kits, and canned chicken, it was cause for celebration and thanksgiving.

“We are grateful because today we see the answer to our prayers, what we have been praying for over a long time,” said José Gonzalez, pastor of the BICCC church in Santa Clara. “We see that what we thought was impossible is possible. We see that we are in the hands of God.”

Klassen said when she’s asked what items would be most useful to send, she was always told to send anything because almost everything was lacking.

MCC doesn’t have a formal presence in Cuba, but over the last few years, it has sent relief funds so that partners like BICCC could buy and distribute food and supplies locally.

While it is legal to ship humanitarian aid to Cuba, MCC coordinators have had difficulty finding companies willing to do it because of the perceived risk of violating the United States’ far-reaching embargo. But in September 2021, MCC was able to send more than 17,000 cans of canned chicken, 800 hygiene kits, and 840 relief kits.

Klassen said the response from the Cubans who received the items was almost overwhelming.

“In the first couple of days, one of the people in the church sent me a WhatsApp voice message and he was literally in tears because of the feminine hygiene products. Women had not seen feminine hygiene products for a very long time.”

—Mennonite Central Committee