

Church leaders praise new travel policy on Cuba

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [February 22, 2011](#) issue

Faith leaders with long-term ties to Cuban organizations are hailing a change in White House policy that reduces restrictions on religious travel to the island nation.

The White House announced January 14 that President Obama had directed changes that include permitting religious organizations to sponsor trips under a general license. The administration also will create a general license that permits remittances to religious institutions in Cuba that support religious activities.

"The president believes these actions, combined with the continuation of the embargo, are important steps in reaching the widely shared goal of a Cuba that respects the basic rights of all its citizens," the statement said.

During a November meeting in the White House, officials with the National Council of Churches had asked Obama to address limitations on travel to Cuba by U.S. religious leaders.

"The White House announcement is an important first step toward more just and open relations between the U.S. and Cuba," said Michael Kinnamon, NCC general secretary. "We look forward to the day when the U.S. embargo of Cuba will be lifted completely."

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Methodists said its Board of Global Ministries and other religious organizations had general travel and general fund transfer licenses prior to a tightening of the economic embargo during the recent Bush

administration.

"Our prayer is that the new regulations, when published, will restore opportunities to obtain such licenses," said Thomas Kemper, the top executive of the global ministries agency, in a January 20 statement.

The changes—which are expected to take effect this month—were also welcomed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops as a positive move to help the Cuban people. —RNS