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Christians in an Atheist Nation

How Los Pinos Nuevos Church & Seminary Is Revitalizing Cuba

PLUS: John Wycliffe Theological College
and combatting deception in South Africa

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How Los Pinos Nuevos Church and Seminary Is Revitalizing Cuba

What happens to Christians when a country officially becomes atheist?

After the 1959 Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro declared Cuba to be an atheist nation and heavily restricted religious practice. Although he promised not to close churches where people continued to meet, his government only recognized those churches that existed prior to the revolution. No new churches could be built, and Christians were not allowed to meet in homes. Beyond this, those who openly practiced their faith were considered traitors to the country's new socialist vision and were ostracized. Pastors were labeled as "social parasites," and key leaders were sent to concentration camps. Under these circumstances, many professing Christians abandoned their faith. Others remained faithful, but their commitment to Christ came at a high cost.

Then, in the early 1990s, Cuba's economy collapsed, leading to a new tolerance for religious practice. Faith leaders were invited to visit the island, and the church began to grow. The problem was that a growing Christian population needs pastors to lead them, and while believers in Cuba had not lost their faith, they had lost decades of opportunities to train their leaders. Some biblical education had occurred, but not much. In addition, many pastors had left the island due to persecution and economic hardship.

Los Pinos Nuevos Church and Seminary (LPN) opened in 1928. Graduates of the seminary had planted churches, and the church had grown steadily over the years. After the Revolution, however, LPN's growth was put on hold. When



the restrictions eased, LPN began again. But the years after the Revolution and the bleak Cuban economy had left them without enough trained professors for the number of people who wanted a biblical education. Their solution was to bring guest lecturers to Cuba to teach.

One of those guest lecturers was a missionary in Costa Rica named Dr. Jeff David.

Jeff and his wife Barbi had become missionaries to Latin America in 1992. They worked in Mexico until 1995. Then God called them to Costa Rica where Jeff taught at a seminary. It was during this time, in 2010, that he was

asked to be a guest lecturer at LPN. He taught a spiritual formation class and did his best to leave them with additional resources. But it wasn't enough. As he told us, "They were so eager to learn." He knew he had to do more. But what?

Just as he was praying for a strategy, he met Will Savell, President of The Grace Institute.¹ Will has been a friend of Thirdmill for many years

and currently serves on the board of Thirdmill Seminary. The Grace Institute's courses are substantially based on Thirdmill's curriculum. When Jeff met Will, Will was using Thirdmill courses to train pastors in Costa Rica who had no more than a 6th-grade education. Jeff was astonished at what they were learning and at their hunger to learn more.

After Will introduced Jeff to Thirdmill, Jeff and Will introduced Thirdmill to LPN.

¹ thegraceinstituteintl.com

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At first, they planned to use tablets loaded with Thirdmill materials. Will had used this method to great effect. But in Cuba, the humid climate and dust diminished the tablets' longevity. And by the end of the first year, they had 1300 students, making the tablet option far too costly.

Cuba is unusual in Latin America. Unlike many other Latin American countries, the Cuban government provides free education and encourages 100% literacy. In Cuba, even the poorest of the poor are highly educated. Many of the students wanting to study with LPN already had advanced degrees. Some were doctors, engineers, artists, but none had the theological training they craved.

To meet the need, the Cubans suggested using Thirdmill DVDs. Then when smartphones with SD ports arrived



Opposite: Celebrating Thirdmill training at Los Pinos Nuevos Seminary Top: Learning group with Jeff David (behind to the right); Gathering of Los Pinos Nuevos students; Students using printed Thirdmill manuscripts and study guides. Below: Los Pinos Nuevos graduation

They do not give up their faith. They do not surrender to despair. Instead, they develop a hunger for the gospel and for God's Word that many people take for granted.

on the island, Jeff brought thousands of microSD cards loaded with Thirdmill curriculum. LPN continues to use Thirdmill microSD cards today, but what Jeff discovered was that, in Cuba, the best option is paper. Students can print out the manuscripts and study guides and use them to teach others. And they do.

Jeff told us, "Because there's a lack of resources in Cuba, a pastor will study with LPN, then use his materials to train others. ... There, everyone knows the program and they LOVE it. It's really making an impact in Cuba."

So, what happens to Christians when a country officially becomes atheist? They do not give up their faith. They do not surrender to despair. Instead, they develop a hunger for the gospel and for God's Word that many people take for granted. And at the first opportunity, they seek to learn everything they can and share their learning with others.

As Jeff said, "The impact is wholistic. You're not just training a pastor. You are impacting a whole community."



John Wycliffe Theological College

Combatting Deception with the Truth of the Gospel



One of the aims at John Wycliffe Theological College in South Africa is to “proclaim truth and resist error.” South Africa suffers from an abundance of prosperity gospel teaching and syncretism. Demonic spiritual traditions go unchallenged, and many church goers impoverish themselves just to receive a “blessing” from God. To stand against these deceptions, John Wycliffe Theological College opened its doors in 1996, “for the purpose of training men to preach the riches of Christ.”

The college teaches what co-director Brian McLean calls “experiential Calvinism.” They focus not only on the gospel, but also on how the gospel impacts all of life. As Mr. McLean puts it, “We are rigorous in our training, while avoiding cold intellectualism that has no heart.”

John Wycliffe bases their primary program materials on the Westminster Confession of Faith, and in 2015, they started a partnership with Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary to help students acquire ministry credentials. But many who wanted to receive biblical training could not. Some had full-time jobs or were already working in ministry, leaving little room for traditional education. Nearly all lacked formal degrees that would make them eligible for the programs offered. For some, studying at a theological college meant moving or spending money they simply did not have.

In 2020, having learned of Thirdmill from Birmingham Theological Seminary (a Thirdmill partner that offers a free certificate using Thirdmill materials), they started the “Academy Program” based almost entirely on Thirdmill’s curriculum.

Then, at a missions conference in 2022, a representative of John Wycliffe met Dr. Richard Pratt who told him about the Thirdmill Institute. The College was eager to extend the offering in Johannesburg — not only did the Institute align with their theology, but it was also accessible from anywhere, customizable to a variety of situations, and free to use. As Dr. Pratt told him enthusiastically, “We are going to help you!”

That same year, the Academy switched to using Thirdmill Institute’s certificate program. Mr. McLean told us,

Access to infrastructure and resources is a critical issue for many of our students.... The format of the Thirdmill electronic materials has real impact. We are able to more easily get the materials out to students where they are. The Institute program also enables students to work at their own pace, and we can offer a modular approach to the classes.

Today, the Academy Program is having a real impact.

These brethren are often genuinely desiring to know the Lord but are not being taught in their home congregations. Bringing them under the teaching of the Scriptures has a visible impact on them in every way. It has been a unique joy to watch the Holy Spirit at work in them to grow them in their knowledge of Christ.

And with this knowledge, the students have joined the call to “proclaim truth and resist error,” bringing the true gospel to South Africa and beyond.



Johannesburg South Africa

Story From the Field: Siberia

Pastor Igor Kirislishin serves at a Pentecostal church in Siberia where many lack biblical training and a strong foundation in the Christian faith. Pastor Igor and his wife primarily minister to the Khanty people, an Indigenous people of northern Siberia, traditionally known for raising deer and hunting forest animals. After being introduced to Thirdmill a couple of years ago, Pastor Igor is now committed to teaching our curriculum to the Khanty.

Sergey Ignashin, our Regional Director for Eurasia, attended an event last year hosted by the church. He told us, “These people are so good. The church is eager to learn, and the pastor is enthusiastic about starting the Institute.”



Scan the QR code to hear a powerful testimony from Pastor Igor about how Thirdmill is impacting his church and community.



Staff Spotlight: Advancement & Generosity

Dr. Mark A. Jennings joined Third Millennium ministry as a Gift Officer in April, 2025. With a PhD in Theology and a background that spans both academic and institutional development roles, he brings a seasoned and strategic approach. Before joining Thirdmill full-time, he served for ten years as a guest professor in Thirdmill's videos.

Over the past two decades, Dr. Jennings has served in a variety of leadership capacities—from Head of School and Chief Advancement Officer for Christian schools to seminary Professor—consistently helping organizations grow through vision-driven fundraising, effective communication, and collaborative team development. As a scholar, he has published in the areas of Pauline literature and Greco-Roman social dynamics.



Dr. Jennings spent nearly twenty years in the Boston area before relocating to the Atlanta, Georgia region in 2021. He and his wife, Kim, have been married for nearly thirty years and are the proud parents of three sons (Avery, 22, Josiah, 20, Harry, 14). He spends his free time coaching youth baseball and watching the Red Sox. He is looking forward to being a part of what the Lord is doing throughout the world through Thirdmill.



Thirdmill
SEMINARY

Now Offering an Accredited Master of Divinity!

We are thrilled to announce that Thirdmill Seminary's newest program, the Master of Divinity (MDiv), received accreditation in both English and Spanish and opens to students on August 11th!

Thirdmill Seminary was founded in August 2018 as a subsidiary of Thirdmill with the goal of offering an affordable, quality, multilingual theological education by distance learning for leaders of the global church. Most Thirdmill Seminary students are already leading churches or ministries and need a field-based education that brings accredited seminary training to them.

The MDiv is an 84-credit graduate degree designed to equip those who plant and pastor churches. Building on the foundation of the Master of Arts in Christian Studies, the MDiv offers an ordination track with additional courses in the languages and literature of Scripture, Theology, Ministry Practices, and Church History.

For more information, visit the all-new website thirdmillseminary.edu. For inquiries in English or Spanish, contact info@thirdmillseminary.edu.

Generosity Corner

The Smith's Story

At Thirdmill, we strive to strengthen the global church by providing **Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.** This vision becomes a reality because of the wonderful people who come alongside us through their generous support. We're continually inspired by the incredible stories of how people discover Thirdmill and the journeys that lead them to give to our mission.

Duncan and Debbie Smith first encountered Thirdmill more than 20 years ago. Dr. Richard Pratt was speaking at Carriage Lane Presbyterian Church and shared about Thirdmill's work of providing pastors throughout the world with sound biblical and theological teaching. The Smiths recalled,

"What an encouragement it was ... It made so much sense to us. Pastors did not have to leave their families or their primary means of employment to get solid Biblical training. Many people were being trained all over the world at the same time. Because Thirdmill has translated their curriculum into so many different languages, it cuts down on the months and years of training missionaries ... to learn a new language, adjusting to a new culture, etc."



"Because Thirdmill has translated their curriculum into so many different languages, it cuts down on the months and years of training missionaries..."

— Duncan and Debbie Smith

Today, Duncan and Debbie find that even though they are in a new stage of life, they can still participate in the Great Commission by giving to Thirdmill. "For every dollar we give to Thirdmill, there are far-reaching results. We trust God will accomplish His purposes!"

Planned Giving: Wills & Bequests

Leave a Legacy of Biblical Education!

Have you considered how your legacy can advance God's kingdom? By including Thirdmill in your will, you can ensure that free, high-quality biblical education continues equipping church leaders worldwide for generations to come.

Bequests have a profound impact and are one of the easiest, most popular types of planned gifts. Simply indicate in your will your intentions for leaving part of your estate to Thirdmill. If you don't have a will, sites like freewill.com, totallegal.com, and rocketlawyer.com will guide you through creating a simple will for free or at a low cost.

To learn more or access sample bequest language, visit thirdmillgivinglegacy.org, or contact Jeremy Ruch at jruch@thirdmill.org. Your generosity today will empower church leaders for years to come!



Scan here to view a message from Dr. Pratt and Jeremy Ruch!



To give to Thirdmill, scan the QR code or visit: thirdmill.org/gift

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