Camporee: Cuba delegation arrives for pathfinder territory-wide activity
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Inter-America: Largest Pathfinder Camporee to officially open
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It's being called a miracle. It's also being called historic. But one thing is for certain: It's definitely causing some excitement. For the first time in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Cuba, a large group of Pathfinders has arrived last night in Mexico City for the third division-wide camporee which officially begins tonight. Two separate delegations totaling 35 Pathfinders and leaders from 15 different clubs are now settling into their campground at Ciudad Deportiva, the site of the event. Only 11 made it from Cuba for the last such camporee in 1998 held in Puerto Rico.

"For us this is a miracle, a huge giant conquered," said an emotional Pastor Ruber Alvarez, youth ministries director for the church in Cuba. "For our government to allow so many to travel outside of the country like this is practically unheard of."

The Cuban government gave approval for the group to leave just just three days before their flight. Alvarez knows how this miracle happened.

"We had the entire church in Cuba praying for this," he said. "Our leaders and church members throughout Inter-America were also praying, so we know God answered our prayers."

"For months we have been working and praying for our delegation from Cuba and we are so thankful that God worked a miracle," said Pastor Benjamin Carballo, youth ministries director for the church in Inter-America. "We are happy to welcome and embrace them as members of our extensive Inter-American family."

Keila Arocha, a 12-year-old Pathfinder from Guanabacoa in the west part of Cuba is excited to visit a new country. She and 12 of her peers were among the delegation to arrive yesterday at Benito Juarez International airport after a six-hour journey from her home.

"I feel so happy to come here and learn better ways in which we can share the love of Jesus with others," said Arocha. She said she is looking forward to making new friends and participating in the marches.

Samuel Sabater, age 14, was all smiles. He represents a Pathfinder Club of 20 in Matanzas in west Cuba.

"I'm thrilled to be able to finally make it," he said. He said he wants to make new friends, participate in swimming events, and learn how to be a better Christian. "I want to be committed to God everyday, to be in a constant relationship with Him and in that way become a better person so I can help those in need."

Sabater and the other Pathfinders from Cuba arriving in Mexico City were selected because of their outstanding missionary work and spiritual growth, said Pastor Alvarez.

Arocha and Sabater represent nearly 2,000 Pathfinders in Cuba. They are led by a group of youth leaders who work to keep young people active in church, stated Alvarez. Leaders like Daniel Cruz, age 50, who left Cuba for the first time to attend the event. Cruz, the Pathfinder director for the west conference of the church in Cuba, has been waiting all his life to participate in a large camporee, even before he was old enough to be a Pathfinder. He oversees dozens of clubs in five provinces in his region.

"I kept telling my wife to pinch me in the plane because it all seemed like a dream," said Cruz, adding that he feels like a 15-year-old Pathfinder again. "I feel so blessed to be part of this wonderful Adventist Church." He and his wife, who is 18 weeks pregnant with their second child, traveled with eight Pathfinders from his delegation.

"We don't bring much, but we come here to represent our young pathfinders and take back what we learn," Cruz said.

Thanks to the church in Inter-America, the Pathfinder and leaders from Cuba will have their campsite needs supplied. The church in Cuba, relatives, and the Inter-American Division (IAD) covered travel expenses.
The opening ceremony of the highly anticipated 3rd Inter-American Pathfinders Camporee will take place in the Ciudad Deportiva campground in Mexico City tonight. Soon, almost 20,000 Seventh-day Adventist children and youth from 600 Pathfinder clubs across the Inter-American Division (IAD) will celebrate the start of what is already the largest-ever territory-wide camporee.

Setting everything up for the inaugural event has been a huge task in itself, organizers said. Five different companies were hired to secure all the necessary elements. One is in charge of lighting and audio, another one is installing a solid structure for the main stage, a third one is in charge of TV recording, a fourth company will upload all video to the internet, and another will oversee coordination of activities on the stage.

The ceremony stage faces a huge open area upon which Pathfinder clubs will be organized and seated according to the union they represent. Besides the hearty welcome to every union youth leader, delegations, and guests, the planned highlight of the event will be a drama depicting the story of David. The drama is the brain child of Benjamin Carballo, IAD youth ministries director and coordinator of the camporee. The drama is divided into five scenes, beginning from the early days of David as a shepherd, his dealings with his parents and brothers, the transformation of Saul into a selfish and wicked king, and culminating with the battle against the Philistines and Goliath.

A group of 60 Adventist young people including 50 actors from the Central Mexican Union have been rehearsing this drama since last June. Organizers say the main purpose of this drama is to help Pathfinders identify the traits that made David triumphant over Goliath, an important step in David's life that parallels the theme of this camporee, which is Conquering Giants.

*"We hope those who watch this drama will feel highly challenged to stand up and courageously overcome any giants they might be facing," said Pastor Javier Muñoz, spiritual counselor of the performers."

Danae Barrera, one of the leaders of the performers, comments, "We hope this drama will accomplish an individual transformation that moves towards a collective transformation among Pathfinders," said Danae Barrera, a leader of the performers. "We want the children to see themselves as reflected in the different roles are played, but especially in David."

Last August the Seventh-day Adventist Church adopted a worldwide initiative to involve church members in prayer and Bible reading that gives way to a revival in our ranks. In this regard, being part of the drama group meant a deep spiritual exercise in itself, said Barrera.

*"We set up a specific hour of the day to pray for this drama which is 7:00 o'clock at night, wherever we are. We are the first ones to be transformed, and that is what we want to happen with all Pathfinders," reflects Barrera."

The opening ceremony will feature top church youth leaders from the Adventist World Church and the IAD and government representatives. There will also be presentations from the 21 church regions, musical numbers, drama performances, a camporee video report, fireworks, and more.

The opening ceremony, as well as the evening programs, will be streamed live over the internet through a 3G cellular network, according to Jose Romero, Information Technology director for the IAD.

*"This technology will allow us to provide a video stream in a location where there was no way of obtaining the usual internet connectivity from local cable providers. Even though there are other technologies out there that would allow us to do this better, we were limited by other requirements," Romero said.

The activity on the camporee's Facebook page has already increased by 218 percent with an average of 300 visitors per day, adds Romero. Twitter followers have also been increasing since Saturday.

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