

Protestants to have access to radio in Cuba

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

HAVANA, CUBA--Protestant churches in Cuba will have regular access to a state-owned radio station, according to the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina.

The program will be presented by the Cuban Council of Churches, an ecumenical agency consisting of 24 Protestant denominations and 10 ecumenical movements.

The news agency said that the "different faiths will produce six to seven program a year beginning in January, 1995. This is a novelty in the country, considering the secular character of the state.

Programs will be broadcast by CMBF, a state-owned station "with regularity and not occasionally as has been the practice", Prensa Latina said.

Access to state radio came from a petition offered by the church council which has broadcast Christmas and Easter programming over CMBF since 1991.

The programming is seen as an opening toward Protestant activities in light of a resurgence of religious interest in Cuba. Previously, religious activities were confined to the churches and could not be manifest publicly.

Protestant and Catholic churches were reported full during recent Christmas Eve services.

Ecuador's international Christian shortwave radio station HCJB says it has a large listening audience in Cuba. HCJB's Director of International Radio, Roger Stubbe said that the opening of the Cuban airwaves to ecumenical broadcasting has political overtones.

Stubbe, who recently visited Cuba, breaks down the Christian community in Cuba into three groups, the Roman Catholics who are anti-government, the Cuban Council of Churches which, he said, is pro-government, and the Evangelical bodies which maintain a neutrality. Stubbe indicated that the more liberal ecumenical council would be most likely to obtain time on government stations because it has traditionally supported government policies.

The evangelical bodies would most likely not be able to obtain national broadcast time, he said, but might pick up an occasional local spot. Stubbe indicated that the more conservative churches would probably not want to obtain regular time at this point because "they would not want the political baggage with would go with it".

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