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## Heart to heart in the Spirit

This was not a trip to Jerusalem or Rome or even Santiago de Compostela, but to Cuba. Our band of 23, traveling under the auspices of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, were not tourists, evangelists, or service volunteers but *peregrinos*, pilgrims.

We had come to Cuba eager to pray with fellow Christians. As Americans we carried with us our knowledge of the long, fraught relationship between our countries -- the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Cuban missile crisis, our economic sanctions, our foothold in Guantánamo. And Cubans retained this knowledge, too, and of the years of Spanish colonial control and later Soviet influence. While none of this knowledge could be erased, we came with a contemplative intention, to meet our fellow Christians with openness, to see and hear in a new way. Our group was ecumenical, including eight Catholics, 11 Protestants and a rabbi.

Because we were in Cuba during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January, we had the opportunity to participate in several ecumenical services at the Protestant seminary in Matanzas, where we were hosted. These included a beautiful Taizé service in the Catholic cathedral and a heartening Sunday liturgy at the Matanzas Baptist church.

One of the highlights of our pilgrimage was a two-day retreat with 25 Cuban pastors and prison and hospital chaplains. Across language and cultural barriers, we were able to meet heart to heart in our common intention to be open to the Spirit. Our contribution to the retreat was to teach and model contemplative practices -- *lectio divina*, breath prayer, walking meditation, and centering prayer. What was offered to us in return was the inspiration of these fellow Christians. Their dedication, courage, hope and joy in the face of personal and national suffering were compelling.

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