

Evangelical Pastor in Danger of Death Under Persecution in Cuba.

In Brief:

Evangelical Cuban pastor Dr. Octavio Rios Verdecia, minister with the Assemblies of God in Cuba and pastor of the important church "Words of Life" in the region of Santa Amalia in the municipality Arroyo Naranjo in Havana, Cuba, suffered an attempt on his life on Monday, the 19th of December 2005, at 10.40 a.m, while he was carrying out his usual duties of visiting members of his congregation. Meanwhile, the one who carried out this act remains free and also threatened "to finish the work he began."

The News in Detail:

Cuban Evangelical Pastor Dr. Octavio rios Verdecia, ordained minister of the Assemblies of God in Cuba, and pastor of the important Words of Life church, situated in the Armando street, #55, between Alberto and Mario, District Santa Amalia, municipality Arroyo Naranjo in Havana 9, CP 10900, was attacked by an individual named Eduardo Valdes Oliva, of the neighbouring street Cristina #23, between Gloria and Hope, on Monday, the 19th of December, 2005 at 10.40 A.M while he was leaving his house to do his pastoral work.

This individual, who has a history of trouble with the law, answered the cordial greeting of Dr. Octavio by swinging a police stick, making use of the astonishment of the pastor to give him a blow on the head and, making use of the time, started to hit the doors of the church with bottles full of homemade wine, according to reports by some eyewitnesses, neighbours of the area. With difficulty, the pastor was able to evade the main blows by putting a bar between him and his attacker when he pulled a steel blade from his belt. This subject then launched a series of dirty words against the Gospel and against the pastor, damaging a bicycle. The doors of the church and the entrance hall's windows remained closed.

This attack occurred in broad daylight, in front of the many children and teachers of the Day Care Center. Pastor Octavio needed medical attention and the whole entrance needed to be cleaned.

Ten minutes after this happening, and in the midst of the worries of all and hoping for police intervention, a "famous" informant of the municipal police arrived casually at the church to offer his disinterested help. They saw him leave in his car together with the pastor, who had partially recuperated, to go to the police station of Capri. Neighbours commented to have heard the pastor say upon arrival at 3.00 PM: "They will take two hours and ten minutes to take my declaration in the police unit in spite of the fact that there is hardly a current case and more than thirty angry officials coming and going.

The perpetrator of these acts, Eduardo Valdes Oliva had been in jail before for common crimes and had attacked a Baptist pastor some years before in the locality. He had been watching the coming and going of the pastor for 17 days as well as the hours of services as well as the comings and goings of his family. He sent notice of his planned attack to some neighbouring churches, had an open intimidation campaign signed only as "Eduardo" and made it almost impossible to find out his identity. It was carried out with premeditation, coldness, and treachery. Having been detained, he was let go 72 hours later. Coinciding with having been set free, he attacked a church with stones and glass in the back of the property.

After the denouncement by the pastor, the police responded in an aloof manner, the municipal government received a mediocre, cowardly and empty response and everything seems to indicate that the delinquent is receiving free protection on the part of the authorities.

The Cuban pastors are accustomed to work under threats and intimidations. When they receive advice of this class, there remains no other option than to confront the risks.

Pastor Octavio Rios, medical doctor and specialist in Internal Medicine, left the professional army in 1997 to dedicate himself completely to the Gospel. He was pastor of the Word of Life Assembly of God in Santa Amalia since 1998. He was president of the Municipal Evangelical Cuban Celebration in 1999 and main speaker in the well-known stadium Ciro Frias. His message was Christ-centered and did not refer to any political party but only to Christ. During the celebration he endured great persecutions, defamation and strong campaigns of intimidation, had to resist real blows by the main opposition which lasted 14 months and had national dimensions. The leading role in this was played by a well-known informant of the Ministry of the Interior named Angel de la Teja Gonzalez, living in the street 1st 1B between F and G. Reparto Poey, Municipality Arroyo Naranjo, who never received any attention in spite of the fact that his work resulted in enormous resources to distribute thousand of letters throughout all of Cuba.

Pastor Octavio Rios Verdecia, an effective preacher, distinguished Bible teacher and National Secretary of Evangelism from 1998 to 2005 under the leadership of the famous international evangelist Rev. Orson Vila, is a calm and peaceful family man. Father of two little girls, an exemplary husband and leader without double standards, has said in intimate family circles, "I will die in a place that God will choose if necessary." Meanwhile, the executor of these despicable acts says in the streets, "I will complete the work."

From Cuba we beg the international community to pray for the pastor who is facing the eminent danger of a death sentence and for the absolute disregard in which others find themselves and for justice. His work has not ended. He continues to preach in his church and works in the streets with pastoral attention. He does not dispose of personal guarantees and the government, which has the power to give it, has preferred to confer the right of freedom to the delinquent Eduardo Valdes Oliva.

At this time we ask for prayer for all the Cuban pastors. It has never been so difficult to minister in Cuba than it is now. Spying, prison, intimidation and now also open physical attacks are the ways under which pastoral work has to be done.

The Assemblies of God in Cuba is the main national evangelical group of two hundred thousand adherents. The Superintendent, Rev. Hector Hunter Wright, is visibly worried about the growing opposition that they are experiencing in almost all the provinces.

Reported for the whole Christian world.

Pastor Octavio with his wife and daughters.



Some members of the congregation.

