



AMERICA/CUBA - In Granma the government returns two schools and land to the Catholic Church

Bayamo (Agenzia Fides) - Authorities in the province of Granma, in the south-east of Cuba, have returned to the Catholic Church two buildings and land, within the policies of President Raul Castro, who intends to return to the Church property nationalized by the revolutionary regime in 1961. At the time 339 Catholic schools and Catholic universities Villanueva and La Salle, in Havana went to the state. The measure took away from the Church its main source of income, as well as the ownership of some churches and chapels.

One of the buildings now given back is the old school "Colegio Divina Pastora" in the city of Bayamo (700 km southeast of Havana), where now there is a public elementary school Manuel Ascunce, as reported to Fides Agency by the local Church. It is a "totally positive" gesture that the Church welcomes "with its consent," said His Exc. Mgr. Alvaro Julio Beyra Luarca, Bishop of the Diocese of Santísimo Salvador de Bayamo y Manzanillo, in Granma.

In addition to the return of these three properties, the provincial government has given the Church another piece of land to build a place of worship for the people of Cauto Embarcadero and Rio Cauto, where "today there is no religious assistance or is very limited, due to the lack of infrastructure," said Mgr. Beyra. In Granma, the government has also returned to the church a chapel dedicated to San Tarcisio in the city of Manzanillo. In 2012, the government returned to the Archdiocese of Havana, the chapel of the old University Villanueva, in bad condition and in need of restoration.

"I have not talked to the other Bishops, I do not know whether there were other things given back in other dioceses, but I think it is a national decision, not local," said Mgr. Beyra to the press. Father Jose Felix Perez, executive Secretary of the Bishops' Conference of Cuba, reported that a few months ago the Office for Religious Affairs of the Party of Government, had communicated to the Church the government's willingness to return some property that had been nationalized. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 26/01/2013)