

Cuba Chronicles

2020 Fall Mission Report IGLESIA EPISCOPAL REFORMADA

Havana REC Congregations

The Rev. Canon Barclay Mayo

The picture to the right depicts a once busy residential street in the Buena Vista neighbourhood of Havana. It is completely deserted in the middle of the day! The Buena Vista neighbourhood presently looks like a ghost-town, derelict & abandoned (for comparison, the photo below right was take near the downtown area of Havana in June, 2014). That is indicative of conditions in Cuba at the moment!

One block away, the yellow tape on a fence announces the sad news of a new Covid family outbreak and the imposition of further quarantine. God have mercy! We are told that curfew in Havana begins each evening at 7pm and is in effect until 5am every morning. There is no public or private transportation allowed throughout the island. It has been completely shut down.

There is little staple food to be had and what there is requires hours standing in line, with no guarantee of success. Cleaning and hygiene products are almost non existent. Regular shops have barren shelves and while the new USD stores have some things, there are no dollars to spend in them! When necessities like toothpaste are even available, costs are 4 or 5 times what they were at the beginning of the year. It is a desperate situation. We need to be interceding daily with the Lord on their behalf.



Bishop Walter Banek, Bishop Willian's wife, Reina, and Claudia Dorrington, January 2019.

The Seminary and Training

Enrique notes that they are facing huge difficulties with the accreditation of the MOCLAM seminary. The MOCLAM administrators have appointed a new representative for Latin America; a brother who unfortunately does not understand the reality of Cuba and has been making plans for the seminary to work here in the same way as it does in the rest of the world, where everything is done via the internet! Because of the communications restrictions, this expectation is unrealistic and unworkable. Both Alexei and Enrique have dropped out of the MOCLAM Seminary. Enrique states, "That system change, I fear, will be the end of MOCLAM in Cuba.

Another possibility is a Presbyterian university that offers free materials, will recognize their previous studies, grant them a certificate, and perhaps, by adding other subjects, help them to acquire a BA level diploma. Enrique states that, "It would be great if an Anglican theological college would support our continuing studies." However, he doesn't know of any in Latin America.

Perhaps this is not all bad news. Although the MOCLAM material comes from an Anglican College in Australia, it has very little "Anglican" content. This has

Enduring the Pandemic

Enrique: el Olivo

Enrique and his family are very thankful for the care and concern they have received from the US and Canadian brothers and sisters in Christ, both as they prepared to immigrate to Mexico, and now as those hopes and dreams have been shattered. He tells us that the economic situation and restrictions are beginning to wear on everyone, their family included. "It is difficult not to succumb to discouragement and depression," he says. However, even though they may not understand why things are happening, Enrique recognizes that God knows what is best for them and will give them the strength to continue. Please pray for Enrique, Maray, Melissa & Diego to have spiritual strength and provision for their needs and ministry in this time of distress. This newly sprouted Mango in their garden is a symbol of God's provision in the midst of crisis!



forced the Cuban teachers to work translating exclusively Anglican material from other sources to be used in the Seminary. Also, Enrique's observation, concerning limited internet access, is significant. Although all of the Cuban clergy do have access to email, communications with the island from the outside are not always possible. Not only are communications monitored closely by the authorities, it can be very expensive and thus inaccessible for those who need to study. Conditions on the island, even before the lockdown, were already difficult. So, a long-distance program of learning with limited communication becomes almost impossible.

Alexei, who has taken on the role of Professor at the Seminary in Moa,

reports that they are presently working with four seminarians, young men from some congregations and their wives. While they cannot meet often together, they are sent weekly lessons & examinations through the mail. The results have been very good despite the inefficient nature of the internet at this time! Alexei says, "We continue to seek ways to keep in touch with our brothers and sisters and encourage them in the faith. We are all exhorting family worship to be the only possible way. The Diocese is being forced to adapt to the new circumstances, but we continue to serve Jesus with the same dedication as always. Brethren... pray a lot for us, I can't find words to describe what we're experiencing. Many blessings for all, I imagine you too are facing some difficulties."

The Rev. Dr. Ben Bernier, Principal of Cranmer Seminary, notes, "As you know, there have been many hurdles in the way of the development of Casa Cranmer, Cuba. Yet despite so many struggles and difficulties, the work continues at a steady pace. Although we have had to place a hold on our original plans for this year, the Seminary has been able to enroll new students and adapt the new study plan to the limitations of the current situation. With the help of the new seminarians, and as a part of their training, Archdeacon Alexei has been doing the rounds of visitation to church members' houses. These have proven to be a great blessing to all concerned."

Dr. Bernier also continues to collaborate from a distance identifying resources in Spanish, translating primary sources, and developing long distance courses for their program. He says, "We are hoping, by God's grace, once the situation becomes normalized, the church will be able to use its new facilities to the full extent of their potential. This would be a great blessing! Please pray for all those involved with this important facet of the life of the church in Cuba."



"Professor" Alexei and new students.

Work of the REC Board of Foreign Missions

The Rev'd Canon John Peter Boonzaaijer, REC-BFM, President

Subsequent to the pioneering work of Bishop and Mrs. Dorrington, the land of Cuba fulfills more of Psalm 86 each year: *“All nations whom thou has made shall come and worship thee, O LORD, and shall glorify thy Name.”* During COVID the songs of praise, while separated, continue their ascent to the heavenly courts of praise. The need for food, funds, and basic supplies is also amplified during the strangling isolation of this island nation. As the missionary arm of the Reformed Episcopal Church, North America, The Board of Foreign Missions has partnered with ANiC to share the financial burden of care for the REC Missionary Diocese of Cuba, having raised 60% of the needed funds for 2021 budget support, funds to purchase the “Seminary House” (for Alexei’s family) in Moa—and enough for five electric scooters through the ministry of the Women of the Church!

The 2020 Trinitide Cycle of Prayer guided all North American parishes through systematic prayer for each

clergyman, mission, parish, and preaching station; further, this year’s Advent Offering has been designated for Cuba, to raise the balance of the “Seminary House” and the annual budget offering. We pray for God’s blessing on this offering toward the continuation of an effective mission!

For continued education, plans are being laid to bring younger leadership across for development visits when permitted, and to utilize the language, training, and teaching skills of Dr. Benjamin Bernier to stabilize Cranmer Theological Seminary onsite for the education of the Cuban clergy, as well as for a springboard into Central and Latin American ministerial formation and degreed education.

To partner with our Canadian friends planting, building, and restoring the Church and her ministry is both an honor and a happy challenge. Advent Offering brochures and Cycles of Prayer can be downloaded for distribution from www.rec-bfm.org.

Building the Church in Havana

Claudio & Nely: Pan de Vida, Habana

Pastors Claudio & Nely Costa Freda care for Pan de Vida congregation in Havana, the largest REC Cuban church, with over a 150 mostly senior members spread throughout the city. Nely tells us that they have been confined to their home for much of the last 8 months. In early October, she wrote that, “It was a great privilege to have Claudia and Bishop Charles as sisters and brothers who support us and encourage us to continue the work that God has placed in our hands. We know that many times it is difficult and that we suffer. We do not get used to losing one of our own, but we have to move on... We are Christians and we have to be light.”

They are presently looking for ways to restart public worship without affecting the elderly, who make up a large portion of their congregation, perhaps meeting together once a month. However, no decision has been made and they continue to attend to the needs of the congregation from a distance. Claudio said that they have to wait for when the President of State says that public meetings can resume. They do their best to pray and worship with their congregation over the phone. However, they are both in delicate health. The Diocese has, for months, been looking for a younger assistant pastor to work with them. However, in the midst of Covid, there is little chance of help on the immediate horizon.

The Chancellor, The Rev. Enrique of el Olivo, Havana, Dcn Eric Mateo of La Restauracion, Havana and their

brother Pastor, Yudel in Rey de Reys, Pinar del Rio, enjoy a little bit more mobility, but they too are severely restricted by the curfews. Ministry is extremely difficult and often overwhelmed by the need just to attend to living basics.



Claudio & Nely

Helping our brothers and sisters in the Cuba Mission

The Rev. Canon Barclay Mayo

So, what does this all mean for our US & Canadian partners and future affiliates? How can we help, when we cannot travel or get finances and much needed material into their hands?

- We can certainly pray with expectation that God will find a way. We have seen the Lord work in many miraculous ways during this pandemic, and I believe that he will continue to do so. Please pray fervently for Bishop Willian and for his wife Reina, who is in rapidly declining health.
- We can begin to make ready the funds that God has provided to relieve this suffering and have them available for when God opens the door, and we can once again be with these faithful brothers and sisters. We are working on some methods for ensuring the Diocese is resourced for the coming year and are encouraged with some small successes!
- By my count we have four new seminarians doing ministry who need partner churches, as well as a new ministry in Guantanamo and one Missionary Lay Reader who need sponsoring. Please pray, asking God if he would like you individually or as a parish to be involved. Salaries are as follows: Priest - \$120USD/mo. - Deacon \$80USD/mo. – Deaconess Asst, Missionary Lay Reader \$50USD/Mo. - Lay Reader \$30USD/mo. (I am assuming the Seminarians are being paid as Lay Readers)
- Please pass this news and needs on to as many churches and people as you can. Ask them to pray and consider helping.

- Please (carefully) “friend” on Facebook, message and email *often* to encourage these pastors. Many of them have accounts and can usually (at least weekly) access them, if only to retrieve messages. Send them news of your churches and your struggle with Covid. Tell them of your prayers for them. Invite them to pray for you and for your churches. Invite them to access your online worship when they can. They can sometimes access them, even live!



Alexei says “Here is the car! Almost finished! Just a few small details left.”

How You Can Give to the Cuba Mission

Canadian donations should now be sent to:

**The Central and Eastern REC Diocese of Canada,
157 Haddon Avenue North, Hamilton, Ontario, L8S 4A7**

or in the USA

c/o REC Board of Foreign Missions
23501 Cinco Ranch Blvd, Ste H120 #642, Katy, TX 77494 www.recbfm.org

For more info about the Cuba Mission please contact:

The Rt. Rev. Charles Dorrington, REC Diocese of Western Canada,
70-7570 Tetayut Rd. Saanichton, BC V8M 2H4 | 250-507-0730 | revchas@shaw.ca | rec-canada.com or
The Rt. Rev. Trevor Walters, ANiC Assisting Bishop, walters34@shaw.ca

To explore how you can become more involved, please contact:

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