

# Cuba Chronicles

2020 Spring Mission Report

IGLESIA EPISCOPAL REFORMADA

## Mission Trip, 2020

### The Rev. Barclay Mayo: Trip Coordinator

This was my 6th mission trip to Cuba, 5th as the trip coordinator. Our team included: Mrs. Claudia Dorrington, the Rt. Rev. Trevor Walters, the Rt. Rev. Water Banek, the Rev. Ben Bernier, the Rev. Jason & Sara Patterson, Mr. Nelson Buffet & Mrs. Gay Welsman. This was, without a doubt the most difficult trip to date. While there was much to be encouraged about, as you can see from the Seminary report below, the new acquisition of a house church (el Sinai) in Florida and the impending completion of the car/taxi project, there was also an air of great caution as country hunkers down and looks to survive in the midst of massive shortages of fuel, transportation, food and medical supplies. Our presence was noted and, in some sectors, not overly appreciated. For the immediate future, as

we seek to continue to serve the Cuban REC church, it will be necessary to look for different ways to be present and to deliver the supplies and services that are so desperately needed. Please pray for favour with the officials, ease of access and the perfect love of Christ Jesus that casts out fear for all concerned.

As we were preparing to return home, Archdeacon Alexei Gonzalez Rodriguez's daughter, Anaysa, was



Anaysa now recovering.

thrown from her bicycle and suffered a severe neck injury. It is only by the grace of God that she survived! Her neck needed to be immobilized, but there was no access to the proper-sized neck brace in their medical system. I managed to track down the required brace from a medical supplier in Winnipeg, Manitoba and have it delivered to a Christian sister, Angela in Victoria, who was headed to Cuba on a



Bishop Walter Banek with Bishop Willian's wife, Reina Acosta Real.

holiday. She met up with one of our clergy and was able to deliver the brace for Anaysa. Thank you, Jesus!

Please also continue to pray for Bishop Willians as he struggles with the effects of his Diabetes. He has just had a toe amputated and is home recovering. The health of Willian's wife, Reina, is failing. She is almost totally blind and having issues with her kidney function. We were indeed blessed to be able to spend time with her this year... and praying for healing and restoration for them both.



The Rev. Barclay Mayo



# Claudia's Dorrington's Notes

## MOA Seminary

The leaders of the Cuban Diocese have completed the required Moore College courses. Twenty-five people took courses last year. The pastors have realized that their vestry members and parishioners also have eager hearts to learn and grow in their faith in knowledge and in wisdom. Therefore, Archdeacon Alexei, Dean of the Seminary, together with Bishop Willians and The Rev. Dr. Ben Bernier of Cranmer Theological College have developed a program from the Seminary Theological Curriculum designed to train lay leaders. The Seminary Programme has been invaluable in preparing the pastors. They, now in turn, are teaching their people and growing a core of stronger maturing believers who know and understand the true gospel of Jesus Christ crucified for us.

We rejoice and give thanks that the Lord provided all the materials to be secured to build the seminary on land the



**The New Seminary in Moa.**

diocese already owned in Moa in an area where it seemed impossible to do so. As soon as the necessary permits are issued, they will begin to teach classes in the new facility. We hope and pray that it will not only be a blessing for Cuba, but also for seminarians and lay leaders throughout central America! It is a miracle—God IS a God of the impossible!



**Archdeacon Alexei in Seminary.**

## The Taxi

Much time, energy and expense has gone into re-building the taxi. When we were in Moa, it was stripped down and waiting for final painting! All the body and mechanical work has been completed. There is just some minor electrical to be done as it is reassembled. Because there is no access to an interior body shop, they require 2-3 dry days to paint it. Bishop Willians believes that once he has the 4 new tires, it will keep running reliably for the next 15 years. Then, it will be 'on the road'. Praise our God, ARDF Canada and all others who have contributed to this project!

## The Rev. Miguel Martin-Barreto- (el Sinai)

We were able to visit with Miguel Martin Barreto in Florida. They are pastoring 4 House Churches throughout the Florida Countryside. He was pleased to introduce us to one of his newly Baptized Church members who is a nurse, Sonja. She greeted us and accompanied us with Miguel to see a wooden house, newly purchased in partnership with the Diocese. The members of the 4 House Churches saved 10,000 Cuban pesos (\$388 USD/\$552 CND) and the Diocese added 5,000CP more towards this project. This new Church House is in the midst of the four congregations and has great potential for development as a ministry centre. As you can see, the structure requires a lot of repair, but it is a great beginning. It was delightful to see Miguel's and Sonja's enthusiasm.



**The Rev. Miguel Martin Barreto & new church building.**

# The Reverend Jason and Sara Patterson

This past January, my wife (Sara) and I had the pleasure of accompanying a team of Americans and Canadians on a trip to Cuba. We visited churches in the eastern region of the island, spent time with Bp. Mendez and his Archdeacon, and had many opportunities to fellowship with the clergy and their wives. We were impressed by the humility, generosity, and joyfulness of the people – even though they are living in a very challenging environment. In what follows I will share some of my impressions and also highlight a few opportunities that we each have to support this important work.

Cuba is unlike any other third-world country that I (we) have visited. Shortages of basic necessities are a daily reality. While we were there, for instance, there was no toothpaste, laundry detergent, or gasoline. Pharmacy shelves are barren. Doctors do not have access to even the most basic of medicines, such as Tylenol, and clean bandages are very difficult to find. Food is scarce and with little variety. Beef, sugar, vegetables (etcetera) are not to be found on the average Cuban's table. What few goods are available are too expensive for most people to purchase.

Income inequality is extreme and thus a small percentage of individuals live very well, while the rest of the nation suffers. A recent opinion piece in *The Wall Street Journal* (March 1, 2020) observed: "It's obvious to a visitor that (the majority of) Cubans live in abject poverty..." A privileged few live in gated communities and enjoy what most North Americans would regard as middle-class standards.

We also observed that, despite these significant challenges, the Church in Cuba is growing, and seems poised for the accomplishment of great things in the years ahead. But for this to happen, I believe that we in the states and in Canada will need to do more to support the wonderfully unique, and overwhelmingly challenging ministry that is underway in Cuba. In particular, I believe that we must endeavor to increase our financial support of this work, and also invest in

the theological education of the Cuban clergy and lay-leaders.

**Pastor's Salaries:** Owing to the massive economic restrictions, it seems completely unrealistic to expect the church in Cuba to become financially independent anytime in the immediate future. It is therefore important that we, in Canada and the United States, not only continue to support this work, but that we double or triple the amount of money that is currently being raised annually for them. A primary objective should be an increase in the clergy's salaries. The pastor's present salaries are barely a living wage.

Many of them must work additional jobs and their wives must also find employment. Seeing the needs in the community around them, they often share what little is given them with those in need. The church would be greatly strengthened if their wages were to be increased, thus freeing these dedicated men to give their full time and energy to the work to which they have been called. Only \$240 a month would go a long way to meet the need!

**Theological Education:** The Great Commission calls us to preach the gospel and to do the hard work of evangelism. Thanks be to God that many people are coming to faith in Cuba! But after conversion, it is essential that discipleship be characterized by the type of catechetical instruction that is possible only with an educated and competent clergy. The new seminary in Moa is a critical and substantial means by which pastors and lay-leaders alike will be able to be equipped to teach and disciple

others to the end that the church in Cuba not only grow in size, but in depth of learning. The seminary needs professors, books, and an endowment in order that it might become a place of learning for the growing Cuban church.



Jason and Sara Patterson

**Please prayerfully consider making a commitment to: (1) pray for our clergy and people in Cuba, (2) do your part to raise awareness as to their needs, and (3) make a generous financial gift in support of this important ministry.**

# CUBAN CHURCH UPDATE

## el Olivo, Central Havana



### The Rt. Rev Walter Banek

The spread of early Christianity around the Mediterranean in the city centers of the Roman empire is a pattern replicated in over fifteen years of growth of the Missionary Diocese of Cuba, REC. The early church had a few key figures in the Apostles Paul, Peter and John as has our church in Cuba grown through the diligent ministries of Bishop Charles Dorrington and his wife Claudia partnering with Bishop Willians Mendez.

As the early church was primarily established around the key urban centers of the Mediterranean in house churches, so also the Cuban house churches have clustered around three regional hubs: Holguin/Moa (11 locations in eastern Cuba); Florida (16 locations in the center); and Havana (16 locations in the west). Although Bishop Willians is located in the far eastern region of Holguin/Moa, Havana in the west is one of the most important sectors for the Cuban diocese, with the el Olivo house-church as the central hub for that region. At this hub, the rest of the church's life and growth can be most effectively nurtured and supported by the larger church outside of Cuba.

el Olivo house-church is located in Central Havana, close to the heart of the city, and has been pastored by the Rev. Enrique Melchor, who has also served as the Chancellor for the Cuban REC. The building has been the home of Enrique's family, and has gone through extensive exterior repair and interior remodeling to create a space large enough to accommodate their growing congregation.

The Rev. Enrique Melchor finds himself in a moral dilemma in regard to the education of his children. His young son is on the autistic spectrum, needing specialized instruction not available in the public system and home-schooling in Cuba is illegal. Relocation away from

Havana, to Mexico, is the only viable option. To facilitate his move, he must recover his personal investment from his home, the el Olivo house. Enrique was offered \$180,000 for the property, which he refused because he discovered that the buyer was planning to use the house for the satanic rites of the Sante-ria religion. Father Enrique's desire is to see el Olivo retained as a house church in the Diocese of Cuba, protecting the investment of so much money donated to its refurbishing, and retaining it as a key hub of ministry in Havana.

For that to happen the house would need to be sold to the Cuban Reformed Episcopal Church. The Melchor-Ramos family requires an immediate \$20,000 from that sale to facilitate their departure from Cuba before their daughter's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday...after which she would be unable to leave. After much prayer and deliberation with the Diocesan leadership and advisory team, it was decided that Archdeacon Alexei would move with his family to Havana and re-establish the el Olivo congregation. With this understanding of the el Olivo property transfer and also understand-

ing the urgency of retaining el Olivo as a critical beachhead to future ministry in support of the Diocese of Cuba, a proposal was brought to the Reformed Episcopal Board of Foreign Missions, and approved, to make a timely advance of \$20,000 to this cause on behalf of Father Enrique, who would make final payment arrangements for the balance of money with the Diocese of Cuba.

However, these BFM funds need to be replenished. We are praying for ten parishes who have the ability to provide generously from their mission funds, to each give \$2000. Those who have the vision for mission and have been blessed in their stewardship with the needed resources in their parish will, I'm confident, respond to this need. The Board of Foreign Mission heard this as a kind of Macedonian call (Acts 16:9) for the continued remarkable advance of the gospel in Cuba. The leadership of our Cuban Missionary Diocese recognizes that it is not yet self-sustaining, nor will it likely be under current communist governance and economy. They must look to the parent church for help. Will your parish respond to the call?

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#### 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*

**Reformed Episcopal Church**  
**23501 Cinco Ranch Blvd, Ste H120 #642, Katy, TX 77494**  
[www.recbfm.org](http://www.recbfm.org)