

Cuba Chronicles

2020 Summer Mission Report

IGLESIA EPISCOPAL REFORMADA



Cuba battling Covid-19

The Rev. Barclay Mayo

Since the last Cuban Chronicles was issued, the Covid-19 virus has made its presence felt, not only in the US and Canada, but throughout the Caribbean, including Cuba and Mexico. As of the 18th of June, Cuba reported 2,295 confirmed cases, with 85 deaths and over 2,000 recovered. On April 1st, the Cuban government suspended all international flights and closed all foreign tourism. Even travel between provinces is prohibited. Their leadership,



Like the church in much of the world, our brothers and sisters in Cuba are struggling in many ways.



Communities are facing difficulties with many businesses suffering from the loss of tourism and general decrease in income among locals.

like many governments throughout the world, is desperately trying to keep the economy going and their citizens safe. However, with a huge chunk of their income dependent upon tourism that no longer exists, it is an almost impossible task. All this is happening on top of the industry crippling swine epidemic from last fall and an ongoing drought in the SE.

Except those who have access to the internet, most churches are not having services. Ministry is restricted to pastoral contact by phone & email. Unlike Canada and the US, they have minimal access to high speed Wi-Fi and so are unable to use Zoom, Facebook-Live or YouTube. Schools are closed. Only emergency medical services are being offered. Imports and exports are unavailable. People stand in food lines for 4-5 hours waiting for minimal staples that can not possibly meet their family's needs.

As you can see here, news out of Cuba, at this time, is a little sparse ... and what there is reveals the situation to be pretty dire.



Bishop Willian and Archdeacon Alexei.

+Bishop Willian (Moa)

Thank you for your communication with us. In Cuba everything has been stopped since mid-March.

Because the churches have been closed, the Seminary is not working either. There is no public transportation & everything is in quarantine. There is also no transportation or access to travel in the provinces or municipalities. There is much need, people are passing days and days lining up to buy things like chicken and oil. There is no rice or beans, no deodorant or toothpaste Everything is in short supply and there is almost no way to eat.

Of course, the Taxi is not yet working, as all travel has been prohibited since the middle of March. The farm, on the other hand, is working hard despite the drought, there are yuccas, sweet potatoes, squash, melon planted.

Although we are in quarantine, the Pastors have been attending the needs of their congregations by phone, and some strategies that allow minimal contact. However, the situation is increasingly difficult in terms of food, finances, etc.

I hope I have answered your questions. We are here to serve you ... A hug

Jose Raul Lopez Carcasses (Moa)

Thanks to the Lord, everything is good, Bishop Willians is in much better health, along with his wife, the church remains in prayer, but we cannot meet until a new order from the government. But we keep abreast of the brothers and pray for each other.

Julio Cesar Ramirez (Havana)

We are fine, thank God. Pastors and leaders have been cared for by the hands of our God.

Enrique Melchor (Havana)

Enrique's call to pastor a church in Mexico has, as a result of the virus, collapsed. The church had to abandon its facility and the congregation was scatted due to the economic collapse. Enrique and his family have lost that crucial window of opportunity to immigrate. However, the Chancellor is quite philosophical about it all. He said, "God is in control of everything and he will open doors again when the time is right."

One up-side from this situation is that the Cuban REC Diocese will be able to retain an interest in the el Olivo building and begin, with Enrique, to rebuild the congregation once the pandemic restrictions are lifted.

Rolando E. Labrador Hildelgo (Pinar del Rio)

I'm fine brother, thanks for asking. We are immersed in this fight against Covid-19. The authorities have already started to take measures to reopen the country. The situation is a little difficult, but God is giving the necessary guidance to move ahead.

From Yudel (Pinar del Rio)

It is a pleasure to hear from you brother. We are waiting on the Lord, but working in the way that He allows.



The REC Committee on Women's Ministry

Thank you for your generous support of our 2020 Women's Day Project. We are pleased to report that our goal to raise \$10,000 to purchase five electric bikes for our Cuban Mission HAS BEEN REACHED! Given these times of program changes/cancellations and financial restrictions, we are most appreciative for your attention to this project.

Because of the great need for these bikes and the number of pastors requiring assistance in reaching their preaching stations, the Committee has embraced the opportunity to purchase five additional bikes and enthusiastically announce our 2021 Project Offering goal to raise \$10,000 to purchase five additional electric bikes. We solicit your continued support of this most worthy project.

Archdeacon Alexei (Florida)

Thank you for your e-mails. Today is when I managed to open them because my home has a very weak mobile data connection, and because of the confinement, I can not go frequently to the Wi-Fi zone in the park. Thank God all our brothers and sisters throughout the country are in good health. Just one girl from the Rev. Paul's congregation test positive for coronavirus, but she is already well at home & enjoying good health, thank God.

I have had telephone communication with all the ministers. They are all reporting good health, respecting the measures of confinement, but lacking food and toiletries. We all wish to return to pastoral work. We managed to get help to each minister through bank transfers, so that everyone could have financial support to help them cope.

We all maintain contact with our congregations as much as possible by convening family worship. It seems that these circumstances will be maintained for at least several more months. We know that this situation will be much more difficult for Claudio, Ricardo, Franklin, Ramiro, Nuño and even the Bishop because of his age. The government exercises greater care about them because they belong to the highest-risk group. We have many challenges as a Diocese to face in the coming months, but the Bishop and I are taking steps to resume all programmes as soon as possible.

Thank you for all the prayers for my family. Anaysa is already doing well, has regained all movements and the wound has healed perfectly. Anaymeé (the one in the middle), who has had coping problems in the past, is also much better. My new son is called Lisner Suarez González, he is a very noble child. The whole family sends greetings.

I pray to God that this Pentecost will make a difference for the work in Cuba, where the fire of the Spirit strengthens us as a church and expands us throughout the island.



Alexei's children.

Eric Mateo (Havana)

We are just fine ... through everything that's happening. Our congregation is very well, no one is sick or in any trouble. I've had the chance to see some of your preaching. It's hard to comment because of the bad quality of Internet signal here. (Eric has been accessing the Holy Cross Facebook feed when able)



Lidia, Franklin and Bishop Walter Banek.



Franklin Hamilton with his granddaughter.

The Future of the Cuban Mission

One thing has become painfully obvious from all these happenings. The REC/ANiC Cuban Mission will need to go through a radical shift in direction and process. The revisioning, that had already begun before the Covid-19 onslaught, is now even more necessary. Our primary activity has to be aimed at aiding the Cuban church to not only grow in size and maturity, but to eventually function as a self-sustaining diocese within the REC.

The last couple of January trips have shown us that travel and the logistics around it has become an ever-increasing burden, not only for us, but for our Cuban hosts as well. The van expense alone, when there is so much need on the ground where those funds could be spent, is particularly hard to continue to justify. Our presence has been officially noted and we have come to the realization that future efforts at pastoral training and assistance would require obtaining religious visas.



Cristo de La Habana: The Christ of Havana, a large sculpture by Cuban sculptor Jilma Madera was inaugurated on December 24, 1958, fifteen days before Fidel Castro entered Havana during the Cuban Revolution.

from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia; photo/Bill Glasgow

Our proposed and very tentative plan (once the travel restrictions have been lifted) is to work hard to obtain the appropriate religious visas; plan shorter, smaller and more frequent trips to Havana, where resources may be more regularly accessed & use of the el Olivo facility for teaching and video recording can be done. Teaching materials and resources can then be distributed to the Seminary in Moa and throughout the island. More on that as events unfold.

What Can You Do to Help?

First, please pray for the Lord to provide for our churches, their Pastors and families. For them to be a blessing in their communities and an instrument of hope and light in the darkness.

Here is a prayer you could use, offered by +Bishop Banek:

O blessed Lord and heavenly Father, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift: Send thy sustaining blessing, we pray thee, upon the missionary diocese Cuba, upon thy servant Bishop Willians, upon his Archdeacon, Alexei+ and Chancellor, Enrique+, and all his clergy and fellow workers, especially during this season of sickness and distress from severe shortages of goods and food in the overall economic breakdown. May thy servants by their teaching and example, strengthen their brethren and flocks, and commend the gospel to all who have not known thy redeeming love. In times of loneliness and weariness cheer them with thy presence; in disappointment give them patience; in failure give them strength to persevere; and at all times deepen in them the sense of dependence upon thee and give them peace in thy service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Secondly, you can give generously to the mission...

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,
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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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