Turning over a new page in 2026

The Rev. Canon Barclay Mayo

Well, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, much has transpired since our last newsletter! You can see from the banner, that we have a new name. "Latin America Missions" was already taken, unfortunately. We are officially named the Association of Latin Missions to the Americas (ALMA). In Spanish "alma" is *soul,* and this is indeed a good name for the ministry God has called us to in Central and South America!

We also have a new Treasurer. We give thanks for the many years that Nelson Buffett has dedicated to us and our Cuban family. However, he has passed the torch to Barbara Henderson. Barb comes with many years experience as Treasurer of Church of the Resurrection, Brandon. So, not only will there be a new name, but there will also be a new address to receive your support donations. Please see the details on the back page.

Things really haven't improved since the fall newsletter. In fact, for many communities the situation has become much, much worse. Hours and hours without power, no fuel for cooking or petrol for vehicles, coupled with double-digit inflation and the shortage of most staples and necessary medicines, has made life for all but the privileged few extremely precarious. There are no solutions on the horizon, no one coming to the rescue.

Desperate people do desperate things! One of our Havana Pastors, Dean Eric had a car accident and while he was at the hospital getting cared for, people stripped the windshield and radio out of his car that he had only recently got on the road. While those repairs were being done, someone stole his motorbike! Thank the Lord we were able to help with the repairs and for a generous donor who replaced the bike.

Synod 2025 We had an incredible Synod in December in Varadero. Many of the Pastors and their wives had never been there, and some had never even been to a beach! Bishop John flew to Holguin for pastoral visits and then travelled on the bus to Varadero with all the clergy!

The President of the Cuban Council of Churches allowed us to use their facility for Synod. For the first time, we were in a proper church sanctuary. One Priest, and four Deacons were ordained, and one Deaconess and one Lay Reader were appointed. We were afforded some great opportunities for liturgical training, and sweet times of pastoral ministry. When the delegates were asked where they would like the next synod to be, there was a resounding response for Varadero. The Church is growing and thriving despite the economic and political strife! Thanks be to God!

One of our Pastors, Fr. Claudio Costafreda, after a long struggle with cancer, was welcomed into the Lord's loving arms while we were in Cuba on this trip. The REC community continues to walk with Neli, their family and congregation as they

2025 Cuba Synod Participants

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grieve Claudio's passing. Please be in prayer for Neli as she continues, with the help of Dean Eric and Deacon Raudel, to minister to their 20-30 member congregation.

Columbia Mission Opportunity! The Bishop of Colombia, The Rt. Rev. Wilmar Pérez Montoya and the Rev. Canon Juan Camilo Cabal Moore, Rector and President of the Obra de Jesus (the work of Jesus) Foundation, have extended an invitation for two young Spanish speaking missionaries to assist with their ministry for a week between the 15–26 July, during the time our team is in Cali for Synod. (exact dates tba) This will be a great opportunity for someone who is exploring a call to missions to experience guided, hands-on gospel ministry with both children and adults in one of the poorest districts of Cali. Please contact Canon Barclay at **barclay.mayo@gmail.com** or text/call 604-815-8309 for further information.

Colombia Obra de Jesus Mission

Ben, Raudel, +John, Eric, Barclay

Ben teaching new members.

Ministry Reports

The Reverend Ben Bernier

This synod experience marked significant steps toward healthy growth in the midst of increasingly difficult circumstances. A highlight of the synod was the use of, and instruction in, the principles of Prayer Book spirituality, which was very well received. The resilience of our brethren, and their eagerness to faithfully minister to their neighbors—doing the best they can within present limitations, without losing hope for better things to come—is both encouraging and humbling. Their desire to receive instruction and to continue improving in God's service, and their commitment to the Gospel, call to mind the words of the Apostle St. Paul as he wrote to the Corinthians:

> *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."* 1 Corinthians 15:58

> *"Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* 1 Corinthians 15:57

The Reverend Paul Howden

It was a privilege to accompany Bishop John during the week prior to the Synod in Varadero, Cuba. For example, in the village of Unas, at the parish called Casa de Dios, he did confirmations, preached a homily, and did a sit down episcopal visit with the leaders. After enjoying a delicious meal, Pastor Alcides took Bishop John to see a dear elderly sister on her death bed. By speaking the litany for the dying, and offering prayers, the sister was comforted in her last hours.

The ravages of a sickness called Chikungunya, a

mosquito-borne disease, was a sad part of our visit. Poor sanitation, stagnant pools, and lack of fumigation, means everybody gets bitten by mosquitoes. The Chikungunya produces fever, headaches, muscle pain, and especially joint pain in one's hands and wrist, feet and ankles. Many Cubans suffered moderate to severe pain. Fr. Tito of Nuevo Amanecer had a case that laid him in bed for twenty days and he nearly died. During the week I was there, I only met one person who said he had not gotten it.

Meds brought to Cuba

At the parish Cristo Redentor in Holguin, a couple wanted to renew their marriage vows. With the brand-new Prayer Book in Spanish, weddings are now a joy. Bishop John and Pastor Reynaldo were able to use the gorgeous liturgy. As the groom and bride made their vows holding hands and exchanging rings, the beauty of the event had some of us tearing up, especially the bride.

Philip (Marc) Daley

"Come, he replied, and you will see" JOHN 1:39

There are times in life when we wonder at an impulse we have that others do not. This was the case when Reverend Mayo recounted his trip to Cuba at church last Spring. All I recall from our brief post-sermon encounter were his words, "come with me." The words 'come' and 'send' are cornerstones of the Christian faith. Jesus says, come unto me. He also sends us … as "ministers of reconciliation." And so, six months later, I got the call: "are you coming?" Gulp! Flesh fought spirit, and spirit won. So, I was sent. Of course, I hadn't the faintest idea what was to come. To make things worse, the synod dates changed (I'd be alone), my ride wasn't in contact the day of travel, yet 'seemingly' without compass or clue, God miraculously made a way: I got safely to my room. On Day 1, it all unraveled. He who was to be my ride came early to my door, heavy in spirit, with an apologetic story for not showing up. Detained by police all day, without means to communicate, so deeply troubled by what this accident would mean; what stood before me was my moral call: the human other, *in need*. I was seized and summoned by God. The cry of a heart so pronounced that all I could do the next six days was reach into Eric's humanity and pray. Prayer spread out to a church, to a people, to a country … deprived of "life." The promise of the gospel is to be fully alive in Christ. But how would that be possible, for Eric, for his people. Well, let me share how 'come' and 'send' meet, in Jesus.

In weakness, we are strong, because it is only then, when masks come off and we can be truly human to one another—when heart reaches into heart—that life from one passes into another, what scripture calls "blessing." In offering his testimony of weakness (even one of shame), Eric *without knowing*, imparted to me an unexpected gift: calling me … to love, to freedom, to life. He was the incarnate of a holy summons that for the rest of the trip shut-up *my* flesh and enlivened *His* spirit. I felt I could not love this man more: a new friend, lands and worlds apart, had no idea how his 'light and momentary affliction' was meant by Jesus for altogether different reason than either of us could imagine. Neither can I to this day reconcile how several months prior, I would be the one appointed by God to be in his 'fiery ordeal' a blessing. A priest taught a peasant—respectively, one up and down the chain in human parlance—that he was worthy to be a life-giver, no matter his station. Alive in Christ, equal under Christ the head, life passes from one into another, and back again, without hierarchy or heroics. This is the gospel. This is the gift, greater than money could buy, that those with much less sent home with me.

It was fitting that my visit to the church would be

Pastor Raudel baptising Martha

a few days later, once I became awake to these holy mysteries. There I met a people, without pretense, who at once, impeded by mosquito-induced joint-pain and reaching into one another and stranger alike, radiated an exuberant hope. It was fitting that the stench of piled-up garbage from the nearby corner would waft by from time to time to remind me I was in another land, because I'd have otherwise forgotten: the unapologetic smiles that accompanied a newly baptized sister and brother, the eagerness to take the cup, the zeal in the singing, the warmth that penetrated this place, broken, yet with an unusual countenance of hope!

My trip to Cuba is most *remembered* by a moment, one when with *eyes-closed*, joined in song with spiritual kin worlds apart, all things came together: we were one, with a single hope, fully unexplainable. But when my eyes opened, a painful reality hit me so hard that tears emerged. How do we cross this seemingly impossible divide, where those with plenty and those with so little break bread together; how do we co-exist in such vast difference. Because on that beautiful Sunday morning, I came to realize, that for those of us who are in Christ, all riches dwell within. Christ in us, the hope of glory.

My trip to Cuba is most *summarized* by a text. It was fitting that the day before my trip to Cuba was to end, Eric's issues with the police were dismissed. Freed once and for all from all complications, all he could do as he parted the station (like God himself parting the Red Sea, making a way amid the impossible) is take to his wife's phone to let me know just how rich he was, to pass on his joy, like a deluge of water breaking down all barriers: "TOTAL VICTORY. Christ wins!" Could any other words punctuate my trip and our shared hope any more than these. All struggle, all worlds and all peoples apart, all need, all that separates … reconciled in Christ.

"and I will send you out to fish for people" MATT 4:19

Reynaldo Córdova

Reynaldo & Yanet

I want to tell you, how God worked in this year, in my ministry and life. Every day the use of the church's prayer book is getting better. It was a great challenge this year, preparing brothers for their Confirmation, and Baptism. We had Holy Communion assisted by Reverend Ramiro. In my life as a parish pastor, I have been very disciplined in preparing every day in prayer and with the study of the Holy Scriptures. I am learning more every day about the use of liturgical colors despite the scarcity.

The services have been constant, every Sunday morning, Tuesday afternoons, and Thursday evenings, Bible Study. On Saturdays, we teach the catechism to

Children's ministry at Even Ezer

the children. In other areas of pastoral work, I have been taking the visits to the homes, and caring for each brother, as well as visitation to the hospitals.

We have helped the brothers and people of the village, with food, some medicines, we have visited a lot, and we make food for the children every month, with resources from our parish. We have given them a little more attention, activities, food and a lot of love.

After evaluation and training, I was ordained Deacon, that I might better serve this ministry. With God's help, I have dedicated myself only to working in this young parish and I have tried to open other cells groups to grow the church.

The Reverend Gustavo Rendón

Gustavo & Clara Rendon

In early December, there was no small measure of uncertainty surrounding the feasibility of our journey, given the tensions between Venezuela and the United States and the resulting complications for regional travel. Even when Venezuelan airspace was closed, the path forward seemed far from clear. Yet, in God's providence, what appeared impossible was graciously opened, and between December 8th and 12th we were able to travel to the beautiful city of Varadero, Cuba, where the IX Synod of the Reformed Episcopal Church of Cuba was gathered. It was a profound blessing to be present with our Cuban brethren once again—brothers and sisters whose faith, resilience, and warmth continually enrich our own. I was especially grateful to share this journey with my wife, whose presence made the experience all the more joyful and meaningful for us both.

Gustavo Ordination to the Priesthood

Amid the work of the Synod, we were also able to enjoy moments of rest and fellowship, taking in the beauty of Varadero's beaches and participating in modest tours within the city—small reminders of God's goodness even in times of challenge. The most solemn and unforgettable moment came on December 10th, when I was ordained to the priesthood by the laying on of hands of Bishop John Boonzaaijer, International Missionary Bishop of the Reformed Episcopal Church and Suffragan Bishop of the REC in Cuba and all the others priests present (from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Colombia and Canada). This sacred act, carried out in the midst of the Cuban Church, has bound us even more closely to her life and witness. Cuba and her people remain continually in our prayers, and we look forward with hope to sharing again with our Cuban family during 2026, if God so wills.

Deaconess Yamilet Conde Henandez, Ciego de Avila

My beginnings in the Reformed Episcopal Church of Cuba began in the Florida-Camagüey mission approximately 14 years ago, although from a very young age I was already in the ways of the Lord with the desire to serve Him and in some way to be useful in the expansion of the Gospel and in the service to the community. During all these years, I have understood that true greatness in ministry lies in humility and obedience to the divine will. This conviction has been the spiritual foundation to carry forward all the work I do, both in the congregation and in the Diocese in general.

For several years I have attended different ministries, dedicating special attention to working with children and young people from my experience as a teacher by profession, which has been a fundamental aspect that has allowed me to teach and sow in them the values of the Kingdom of God from an early age. At the same time, I have directed my efforts in the care of the ladies, providing them with tools to grow in their faith and purpose.

Deaconness Yamilet reading her vows

It has also been important to support my husband as Pastor of the Nuevo Amanecer congregation of which I am a member and in the care of the family. Being a minister's wife has involved me in pastoral care and looking closely at ministry life and love for the gospel and souls who don't know the Lord.

In addition, having

Ben, Tito, Deaconness Yamilet & +John

Yamilet

been Secretary of the Diocese has contributed to my ecclesiastical formation and knowledge of the diocesan dynamics. I have had the opportunity of preparing new leaders in the administration of the church and in the working with the various ministries. This guarantees the sustainability and growth of the church under the principle of serving as Jesus did.

Having been designated as a Deaconess in the Diocese of Cuba is something wonderful, a ministry of service to the church, which with the help of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I will continue to carry out with joy and gratitude because the most valuable title is not that of leader, but that of servant of the Lord as an expression of genuine love.

How Can You Help?

The Reverend Canon Barclay Mayo

In order to continue covering all the Cuban Pastors' salaries, Diocesan expenses and Special Projects, we need to raise $126,000 USD annually. Canadian donors provide a half share in the ALMA Mission budget. This is $86,105 CD, just over $7,000 CD/mo. The other half is raised through REC US Board of Foreign Missions. This supports sixteen pastors and their ministries for the average cost of one small Canadian ministry! It is wonderful stewardship of God's resources. Thank you to those who have been faithful donors over the years. Please share this newsletter with your congregations and with others who may feel the call to support God's work in a foreign land.

ALMA funds are raised for works in Cuba, Colombia, and Venezuela. Please ensure that any donation designation is **NOT** indicated on the info line at the bottom of the check. This causes problems with some US based banks. Instead, please include a separate note indicating your designated mission recipient.

Franky with Barclay

How You Can Give to the Association of Latin Missions to the Americas (ALMA) – Cuba Mission

Canadian donations should now be made out and sent to:

ALMA
811 Birchview Place, Brandon, Manitoba, R7B 3S2
almatreasurer2025@gmail.com 1-204-570-0719

or in the USA

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

For more info about the Cuba Mission please contact:

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70-7570 Tetayut Rd. Saanichton, BC V8M 2H4 | 250-507-0730 | revchas@shaw.ca or
Mrs. Claudia Dorrington, Corresponding Secretary, REC-ANiC Society | 250-652-8850

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The Rt. Rev. Walter Banek, REC USA, wrbanek@mac.com
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