

Cuba Chronicles

2024 SPRING EDITION IGLESIA EPISCOPAL REFORMADA

Economic Situation: Needing Prayer & Support

In early March the Rev. Dr. Ben Bernier and the Rev. Canon Barclay Mayo headed to the central part of Cuba for a visit with Archdeacon Alexei and then to Holguin to welcome 2 pastors and their congregations into the REC Cuban church. So there is much to celebrate, but also much in need of our prayers and support.

The conditions on the ground are horrendous. The price of fuel tripled a couple of weeks before we arrived and has risen even more in the last month! Trucks carrying flour and potatoes are sent out with armed police escorts. The government supply depots are almost empty. Now, it is more costly to buy an egg than it was to buy a dozen not long ago. A horse taxi ride still costs a US dollar. However, in Cuban pesos, that same ride is now 12.5 times more expensive, going from 24 to 300 pesos! This rate of increase applies to everything.

Consequently, the homeless and begging population is rapidly increasing, reaching levels that locals say are even worse than the “special period” of the nineties, which was previously considered the benchmark for extremely dire conditions. **At the private shipping-container stores the prices are so high many of the people simply**

can’t afford to buy. There are rolling 16-18 hr/day blackouts which means no cooking, no light and no power to pump water. There were protests when we were there... in many more places than reported, and the desperation is almost palpable.

The shipping-container stores were billed by the government to be the country’s salvation. These are containers full of product that are purchased abroad with the investment of foreign nationals. (Yes, US & Canadian citizens!) They are purchased outside of the US and then sent to Cuba to be sold. The gov’t takes their cut and then the remainder are sold on the open market for whatever the market will bear. It was a generally thought to be a good idea to boost the economy by promoting private

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Eva, Ramiro, Reynaldo, Yanet, Carlos.



Ben, Eva, Barclay, Ramiro, and Alexei in Christ the Redeemer Holguin.

business. However, no one calculated for greed! A small number of people are making an insane amount of money, and the general population is suffering as a result. Teachers, doctors and other government professionals that would be essential to a functioning society, are quitting their low-paid government positions to become business people because the container store business provides them thousands of dollars more every month.

At first glance, the situations seems almost hopeless. What can our small mission organization

do that will be more than a drop in the bucket, as it were? The quick answer is, nothing! But that small drop in the bucket is absolutely necessary to the physical and spiritual well-being of some of the most vulnerable of God's children. Yes, there are indeed days when it seems like we are getting nowhere! Yes, in some places it is one step forward and two back. And yes, even some of the most faithful pastors are running away as quickly as their legs can carry them. We can't even blame them for that. In their situation, to care for my family, I would be tempted to bolt as well!

■ Three Pastors welcomed to the REC

It was a great privilege to work alongside Alexei and Ben to interview and then present to Walter Serrano Gonzalez and Alcides Medina Peron the REC three-step process for their reintegration with the REC in Cuba. A decision was made to move ahead from this point and not to dwell upon their previous dispute with Bishop Willians.

The team also had a good discussion about the liturgy and the need for them, if they had not already begun, to reintroduce the liturgy to their congregations. We also spoke of the requirements for their continuing education.

We emphasized the necessity of the application & three-step process and the need to take it slowly so that they, their congregations, the REC Cuba and the mission societies could be sure that this was



Welcoming brothers and sisters back.



Central Clergy with Ben and Barclay.

what God was calling all of us to. They were smiling, compliant and looking forward to the future.

Ben, Alexei and I also had a great meeting with Ramiro & Carlos about their work in Holguin and emphasized the need for Carlos to continue training toward Ordination. He was ecstatic and excited to get back at it. We met and interviewed Missionary Reynaldo Cordova Gomez who has asked to bring his congregation into the REC. He was very accepting of the REC three-step process and welcomed the opportunity to do ministry with us. Together, these five men and their leaders have reaffirmed a strong Reformed Episcopal presence once again in Holguin, TBTG!

■ Cuba Council of Churches

It has been a long and often frustrating process, but the REC have finally been officially recognized and welcomed as full member of the Cuba Council of Churches. There are many evangelical, Bible-believing churches in the CCC and they have all been assured that their membership is not dependent upon them acquiescing to the gay marriage/ordination issue. The government now realizes that they need the churches to care for the people! Alexei attended the CCC Annual Convocation and made application for religious visas for Bishop John's first, all island pastoral visitation, July 05-18. Please pray for God's favour as we book and arrange travel... and especially for donations and funds to cover. This official recognition will also allow the REC Cuba to own church

properties. Sometime in the next year a conversation will need to be had about how and when to begin the process of transferring properties. So, there is lots of good news in the midst of a horrible situation. This is the Lord's work, and I am always amazed at how he, through the power of the Holy Spirit, "adjusts" things to ensure that his will and purposes are made manifest.



Christian Centre new outside space (above) and classroom (below).

What Can You Do?

The Rev. Canon Barclay Mayo*

Obviously a massive amount of prayer coverage is essential. These faithful servants can only continue the Lord's work in this dark and dangerous environment when they are protected by the Holy Spirit. We need all of the Church's prayer warriors to be on their knees. Also, please be in regular contact, through WhatsApp or Facebook, with your partner Cuban congregations. Ask them to pray for your congregation and lift them up in your public worship.

Even though we know that it will probably not be sufficient, the Board of Directors has held the 2024-2025 Cuba Mission budget to a 10% increase. That means we need to raise \$110,000 USD or \$9,165 monthly to continue our support of this struggling, but once again growing diocese. Travel has also become much more expensive for the mission teams, and we could also use some help in that area. If we had these funds either in hand or promised before the end of May, it would make managing this mission much easier. Please ask the

Lord to show you how and provide the means for you individually and/or your congregations to help. Thank you for your prayers and for your personal and parish support.

If you are not already working with us on this mission but feel that God might be calling you to get involved, please give me a call at 604-815-8309 or email at barclay.mayo@gmail.com.

Our Charity application is in progress but, at the moment we are still working through the REC Diocese. Please see below to find information about donating funds.



Happy Congregation.

How You Can Give to the Cuba Mission

Canadian donations should now be made out and sent to:

**The Diocese of Central and Eastern Canada of
The Reformed Episcopal Church,
157 Haddon Avenue North,
Hamilton, Ontario, L8S 4A7
nelsonbuffett@gmail.com 905-527-1549**

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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Mrs. Claudia Dorrington, Corresponding Secretary, REC-ANiC Society
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The Rt. Rev. Trevor Walters, ANiC Assisting Bishop, walters34@shaw.ca

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

The Rt. Rev. John Boonzaaijer - Suffragan Bishop of REC Cuba, john.boonzaaijer@gmail.com

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

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