



Please Pray Fervently!



Worship at San Lucas with Pablo's congregation, January, 2020.

The Rev. Canon Barclay Mayo

As I write this introduction, I have been made painfully aware that Cuba, like many other nations in our broken world, is struggling deeply with the 3rd wave of this horrible and debilitating pandemic. While vaccines are being developed in country, there has been no roll-out yet for the general population. Recent news out of Cuba indicates that much of the country remains in virtual lockdown, with many areas, including Havana, under mandatory & enforced curfews from five in the afternoon to seven the following morning. In some locations, seniors

are required to stay permanently in their homes.

As you might imagine, these restrictions make it almost impossible to access essential groceries & medication even when they can be found. One of my contacts has indicated that in their community there is no meat, fish, fresh vegetables or oil for cooking. Someone from each family has to be in a food line up to 40 hours each week just to access the few things that may be available, often waiting over 5 hours at a time with no guarantee that something will be available when they reach the front of the line. Inflation is rampant. A dozen eggs, that a few months ago would have cost the equivalent of \$5US, now costs \$30. A pound of rice that sold in June 2020 for between \$1.75 & \$2.00, when it can be found... now costs between \$17 & \$20! To say that they are suffering, would be a gross understatement!

However, even in the darkness, there is hope. Archdeacon Alexei told me that, by the grace of God, he is able to make it through each day. Moment by moment, the Holy Spirit provides the strength he needs. While there have been many challenges to face, both personal and in his duties to the Cuban REC Diocese, Alexei finds assurance that, along with the Apostle Paul, he can say, **It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.** They literally have no choice but to live by faith in Jesus.

Bishop Willian's and Reina's Health

Bishop Willian continues to convalesce at home from his surgery but is still having to endure painful supplementary treatments twice a week. The abscess/infection was extremely deep and came within millimeters of his brain which would have been fatal. Thanks be to God he has been spared. The wound is having to heal and scar over from the inside out, with diminishing risk each day of renewed infection. Please continue to pray for his full recovery. As Reina continued to deteriorate, an attempt was made to admit her to the hospital. However, because of the advanced state of her renal failure & the lack necessary medical supplies to treat her, she was returned to spend her last days at home. Her church continues in prayer for her and for her entire family. The Lord will call her home into His presence soon.



Reina and Claudia with Reina's neice and nephew.

The State of the Diocese

Given the condition of Bishop Willian's health and the needed palliative care of Reina, Archdeacon Alexei has had a very full plate managing the diocese and the seminary. However, a decision has been made to divide the Island into three Convocations or regions: East, around Moa; Central around Florida/Venezuela/Ciego de Avila, and West, around Havana, including Pina de Rio. Bishop Willian has appointed the Rev. Pablo Ulloa Caballero to oversee the Central Convocation; and Archdeacon Alexei to oversee the Eastern convocation. With Enrique's departure to the US, Bishop Willian is in prayer about who to appoint to oversee the Western Convocation.



Synod in Moa.

News from Havana

Enrique and Maray have devised a plan for their family's immigration to the US which will see him working as a landed immigrant for the next year while supporting his family from abroad. Once he has completed the required time (1 year + a day), Enrique will apply for visas for Maray, their special needs son, Diego & daughter, Melissta. Their leaving will be a great loss to the Reformed Episcopal Church (REC) in Cuba. However, there is a silver lining to this cloud! Enrique has been appointed an ambassador of the REC in Cuban and will spend some of this coming year visiting Canadian & US parishes to speak with their leadership and congregations about how they may partner with the church in Cuba.

Enrique also pointed out that **El Olivo** is ideally situated in Havana as a viable option for the church to continue, even after the family moves out in a year. He hopes and prays that the REC in CUBA will be able to retain its use as a house-church and that a suitable clergyman can be appointed there in Havana.

Pan de Vida & Vedado

As noted above, The Rev. Claudio Otero Costafreda & his wife Neli, as seniors, have been confined to their home. Much of their ministry was one on one in homes and small groups, which they are no longer able to do. They need our prayer and encouragement.

The Standing Committee

Even in the midst of the lockdown, the day-to-day work of administration and ministry in the Diocese continues apace. The permanent members of the Standing Committee meet online every Tuesday & maintain weekly communications with the Clergy and their parishes. The Standing Committee is working hard to encourage the Clergy to be strong in the faith through testimony & prayer, to cultivate a secure foundation of prayer & to develop new ways to pursue pastoral ministry in these difficult times. To this end, Bishop Willian has purchased WhatsApp for use on clergy smart phones so that he can be in direct communication with them as needed. Internet availability has improved in most places, but it is expensive, about \$1/day. In the past you could only get the INTERNET in the town square near the government building, but now there is wider availability, if you can afford it. As is the case in Havana, the REC pastors elsewhere, when allowed, are traveling to homes to bring Holy Communion, pray with their members, anoint, teach & preach the word. The work of the gospel continues...TBTG!

Pastors on Scooters

Over the last couple of years, the REC Women of the Church have raised funds to provide scooters for REC Cuba clergy transportation. Again, Covid has caused a pause in the ability to complete this project. Due to the impairments of imports and commerce in general, things have come to a halt. However, there is some indication that plans are being developed to build a scooter manufacturing plant in Cuba. If this comes to pass it would serve to decrease the expense and give greater access. However, it is a plan in process and these things take (Cuban) time!

Official Status for the Diocese

There has been some encouraging movement on the official recognition of REC Church by the Cuban government. If this can be completed, visitation by Canadian & US Clergy & Lay partners on religious visas (post pandemic of course) would be greatly streamlined. Verification of how donated funds are being used to resource the Diocese is now under way. The diocese has contracted with an evangelical attorney who has effectively and successfully handled such cases with the government in the past. As long as the intended recipients are not suspect, and the full amount of the funds is accounted for, no additional problems are anticipated, although the legal process does come with yet another unexpected expense. The Bishop & Standing Committee are very hopeful that this can be completed without a requirement to compromise on the authority of Scripture.



Sarah, Jason, Bishop Walter, and Armando.

The Seminary

Archdeacon Alexei reports that due to the pandemic, he was required to suspend on-site classes and the candidates for Holy Orders continue their studies from their homes. However, the faculty, with the help of one of the seminarians, Jesús Cabrera Torres, is employing technology to refine and complete preparation of the first-year curriculum. Jesus is putting his knowledge as a teacher at the service of our Seminary. The by-laws that will govern the discipline of the Institution have been sent for legal review. When they are able to resume the in-person teaching program, they will be prepared to offer Biblical Studies in Old Testament/Pentateuch and also a course on the Constitution and Canons of REC Cuba. In addition, there will be courses dealing with general cultural subjects.

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/ Seminarians—\$30USD/mo. These will need to be increased this year.
- Please pass this news and needs on to as many churches and people as you can. Ask them to pray and consider helping.



Children from Florida community in new facility.

- 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!



Ramiro, Yamilet, and Ricardo.

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
nelsonbuffett@gmail.com 905-5271549

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, wrbanek@mac.com

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

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