

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF LA IGLESIA EPISCOPAL PUERTORRIQUEÑA

The Episcopal Church in Puerto Rico carries out its mission on the island of Puerto Rico which is a territorial possession of the United States of North America and has been since 1898. Before that, Puerto Rico was a possession of Spain from 1493 until 1898.

The island of Puerto Rico forms a part of the Western Antilles, being the smallest of the Mayor Antilles or the largest of the Minor Antilles. Puerto Rico has a territorial area of 3,435 square miles and a population of 3 millions inhabitants, which means a population density of 1,000 inhabitants per square mile.

Anglicanism arrived in Puerto Rico in the year 1872 when under the supervision of the Rt. Rev. W. Jackson, Bishop of Antigua and the West Indies, there was established the church of the Most Holy Trinity in the city of Ponce, on the south coast of Puerto Rico. A few years later, in Vieques, Puerto Rico, the Church of All Angels was established under the direction of the Anglican Diocese of Antigua, also.

An entry in the diary of the Rt. Rev. W.W. Jackson, Bishop of Antigua, shows that the 14th. of June of the year 1872, he arrived in the city of Ponce at the invitation of members of various Reformed Churches who lived there. During the visit of the Bishop and under his supervision a committee of persons were named with the responsibility of building a church under the title of Most Holy Trinity. In 1880 the Church of All Saints in Vieques was established following the same pattern.

Two other events which ought to be decisive in the way in which Anglicanism would be established in Puerto Rico, we find in the invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898 and with the joining of the Church of Jesus, a local Puerto Rican Church in 1920.

On the 25th. of July of 1898 at the end of the Spanish-American War, the U.S.A., signed the Treaty of Paris by which Puerto Rico was ceded to the U.S.A. and it is said that the church of the Holy Trinity rang and had its bell run all during the 25th. of July of 1898 announcing that restrictions on worship imposed by the Spanish Crown had ended with the North American invasion.

In 1901, the House of Bishops of E.C.U.S.A., responding to the relationship established among the chaplains of the invading troops and the already established Anglican work in Puerto Rico - those anglicans who attended the religious necessities of English Subjects and the immigrants from the West Indies - established a Missionary District of Puerto Rico and sent James Heart Van Buren as the 1st. Bishop of the new jurisdiction of E.C.U.S.A.

On the other hand and simultaneously with the activities described above, a religious community in Quebrada Limón, of the Municipality of Ponce, under the direction of Manuel Ferrando, a former Roman Catholic priest, established a Church with its own properties and thousands of faithful communicants and was incorporated under the name of the Church of Jesus.

The union of the Church of Jesus with the Episcopal Church was carried out in 1922, under the pastoral care of the Rt. Rev. Charles B. Colmore, who had succeeded James H. Van Buren in 1917.

At the moment of the union or concordat the members, properties or other goods of the Church of Jesus became a part of the E.C.U.S.A. Manuel Ferrando was consecrated Bishop of Quebrada Limón and suffragan Bishop of Puerto Rico in the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in the city of New York.

Bishop Colmore's episcopate emphasized work in the rural areas of Puerto Rico as an answer to the control already established in the urban areas by other religious bodies in the island.

The ministry of Colmore was fruitful and in 1946 when he announced his retirement, the Church in Puerto Rico had a mayor hospital in the city of Ponce, a vocational school in Quebrada Limón and another in the city of Mayaguez. There was also in Puerto Rico clergy with 16 active priests serving 27 churches in the rural areas of Yauco, Lares, Maricao, Adjuntas and in the major urban centers of San Juan, Ponce, and Mayaguez.

In 1949 Charles Francis Boynton a North American priest who was working in Saint Andrew's Church in Mayaguez was consecrated Bishop of Puerto Rico. His episcopate lasted only few years for in 1952 he became Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of New York in U.S.A.

With Bishop Boynton's leaving and the development of the Puerto Rican clergy, there arose aspirations of having a Puerto Rican Bishop for the Diocese. A group of priests nominated Arístides Villafañe, then Canon of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Santurce as a candidate to occupy this post.

National aspirations did not prosper and in 1953 the House of Bishops elected A. Ervine Swift as the 4th. Missionary Bishop of Puerto Rico.

The naming of Bishop Swift took place at a time when Puerto Rico was in a period of transition. A small island isolated from the rest of the world and a colony of one of the great powers, its destiny was determined by happenings outside itself. In 1953, nevertheless, Puerto Rico had lived the results of a World War and the last vestiges and consequences of the Korean conflict. The Puerto Rican soldier who before had been an islander and provincial, now returns from the other side of the globe, a veteran of military action, with new economic resources and a whole new outlook on life which was translated

into political action and social change which challenged the Episcopal Church to look at the new forces which were putting pressure on the Puerto Rican society.

Therefore, in 1956 when the Roman Catholic Church formed and insisted that Roman Catholics vote for a Christian Action Party, the Episcopal Church underlined the right of the individual conscience of each person to choose a party of his choice.

This political stand caused the Puerto Rican government to invite the Episcopal Church to expand its missionary work to all the municipalities and towns of the island and encouraged Bishop Swift to ask E.C.U.S.A. for human and economic aid in responding to the challenge of the situation.

A gift from the U.T.O. in 1950, made possible the establishment of new work in the cities of Fajardo, Arecibo, Caguas, Río Piedras and Bayamón. The arrival of 5 North American priests, sent by the Overseas Deputy of the Executive Council in the city of N.Y., who together with 5 new Puerto Rican priests ordained in 1962 increased almost overnight the clergymen which the Church in Puerto Rico had to carry out its work.

The ferment, effort and testimony of the missionary work motivated and attracted new vocations without precedent among Puerto Rican Episcopal youth.

The same effort and fervour began also to express itself in the inclination of the church to depend less in E.C.U.S.A. and to do more and more for itself.

In 1964, Bishop Swift, already conscious of the development of the church own resources and being on accord with the necessity of indigenous leadership, resigned his episcopate in Puerto Rico, opening the way for the election and consecration of the 1st. Puerto Rican to become the Diocesan Bishop of the Church in Puerto Rico, Francisco Reus Froylán.

In the passing of the last 12 years and under the leadership of Bishop Reus, the Church has focused its work in the areas of urban development, vocations to the priesthood, Christian Stewardship with a view toward self-support and special ministries designed to involve the church in the care and necessities of the world around her.

It is important to note in this brief description of the Puerto Rican Episcopal Church that in 1970 this church meeting in its 1st. Special Extraordinary Convention, decided to establish by the year 1982 a National Church with self-support, self government and self-propagation.

In a following Convention the date was changed to 1980. A series of new development both nationally and in the United States moved the date forward and in September of 1979 the General Convention of the E.C.U.S.A. established Puerto Rico as an autonomous diocese.

Since that date, the Church in Puerto Rico, supervised by the Synod the IX Province which is also responsible for providing Puerto Rico with its metropolitical jurisdiction, has been responsible for the life and program of all its structure and of its leadership.

At the present time Puerto Rico has been functioning for the last 13 years as an Extra Provincial Diocese of the Anglican Communion. The Church will continue as an Extra Provincial Diocese until such time as the proposed Episcopal Province of the Caribbean becomes a reality. Within this period of time, and highlyly the new autonomous status, the Church elected a native son for the first time, the Rt. Rev. David Andres Alvarez as its Bishop. This historical election was held on October 30, 1986.

At the present all programs and efforts of the Puerto Rican Episcopal Church are directed toward a coordinated program in which the renewal of the Church in its autonomic development are the number one priority.

Number of Clergymen:

The Puerto Rican Episcopal Church has in the year 1992 68 active clergymen in its official list.

Membership:

The Puerto Rican Episcopal Church has 41 congregations organized and two in stage of forming themselves as organized congregations with a total membership of 15,000 episcopalians.

Of the 41 congregations, 40 of them carry out their work in Spanish. The other one principally serve North Americans and those persons who come from the British Islands.

Diocesan Institutions:

A. Saint Luke's Hospital

Founded in 1906, this hospital serves Ponce and surrounding towns. It has a board of directors presided by the Bishop of P.R. The Hospital is completely autonomous in its finances and is in the process of development for the betterment of its physical plant.

St. Luke's is a 162 bed hospital providing general medical services and 15 for acute patients. It has surgical facilities, an intensive care unit, a pharmacy, a convalescence unit, a maternity care unit and an emergency unit. It also offers respiratory and oxygen therapy and an X Ray Unit. Its Cardiology Department is the best in the south part of the Island.

B. St. Luke's Home Care Program

The purpose of the St. Luke's Home Care Program is to provide skilled nursing and other therapeutic services on a visiting basis in a place of residence used as the individual's home. It has 19 units and serves over 3,000 patients at the present time.

C. St. Michael's House

A recreational center which provides recreation, counseling, religious instruction and daytime home for children; community organization, chaplaincy services to institutions, coordination of community programs group care, group work, shelter, summer programs, urban parish and mission work, youth work.

D. Quinta Tranquila - Carr. 105 Km. 22, Bo. Rubias, Yauco,
P. R.

This is a conference and retreat center of the Diocese, located at 3,000 feet above sea level in the mountainous area of the south west region of Puerto Rico. Center also serves for vacations and summer recreational programs.

E. Centro Colmore

It is located in Barrio Quebrada Limón in Ponce. This is a center used for conference and retreats serving the southern area of Puerto Rico. It has facilities and space for educational and recreational activities.

F. Schools

1. St. John's Episcopal Cathedral School: Stop 20, Santurce, P.R. Day School sponsored by the Cathedral Church. It is accredited as a preparatory school by the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges. It serves primarily English speaking persons. Grades run from Kindergarten through High School. It is also accredited by the Puerto Rican Department of Education.

2. Holy Trinity School: Calle Marina esq. Abolición, Ponce, P.R.

It was founded in 1945 and is sponsored by Parish of the Holy Trinity in Ponce. It offers teaching from Kindergarten up to 9th. grade. It is accredited by the department of Education and its teaching is carried on in Spanish, except the English classes which are taught in said language.

3. School of St. Mary the Virgin: Calle Central 15, Clausells,
Ponce, P.R.

It has a student body of about 400 students and offers teaching from 1st. grade through 6th. grade. Teaching is in Spanish and the school is accredited by the Department of Education.

4. Saint Andrew's School: Calle Sol esq. Salud, Mayaguez, P.R.

Grades from Kindergarten to ninth grade and has 450 students. It serves the community of Barrio Salud in Mayaguez and adjacent neighborhood.

5. Saint Just School: Carr. 848, Km.1, Saint Just, Trujillo Alto
P.R.

It offers classes in Spanish from Kindergarten through Senior High School. It serves 450 students from the community of Saint Just, Villa Andalucia, Río Piedras, Trujillo Alto and it is the main school for middle class status people.

6. Incarnation Day Center: Calle J.A.Dávila esq. J.R. Rodríguez
Ext. Roosevelt, Hato Rey, P.R.

It is sponsored by the Church of the Incarnation, serving the neighborhood in Ext. Roosevelt - middle class folks and it is doing a splendid job in this respect.

G. E.S.T.U.D.I.O.

School of Theological Education of the Diocese. It directs the administration and supervises the formation of those who aspire to the priesthood and the diaconate of the church. Courses are offered in Theology, Holy Scriptures, Pastoral Studies, Church and Society, History and other disciplines of the Church. It also serves as a resource of the Diocese in the areas of continuing education for the clergy and lay training.

- H. Saint Just Episcopal Center: Carr. 848 Km. 1, St. Just, P.R.

Diocesan Center for retreats, conferences and administration. It is located in the St. Just Barrio of Trujillo Alto and is formed by the components of the Central Offices (Diocesan) and St. Just School. It is close enough to the Muñoz Marin Airport and to the main San Juan Area by public or private transportation.

I- Mount Gethsemani Episcopal Cemetery: Quebrada Limón, Ponce, P.R.

This cemetery was started before 1920 by Manuel Ferrando, then head of the Puerto Rican Church of Jesús. In 1922 when the union of the two churches came about, the cemetery with the rest of the properties of the Church of Jesus were transferred to E.C.U.S.A.

The cemetery serves the Quebrada Limón area regardless of nationality, sex or religion and it is run by the Rector and Vestry of the Church of the Atonement.