

## **The Archives of the Episcopal Church**

### **Research Report: The Episcopal Church and the Church in Cuba after the Revolution**

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#### **Separation from The Episcopal Church, 1966**

Following the Revolution, the number of Cuban communicants dropped dramatically after nearly 75% of the island's Episcopalians fled to the United States. Local churches were substantially affected by the subsequent loss of financial support with few assets and no Church-wide reserves to draw upon. By the mid-1960s, anti-church sentiment in Cuba was pronounced: entrance to churches was barred, prayer books were burned, and all religious education was outlawed<sup>1</sup>. Cuban clergy unsuccessfully appealed to the DFMS for help in leaving the country. This tense political situation was the backdrop to the House of Bishops' vote at a special meeting in October 1966 to make the Missionary District of Cuba an autonomous jurisdiction<sup>2</sup>.

While politically the relationship between the Cuban church and The Episcopal Church was tenuous, the death of Missionary Bishop Romualdo González Agüeros precipitated the formal separation. As Cuba was a Missionary District, it was up to the House of Bishops to elect his successor. Officials, both within The Episcopal Church and from other dioceses in the Anglican communion, expressed concern that the appearance of American influence in the local Church would be used for negative propaganda purposes by the Cuban government<sup>3</sup>. A memo from Presiding Bishop Hines reported that in preparing for the House of Bishops meeting, "it seemed wise to prepare two alternative courses of action with respect to the vacancy in the Cuban see. One would be that of normal constitutional procedure, the other would take a more radical line, perhaps more appropriate to the current situation<sup>4</sup>."

In response, a resolution was prepared by Bishop Stephen Bayne, who consulted with the Presiding Bishop, the House of Bishops' Committee on Missionary Dioceses, and Jackson Dykman to invoke Canon 40<sup>5</sup>. The Canon was interpreted to allow the House of Bishops to "dis-establish" a missionary diocese. The missionary diocese would be released to a Metropolitan Council made up of the Primate of Canada, the Archbishop of the West Indies, and the President of Province IX. The ecclesiastical model for the Cuban jurisdiction was not unprecedented but was based on the treatment of Hong Kong, which operated as an autonomous diocese with a metropolitan under the Council of the Church of Southeast Asia.

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<sup>1</sup>Romualdo González Agüeros to Arthur Lichtenberger, Bishop's Report on Cuba, Dec. 29, 1961. RG 113-3-10.

<sup>2</sup>The text of the resolution delicately addresses this, citing the Cuban Church's "heroic and steadfast witness... during the recent years of painful separation from its companion Church in the United States." Journal of the General Convention, 1967.

<sup>3</sup>ENS Press Release #48-1, November 7, 1966. The Bishop of Cuba later acknowledged that the American Church's concerns had been valid. José Augustine Gonzales to Paul Tate, September 24, 1969. RG 113-3-10.

<sup>4</sup>Memorandum, John Hines to House of Bishops, A Note on Cuba, undated. RG 113-3-10.

<sup>5</sup>Canon 40:1 provided for the establishment of Missionary Districts by the House of Bishops, and also empowered the House to "change, increase, or diminish the territory included in such Missionary Districts." Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church, 1961, p. 101. (By 1964, this canon had been renumbered as 39:1). As Dykman noted to Bayne, "I would not hesitate to hold that the power to diminish included a power to abolish." Jackson Dykman to Stephen Bayne, August 30, 1966. RG 84-5-25.

While Hines communicated with members of the proposed Metropolitan Council, asking them "to re-assure the Church in Cuba of the unchanging love and brotherly support of the Church in the United States," his letters to Cuba did not arrive in time to prepare them for the House of Bishops resolution proposing autonomy<sup>6</sup>. Nonetheless, the Bishop and Council of Advice in Cuba accepted and approved the resolution, calling it "the wise thing to do." Following adoption by the House of Bishops, the Missionary Diocese of Cuba was set apart on December 1, 1966.

The intent of the Metropolitan Council was to act as a "trustee" of the diocese in Cuba. The participation of the President of Province IX was a sign of ongoing American involvement, albeit at arm's length<sup>7</sup>. The absence of explicit provisions for the care of the Episcopal Church in Cuba beyond the temporary transfer of jurisdictional authority was notable, however. Melchor Saucedo, Bishop Suffragan of the Missionary Diocese of Mexico, who was consulted on the plan by Bishop Bayne, wrote at the time of his agreement to the plan: "There is one small question in my mind, however; if the situation changes in the Island, would PECUSA be willing to continue, in some way, the autonomy of the Cuban Church? Or would it return to its former status of a Missionary Diocese?"<sup>8</sup>

The Episcopal Church provided regular financial support to the Church in Cuba through the World Council of Churches until 1969, when that support began a steep decline. Several factors were cited by the Presiding Bishop including reduced resources at home (e.g., the Special General Convention having commenced) and the recommendation of the Cuban Council of Churches (through the WCC)<sup>9</sup>. Bishop Gonzalez of Cuba was dismayed by the decision, however, and attributed it to the sympathetic leanings of the WCC to the Cuban Revolution and the unilateral approach of The Episcopal Church<sup>10</sup>. He expressed his frustrations with the political nature of the decision-making, noting that, "autonomy was granted because of the circumstances of our situation. It was not requested by the Church in Cuba." In contrast to the Presbyterian and Methodist churches in Cuba that had been working towards self-support, the Episcopal Church in Cuba found themselves unprepared for financial autonomy noting, "It was taken for granted—and it was even said—that we could count on your support"<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup>Hines to Metropolitan Council, September 28, 1966. The late arrival of the letter is noted in Gonzales to Hines, Oct. 27, 1966. RG 113-3-10.

<sup>7</sup>Bishop Bayne announced the decision, saying, "Our intention in doing this was to set [Cuba] free from any relationship with the American Church which could be potentially harassing and even dangerous for them. Our support of them and other Churches in Cuba through the World Council of Churches will continue undiminished." ENS Press Release #48-1, November 7, 1966.

<sup>8</sup>Melchor Saucedo to Bayne. August 18, 1966. RG 84-5-25.

<sup>9</sup>Hines to Gonzales, October 13, 1969. RG 113-3-10.

<sup>10</sup>Bishop Gonzales wrote to the Overseas Department: "[I]n my country, this [US-Cuban] project has been, from the beginning under the attack of ecclesiastical leaders whose political position is too sympathetic to our Communist regime. Such a political position bears heavily on other matters and does create problems between and in the churches. Finally, these leaders have won their point, first, in Cuba....and now in Geneva and in the United States – where they also have an advantageous position." Gonzales to Tate, September 24, 1969. RG 113-3-10.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

### Reunification Attempt, 2002-2003

Following a period of increased acceptance of religion in Cuba beginning in the 1990s, the number of Episcopalians in Cuba grew. In February 2002, the Cuban Synod voted to seek readmission to the Episcopal Church as a constituent diocese. Although the resolution achieved unanimous support, it was hotly debated among delegates as many insisted the Cubans were "expelled" and that the 1966 separation was "unjust" and "immoral"<sup>12</sup>. Despite many church members feeling abandoned by The Episcopal Church, it appears the concern for clergy pensions assured the success of the resolution<sup>13</sup>.

At the time, the Episcopal Church in Cuba had no separate retirement fund, and the majority of clergy in Cuba did not have pensions. Only clergy ordained prior to the separation were covered by the Church Pension Fund. In 2001 a new Patriot Act regulation required a license from the Treasury Department to transmit funds to Cuba, leading the CPF to suspend pension payments. Instead, the pension funds were deposited into a "blocked account," and would only be dispensed once CPF obtained an OFAC license or the U.S. lifted its economic embargo against Cuba. In October 2001 the Episcopal Province of the Caribbean (in formation), had agreed that in order to provide for a "just pension plan for clergy and lay staff" and "the regularization of their metropolitan authorities" (necessary to establish a Caribbean Province), Puerto Rico and Cuba would seek readmission into The Episcopal Church. Their 2002 resolution requested re-incorporation and establishment of a Cuban committee to draft the documents. Both Puerto Rico and Cuba agreed that if either one was denied admission, the other would decline acceptance.

Presiding Bishop Griswold supported reunification and reported the proposal would be "generally welcomed" by General Convention<sup>14</sup>. In October 2002, the Standing Commission on World Mission voted unanimously to support proposals for incorporation, noting that, "the links they do have with the Metropolitan Council are unusual, attenuated, and anomalous" and that "extra-provincial status is no longer an organizational practice in the Anglican Communion"<sup>15</sup>. The Standing Commission also specified that it would not support proposals for reunification on an interim basis (though reincorporated dioceses would be free to pursue independence in the future as provided in the stipulations of General Convention resolution (1991-A235)<sup>16</sup>. Contrary to this position, the original reincorporation petition adopted by the Cuban church in February 2002 contained a clause indicating that Cuba's union with The Episcopal Church was intended to be provisional, with the eventual goal of establishing an autonomous Caribbean province. As such, the Standing Commission requested that the Cuban church submit a revised petition before the deadline for pre-filed (Blue Book) resolutions to the 2003 General Convention<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup>ENS Press Release #2002-119, May 13, 2002; Presidential Address to the Synod, Cuba, February 22, 2002. RC 2008.031, "Central America and the Caribbean: Cuba, 2002."

<sup>13</sup>Patrick Mauney to Juan Marquez, Dec. 11, 2003. RC 2008.031, "Central America and the Caribbean: Cuba, 2003."

<sup>14</sup>ENS Press Release #2002-119, May 13, 2002.

<sup>15</sup>Reports to the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention, 2003, pp. 285-289.

<sup>16</sup>Acts of Convention, 70<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

<[http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts\\_resolution-complete.pl?resolution=1991-A235](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution-complete.pl?resolution=1991-A235)>; Reports to the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention, 2003, pp. 285-289.

<sup>17</sup>ENS Press Release #2003-072, April 7, 2003.

The church in Cuba convened an extraordinary synod in December 2002 to accommodate this request. Debate at the Special Synod was not harmonious, however, with some clergy insisting that revision of the petition was unnecessary and others calling for a revocation of the reunification request entirely. Several clergy walked out, leaving the afternoon session short of the number needed to proceed with any vote. When the Church in Cuba next met for the regularly scheduled Synod in February 2003, it voted to revoke the petition for readmission, opting to continue to operate as an "extra-provincial" church under the Metropolitan Council<sup>18</sup>.

### **Reunification with Dioceses of Puerto Rico and Venezuela, 2003**

At the 2003 General Convention, Puerto Rico and Venezuela – formerly "extra-provincial" dioceses – were re-admitted into The Episcopal Church ([2003-A141](#) and [2003-A142](#))<sup>19</sup>. The resolutions required that Venezuela and Puerto Rico accede to the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church, adopt canons that conformed to the canons of The Episcopal Church, submit an annual diocesan report and annual parochial reports, contribute to the budget of The Episcopal Church, and submit an audited accounting of any funds received from the General Convention. The resolutions noted the dioceses would be formally accepted on the date Executive Council received the required documents.

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<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>Acts of Convention, 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

<[http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts\\_resolution-complete.pl?resolution=2003-A141](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution-complete.pl?resolution=2003-A141)>

<[http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts\\_resolution-complete.pl?resolution=2003-A142](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution-complete.pl?resolution=2003-A142)>