

La Epifanía



Updated July 3, 2015.

Church History:

Following the United States military occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1916 came missionaries seeking to minister to the American families moving to the country. One of these American missionaries was the Reverend William Wyllie, an Episcopal priest who came to Santo Domingo in 1918. He began his ministry with US soldiers and their families, giving a church service at Fort Ozama, the oldest European-built fort in the new world, his second day in the country. However his ministry eventually extended to other American families and eventually English-speaking Antilleans. Antilleans started immigrating to the Dominican Republic from the British-colonized Antillean islands seeking jobs in the sugar industry as early as 1880. As

Americans started taking over the sugar companies after 1916, the Antilleans were often the preferred workers as they already spoke English. The mission of *La Epifanía* or *The Epiphany* began in a culmination of these events.

La Epifanía officially began in 1918 with the Rev. Wyllie, and services were initially held in the old Customs House and the British Embassy. Shortly after his arrival, Wyllie purchased the land that currently houses *La Epifanía*. He began giving services in a small wooden shack on the property that had been originally built as a lemonade factory. In 1928 they decided to build a larger *Epifanía* church closer to the American Embassy, but this was quickly destroyed, along with other Episcopal churches, by a devastating hurricane, San Zenón, in 1930. They decided to rebuild the church on Calle de Independencia, which housed the rectory and the small shack they had been using previously. This is the current location of *Epifanía* church today. Church services were given only in English until the 1970s. Today every Sunday there is both an English and a Spanish service.



The Dominican Episcopal Church's First Martyr:

1930 not only marks the construction of the current *Epifanía* church but also the beginning of the rule of dictator Rafael Trujillo. Trujillo ran the country for a little over 30 years and may be most notoriously known for his massacre of over 20,000 Haitians in 1937. One year before this horrendous event one of the most notable leaders in the Episcopalian church came to work at *Epifanía*, the Rev. Charles Barnes. Barnes had a family member who worked in the US State Department and he wrote many letters speaking out about the atrocities Trujillo was committing. He also urged the US government to take action against Trujillo. For his bravery, the Rev. Barnes was taken in the middle of the night by Trujillo and his men and brutally beaten to death with an iron pole in 1938. To cover up the fact that he had killed the Rev. Barnes, Trujillo and his men twisted evidence to make it seem that José Manuel Díaz, a 19-year-old Puerto Rican, had killed him. They claimed the two had been in a relationship and that Díaz killed Barnes during a lovers' quarrel. After being forced to confess to the murder, the boy was jailed and later put to death by Trujillo as well. The truth about what really happened to the Rev. Barnes did not come out until years after Trujillo's assassination in 1961. July 26 marks the anniversary of the death of the Rev. Barnes. During the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 2015, this will be officially marked on the calendar.

Carol Morgan School:

Around the time the new *Epifanía* was built, the Carol Morgan school was founded, which is today one of the most prestigious schools in the country. In 1933, Carol Morgan, the wife of an American missionary who ran the city's hospital, came to

the rector of *Epifanía* at the time, the Rev. Victor Lyle Dowell, as she knew he was doing some tutoring in English for high school subjects at the time. She was worried about her children getting their basic education in Spanish and then having to switch to receiving their education in English when they returned to the States. The Rev. Dowell gave Mrs. Morgan use of the old chapel and the school began with 9 students. At the beginning it was simply called the “Little School” and the name wasn’t changed until 1949. The school remained on *Epifanía* grounds until 1968 when they moved to the western section of the city. The school no longer has any official connection with the Episcopal Church but it continues to give all its classes in English.

Connection with the Union Church:

Other Christian denominations that are popular in the Dominican Republic include Catholicism, which is still the official religion of the country, and the Evangelical Church, which has its history intertwined with our own. It should be noted that the Dominican Evangelical Church is separate and distinct from the American Evangelical Church and it is not always Pentecostal. In the 1940’s the leader of the First Dominican Evangelical Church, the Rev. Barney Morgan, began an English-language Sunday school. This transformed into the “Community Church” which was renamed the “Union Church” in the 1970’s. The Union Church’s ministry focused on English-speaking expats of any country and any protestant denomination. For a while, they held services in various locations, including *Epifanía* where they ended up staying. The Episcopalian and the Union Churches originally worshiped separately, but as the years passed, and numbers of English speakers dwindled in both congregations, they decided to join together in the

summer of 1974. Union services and Episcopal-style services alternated weekly, but every Sunday was lead by the same Episcopal priest. They worked to keep important aspects of both churches alive, however, and an example of this can be seen during communion. There would be a single line to receive the communion bread but different lines depending on the way you wished to receive the communal wine. If you turned right after receiving the bread, you would receive wine from a common cup, as is tradition in the Episcopal Church. If you turned left, you would receive wine in a small plastic cup, as was tradition for the Union church. In the last 10 years they stopped holding Union Church services again because of dwindling numbers at the English service, but the Union Church's name remains on *Epifanía's* building.

The Seminary:

In 1978, the Center for Theological studies, the seminary in Santo Domingo, was founded. While today it is solely for the training of Episcopal priests, originally it was formed in collaboration with the Dominican Evangelical church. The first dean of the seminary, American priest the Rev. David Bergesen, served only a year while the Rev. Ashton Brooks was on sabbatical. The Rev. Brooks served as the first official dean of the seminary from 1979-1988 and returned as dean in 2011. He is the present dean. Today the Seminary in Santo Domingo is the official seminary for Province IX of The Episcopal Church, which includes various Central and South American countries. While the majority of the students are Dominican, the seminary has served students from Panama, Venezuela, El Salvador, Peru, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, Ecuador, and Colombia.

Church Today:**Community:**

Epifanía serves as the cathedral of the diocese with the Very Rev. Brooks as the dean. They continue to minister to the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking communities. As of now its congregation is composed of many people in the white-collar sector. One of Canon Brooks' hopes is to begin outreach ministry to those of other socio-economic backgrounds. There are many important lay leaders in the congregation who not only serve *Epifanía* but also the diocese as a whole.

Ministries:

One of the church's ministries includes the *Ovejitas* (meaning "little lambs") pre-school and day-care center, which was started in 2008 by Father Brito and his wife, Doña Nelly, who was the first administrator. It encompasses day care, pre-school, and kindergarten. Currently they have 31 children enrolled, ages 1-5. Another ministry is the "Lazarus Basket" which provides food staples to the homeless in the area every Tuesday, and clothes donations once a month. The church also organizes a prayer group on Tuesdays, bible study on Wednesdays, and classes on various themes most Saturdays.

Future Plans:

In the coming years Canon Brooks hopes to strengthen and organize more activities specifically for the English-speaking community, as well as have a mission team come to build new pews for the church and do other refurbishing work.

Location

Latitude and longitude, traditional format: 18°27'58.1"N, 69°53'47.0W

Latitude and longitude, decimal format: 18.466128, -69.896398

Google Maps location: <https://goo.gl/maps/fiVUy>



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