

Santa María la Virgen



Updated: July 3, 2015

Church History:

The Episcopal church in Monte Llano, an outside town of Puerto Plata, was begun by the Reverend Thomas O. Basden, in 1953. Father Basden is often considered the “father” of the Episcopal Church in the North. With the boom of the sugar industry in the Dominican Republic in the early 1900s, many people emigrated here from the British Antilles and the Lucayan Archipelago (Bahamas and Turks & Caicos). Therefore in regions like Puerto Plata and the southeast there were large communities of people who were Anglican by tradition because of British influence on their home countries. A native of Turks & Caicos, Basden (as a lay leader), John Henry, and Archibald B. Carpenter

began organizing Episcopal services with other members of the Antillean community in Puerto Plata in 1920. Father Basden went to seminary in Haiti in 1932, was ordained a deacon in 1934, and ordained as a priest in 1940. Though he was technically stationed in the East during his first 18 years as a member of the clergy, he came back to Puerto Plata often to serve the growing church community there. In 1952 he was named vicar of the mission in Puerto Plata, *Christ the King*, and he quickly began other churches in the surrounding area, including *Santa María la Virgen*, or *Holy Virgin Mary*, in Monte Llano.

Some say that Father Basden's initial interest in the area began with a woman—later his wife. Because of her, he began visiting Monte Llano more, got to know the community better, and was motivated to begin a church there. The two of them eventually were married and she moved to the center of Puerto Plata with him, but he remained very active with the community. The community did not have a permanent site until the 1970s when Clara Emilia Canot gave over an old school building to the church. Unfortunately in 1982, this chapel was burned down in a devastating fire caused by an electric circuit problem. Because there wasn't a fire station in the town or anywhere nearby at the time, the two-story building and other buildings close-by burnt down completely. For a while they met in a church member's home and later they rented a small house. From 1989-1990 they built the salon and used it for church services while they began work on the church. The church they have today was officially completed in 2008 when they replaced the tin roof with a concrete one. Along with the church roof the current rector of *Santa María la Virgen*, Father Daniel Samuel, also constructed a rectory for the church and the school.



School:

As the school is the progeny of the church *Santa María la Virgen* it was appropriately named *Niño Jesús* or *Child Jesus*. Father Sandino Sanchez and Father Ramón Ubiera began the school in 1999 in the small salon next to the church with 19 pre-school students. Construction on a new school began in 2005 and today the school has 8 grades and 96 students. They are currently working along side a team from St. Peter's church in Virginia on the second floor of the school and it will be completed this summer. The present school only has 5 classrooms, meaning that one group of students comes in the morning and another group in the afternoon so that the rooms are not overcrowded.

Father Daniel Samuel, the current priest in charge of the school, would like to finish the school building this summer so that he can start working to implement full school day programs as soon as possible. The majority of the schools in the country only run for half a day but some of the public schools are beginning to run full day programs. The government has started to build a school across the way from ours, which will most

likely have a full day of classes. This will make all day classes a necessity if we want to keep a healthy student body. While most families would prefer to send their children to private schools as the public schools have a reputation for being overcrowded and dangerous, most will not turn down the opportunity for 2 free meals and a full day of class that the public schools would offer.

Church Today:

Community:

The church and the school are in two different areas of Monte Llano. The church is closer to the center of the town while the school is in a newer area of town. Monte Llano as a town found its beginnings with the boom of the sugar cane industry. It was formally a *batey*, or small village in the middle of a sugar cane field where Haitian migrant workers were supposed to stay only for the summer to cut cane, but never left. Monte Llano is no longer considered a batey as it outgrew the sugar cane field, but there are many other small bateys in the area. The “Bergaten” batey was located very close to the beach where the government wanted to do a tourism project. Tourism is the country’s biggest industry and any expansion on this will bring many much-needed jobs. In order to be able to do this project, they built an entirely new neighborhood for the people outside of the sugar cane field called, Juan Lockward. The school is located in this new neighborhood.

The sugar mill in Monte Llano has been closed for about 10 years now, and since then there has been high unemployment in the area. Many people go to a nearby town called Sosua, to work in the hotels and restaurants there. The rest try and sell what they

can on the side of the road or are considered “chiripas” or people who take on any odd job.

Ministries:

For a small church, Monte Llano has a good group of about 30-50 people on any given Sunday. They are very active group, however. Outside of Sunday service, on Tuesdays there is a Eucharistic service with the women’s group, Daughters of the King. Every Wednesday they have adult bible study and on the last Wednesday of every month they have a mini-retreat with different themes for spiritual growth. They do home visits for those in the community who are sick and visit with the patients in the men’s nursing home in Puerto Plata. There is also a home for disabled children in a nearby neighborhood that they sometimes visit and bring clothes donations too. They also occasionally bring clothes to the nearby bateys.

Future Plans:

The church’s biggest current need is musical instruments for their time of worship. They currently only have a small drum, a tamborine, and a *guira*, a local instrument made of thin sheet metal. They would like a real drum set and a small piano or flute-organ. The community is also trying to find a weekday use for their salon next to the church. Many ideas have been presented including using it as a study room for the local teens or creating a pharmacy. If they turn it into a study room, they are hoping to find computers, books, and other study equipment that other families cannot often afford in this area. The pharmacy idea arose when a medical team came to work at the church and the community wanted to continue giving those in need their medications, despite the fact

that the team had left. Father Samuel is optimistic that they will find a use for the salon that will best serve the community.

Location (Iglesia Santa María la Virgen)

Latitude and longitude, traditional format: 19°43'45.0"N 70°36'20.0"W

Latitude and longitude, decimal format: 19.729167, -70.605556

Google Maps location: <https://goo.gl/maps/6x0l7>

Location (Colegio Niño Jesús)

Latitude and longitude, traditional format: 19°44'29.0"N 70°35'49.0"W

Latitude and longitude, decimal format: 19.741389, -70.596944

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



Bibliography

Algunas Apuntes Históricos de la Misión de Santa María la Virgen, de Villa Monte

Llano, document.

Rev. Daniel Samuel, Interview by Emily Gibson. Electronic Recording. Puerto Plata,

May 17, 2015.