

A History to Tell The Presence of the Episcopal-Anglican Church in the Dominican Republic

by The Right Reverend Telésforo Isaac

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Anglican Church is an association of ecclesiastical provinces, dioceses, autonomous and interdependent Christian groups that are in complete communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Prelate of the Church of England, UK.

The term Anglican and its derivative "Anglicanism" come from the medieval Latin "Ecclesia Anglicana," meaning Anglican Church, to differentiate this part of the occidental Christianity of the Roman Church with seat in the Vatican, Italy.

The origin of the Christian Church in England dates from the 3rd century. Already in the year 1075 its liturgy was known as the Rito Sarúm (Sarum Rite) that originated in the British Isle. This original Christianity in England was related to the Roman Catholicism with the arrival of Saint Augustine to Canterbury in the year 597.

During 10 centuries, from the 6th to the 16th centuries, the Church in England was under the rule of the Bishop of Rome. It became a national church after the setback of Pope Clement VII (1478-1534) due to the annulment of the marriage of Henry VIII (1491-1547) to the Spaniard Catalina of Aragon (1485-1536); but the Anglican Church as such was organized and specifically implemented during the reign of Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen (1533-1603).

Queen Elizabeth was a unique woman who knew how to handle the affairs of the British Empire; she made excellent state policy in England and she acted with ability in the ecclesiastical entanglements, with a vision and capacity that were quite admirable. The achievements of this queen endure until today and are notable because of the stability of the British Commonwealth, the worldwide influence of the English language, and the continuous and expanded presence of the Anglican Communion.

The Anglican Communion is a fraternity of 38 provinces and a membership of more than 80 million faithful spread all over the world and in all the continents. It is one of the most numerous Christian groups that professes and practices the faith according to liturgical traditions and theological

concepts developed by the Church in England and in the ecclesiastical provinces of this communion.

The work of Anglican bishops and theologians was done according to the reforms of the Reformation period and it was conducted with a unique interest in the approach of the Bible, the essence of the creed of the faith, theological reflection, reason, spirituality, and ecclesiastical authority. All of this was done with a humble heart, good use of intellect and devoid of superficial and intolerant beliefs and actions of the Middle Ages.

We must understand clearly that "the Anglican Communion is catholic, although not Roman; evangelical, but not protestant, and it is apostolic by the succession of bishops." (Dean Henry Forrester, Mexico, 1906.)

For many Anglicans, this church represents an authentic form of non-papal Catholicism, and at the same time is a form of Protestantism, without figures such as Martin Luther or John Calvin; because it is in itself, truly, a MIDDLE ROAD, the equilibrium of Christianity which denotes prudence and harmony in the application of the Holy Scriptures, the Apostolic Tradition, and Reason. This set of details is represented by means of liturgical practices and rituals that are defined and esthetically coordinated.

The harmony and balance among the Holy Scriptures, the Apostolic Tradition, and the use of the capacity to reason are in the Book of Common Prayer, which is, after the Bible, the best known and most used religious compendium.

Due to its makeup and idiosyncrasy, the Anglican Church has been a pioneer and a symbol of ecumenism. It is at the forefront of the fraternal dialogue, the theological reflection of erudite people, and the social cooperation among Christians of diverse churches and denominations. The Anglicans feel comfortable among the Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Protestants and Evangelicals.

The presence of the Anglican Church in the Dominican Republic

In the late nineteenth century there was a significantly reduction in the production and marketing of essential products in the country. The harvest and export of cacao, tobacco and mahogany were affected, and the cultivation of sugar cane increased as the most important product. Sugar mills were established and a labor force was needed to work in the sugar cane fields and sugar processing mills.

The governments of that time and the sugar entrepreneurs stimulated the import of workers from the smaller islands in the Caribbean to work in sugar mills. Thousands of immigrants were brought in schooners and these immigrants brought with them Bibles, the Book of Common Prayer and hymnals.

Among the immigrants from the Minor Antillean islands were people with knowledge and training in many areas: mechanics, masons, electricians, bookkeepers, accountants, primary school teachers, automotive technicians, tinsmiths, carpenters, blacksmiths, plumbers, musicians and others.

A considerable number of them had higher education, had studied the Bible, theology and ecclesiology, and some demonstrated a calling to serve as leaders and Christian ministers. They were willing to guide and provide spiritual and emotional advice and support to their peers.

The first Anglicans arrived in the country in the late nineteenth century and began to practice their Christian faith, probably in small groups in family homes and under the shade of trees near the mills, mainly in the east of the country.

From Saint Croix, Virgin Islands, an Anglican named Benjamin Isaac Wilson came to the country. He was born in Fredriksted on April 16, 1853. He stated that he came to the Dominican Republic on May 22, 1891.

He noticed the need to organize and serve the faithful who were in the country like "sheep without a shepherd." Moved by his missionary vocation, he propelled Anglicanism in the Dominican Republic. Wilson founded the Holy Trinity Church in San Pedro de Macorís. He built a church and a place for his home. He also ministered in other missions in the mills of the sugar industry. This is how the Anglican presence in the Dominican Republic was initiated.

It is said that the minister and educator Wilson offered his pastoral services in English and in Spanish to the people of San Pedro de Macorís. He directed a school with help from his wife and a daughter. He taught languages to prominent people. Among them were lawyers and other professionals in the city. In order to obtain and secure recognition and credibility, Mr. Wilson contacted the Rt. Rev. Theodore Holly, the Bishop of the Anglican Church in Haiti, and Bishop Holly gave him guidance, instruction and support in preparation for his ministry.

Benjamin Wilson and Bishop Theodore Holly signed an agreement for the Dominican Church to conform to the worship and discipline to the Anglican Church in Haiti. With this, the mission work in San Pedro de Macorís was

under the direction and canonical authority of the church led by Holly and in communion with Anglicanism.

On August 8, 1897, Benjamin Isaac Wilson was ordained to the Diaconate. The church he had built was consecrated the 20th of February of the following year, 1898. On the 27th of February 1898, he was ordained a priest.

Once ordained a priest, Wilson served as an untiring missionary. He celebrated and preached three services every Sunday. Worship services in Spanish were at 3:00 p.m. Thus the presence of Anglicanism in the Dominican Republic was firmly established.

The Reverend Wilson was under the supervision of the Bishop of Haiti, but over the years the relationship cooled for reasons we do not know. The age and health of Benjamin Wilson contributed to the weakening of the congregation and to slowing the growth it had at the beginning of the twentieth century. He died in 1939.

Important Moments of the Anglican Church in the Country

A number of changes occurred in the Anglican Church in the country starting on the first decade of the twentieth century.

- Bishop Holly's last visit was in 1905. He did not return to the Dominican Republic because of his age and health. He died in 1911. With the demise of Haiti's ecclesiastical supervisor, jurisdiction passed to Bishop Charles B. Colmore of Puerto Rico.
- In 1916, U.S. intervention in the country made possible a new opportunity for the missionary work and ministry of the church. Besides this, there was interest in strengthening the priestly and pastoral ministry to serve the growing number of Anglican residents in the east of the country, in San Pedro de Macorís, in La Romana and especially in the region of the sugar mills. To meet this need, arrangements were made to bring ordained ministers to the Dominican Republic.
- In 1918 the Rev. William Wyllie, a Scot married to an American, came to Santo Domingo. He ministered to Anglicans of the Caribbean island and served as chaplain to the American soldiers and their families.

- Wyllie was a tireless worker in charge of the Church of the Epiphany, the Church of St. George (now non-existent), chaplain of the armed forces, and the missions of San Isidro, San Luis, Boca Chica, La Romana, and Barahona.

He organized a school in the Church of the Epiphany (September, 1918) that became later the Carol Morgan School. He ministered in the Dominican Republic until 1932 after rebuilding the temple of the Epiphany which was destroyed by the hurricane San Zenon on September 3, 1930.

- In 1920 an English priest, the Rev. Archibald Beer, came to the Dominican Republic. He was married to an American. He served in the east of the country, was consul of England and commissioner of Pan American Airways, whose flights landed in the Higuamo River in San Pedro de Macorís.
- The Rev. Beer worked very hard in the central bateys of the mills in Consuelo, Santa Fe, and Porvenir and the city of La Romana. He took charge of the Moravian school in Santa Fe and established St. Stephen School in San Pedro de Macorís in 1922, and other schools in Consuelo, Porvenir and La Romana.

He organized a troop of Boy Scouts who gained recognition by the organization's central office in London. He gained prestige as a minister of the Anglican Church and at the same time was consul of the British government in the country. He lived in San Pedro de Macorís and ministered in the east of the country until 1953.

Areas of Activity of the Anglican Church in the Country

The Church has been effective in the Dominican Republic because of its ideas, programs and actions for spiritual growth, human rights, improvements in social welfare, education, sacred music, theological education, and culture in general. The presence of this church is felt in the Dominican territory from the Seybo region to the frontier in Dajabón and Jimani.

1. In addition to pastoral care, churches have always had schools to provide education to the children of the faithful and the communities where they are. All church schools are coed, and were the first of their kind in the eastern part of the country. They were bilingual schools with home economics programs, craft programs for girls, and music programs.

- San Esteban School was established by the Reverend A. Beer in San Pedro de Macorís in 1922.
- With the rise of young people studying at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo in the early 1970-1980's, the church sponsored two student lodges for men and women in Santo Domingo where dozens of students from the interior of the country were housed during their studies.

In 1976, the church founded and sponsored the Center for Theological Education (CET) with a well-stocked library, where students trained for the ministry for the Dominican Republic and for other Latin American dioceses.

2. In addition to children's shelters/nurseries, schools and seminaries, there has been interest and action to denounce human rights violations. The most notable case was the complaint of the Rev. Charles Barnes, who gave the information to the American press about the massacre of Haitians on the border. He was assassinated by Trujillo on the 26th of July, 1938.

Other complaints and interventions were made in favor of Spanish citizens who arrived from exile, Hungarian and Haitians, and especially the sugar cane workers. The Church also acted in defense and protection of journalists, youth, trade unionists, politicians and other people persecuted during the last part of the Trujillo dictatorship and the regime of Balaguer.

3. The first Boy Scout troop organized in the country and recognized by the Boy Scouts office was established by Rev. Beer. The former Admiral Ramon Dewindt Lavandier was the product of this troop when, at the opening of the Ramfis bridge over the Higuamo river in 1932, Trujillo chose and sponsored him to study for the military.
4. Ministers of the church gave support to Rescue Workers organization of the Dominican Red Cross.
5. The church played an important part in the polio vaccination of children from birth to 5 years of age in 1985. Vaccination was under the leadership of Mrs. Mary Marranzini, the Dominican Association for Rehabilitation, the cooperation of the Social Service of the Dominican Churches and two Anglican bishops, Antonio Ramos of the Church Council and Telésforo A. Isaac.

6. Due to the tendency of the liturgical renewal in the construction of Christian churches in the decade of the 1950s, the church of San Andres was built in avant-garde architectural style. It was designed by the architect Forestieri, newly arrived from Italy, and contains the art of Pratt Ventós, the renowned Spanish sculptor.
7. The church helped consolidate the Society of Friends of Family Planning PROFAMILIA in 1966.
8. Today the Anglican Church along with other religious groups maintain the Pro - solidarity program for the prevention of HIV/AIDS.
9. The church has been involved in promoting development committees in some parts of the country, such as Santo Domingo, San Pedro de Macorís, San Francisco de Macorís, Barahona, Haina, Jarabacoa, and the border cities of Dajabón and Jimaní.
10. This ecclesiastical institution has provided assistance and support before, during and after hurricane devastation and other natural disasters. Hundreds of houses have been repaired and built in Santana-Nizao, Jimani and Azua.
11. In the area of health, the church has clinics and nutrition programs in poor areas in different parts of the country and programs to provide food and social assistance to people in need.
12. The ordained ministry in the church is exercised by men and women from diverse cultural backgrounds and national origins.
13. Among other programs and institutions sponsored by or with which the Anglican Church in the country cooperates are:
 - a) Social Service of Dominican Churches.
 - b) Dominican Bible Society.
 - c) Dominican-Haitian Dialogue.
 - d) Camp Mount of the Transfiguration, Jarabacoa.
 - e) Episcopal Convent, Las Flores, San Pedro de Macorís.
 - f) Home for the Aging, Boca Chica.
 - g) Clinic Hope and Charity, San Pedro de Macorís.
 - h) Good Shepherd Health Center, San Pedro de Macorís.
 - i) Micro-credit Program.
 - j) Pastoral Ministry for Haitians.
 - k) Theological Studies Center (CET), Santo Domingo.
 - l) Permanent Diaconate Program (CET).
 - m) Conference Center "Bishop Kellogg ", San Pedro de Macorís.
 - n) Conference Center "Bishop Holly " Santo Domingo.

- o) Retreat Center "Bishop Skilton", Boca Chica.
- p) Training Center, San Andres.
- q) Visitation Program Psychiatric Hospital (Highway Duarte, Km 28).
- r) Clinical Pastoral Training Program for chaplains.

The format of this brochure cannot name all the outstanding figures in the ministerial and administrative work of the Anglican Church in the Dominican Republic. Here we mention just a few notables:

Isaac Benjamin Wilson, pioneer of Anglicanism in the country, San Pedro de Macorís, (May 22, 1891).

Theodore Holly, Bishop of Haiti who ordered Wilson, (1897).

William Wyllie, Scottish missionary, (1918 to 1939).

Archibald Beer, English missionary, (1920 to 1953).

Charles Barnes, a missionary killed by Trujillo (1938).

Charles Voegeli, Bishop of Haiti and Dominican Republic, (1960).

Thomas O. Basden, a priest of the Turks and Caicos who served in the Dominican Republic , musician and composer of 66 pieces. (1932-1980).

George Hodge, a native of Anguilla, director of Colegio San Esteban, musician and composer.

Virginia Norman, master and first woman appointed treasurer of the Episcopal Church outside the United States.

Phillip Wheaton, enterprising missionary and leader on human rights issues.

William L. Wipfler, author of the book *Power, Influence and Impotence: The Church as Socio-Political factor in the Dominican Republic*, (1980).

Paul Kellogg, first bishop resident in the country. (1962-1972)

Telésforo Isaac, first Dominican ordained to the ministry and elevated to bishop. (1972-1991)

Ashton Brooks, first Dominican dean of the Center for Theology Studies (CET)

Mercedes Julian, first Dominican woman ordained in the diocese of Panama.

Margarita Santana, first woman ordained. (1991 -).

Julio C. Holguín, Diocesan Bishop of the Episcopal-Anglican Church in the Dominican Republic (1991 -) .

Luis Fernando Ruiz, (Assistant Bishop). (2012 -).

William Skilton, (Assistant Bishop, Retired 2012).



First Diocesan Convention, 1959



Consecration of Bishop Telefóro Isaac, 1972



Diocesan Clericus at Bishop Kellogg Center, 1960



Deaconal Ordination in San Andrés, 11 July 1976



Episcopal Women in Santa Margarita, 1960



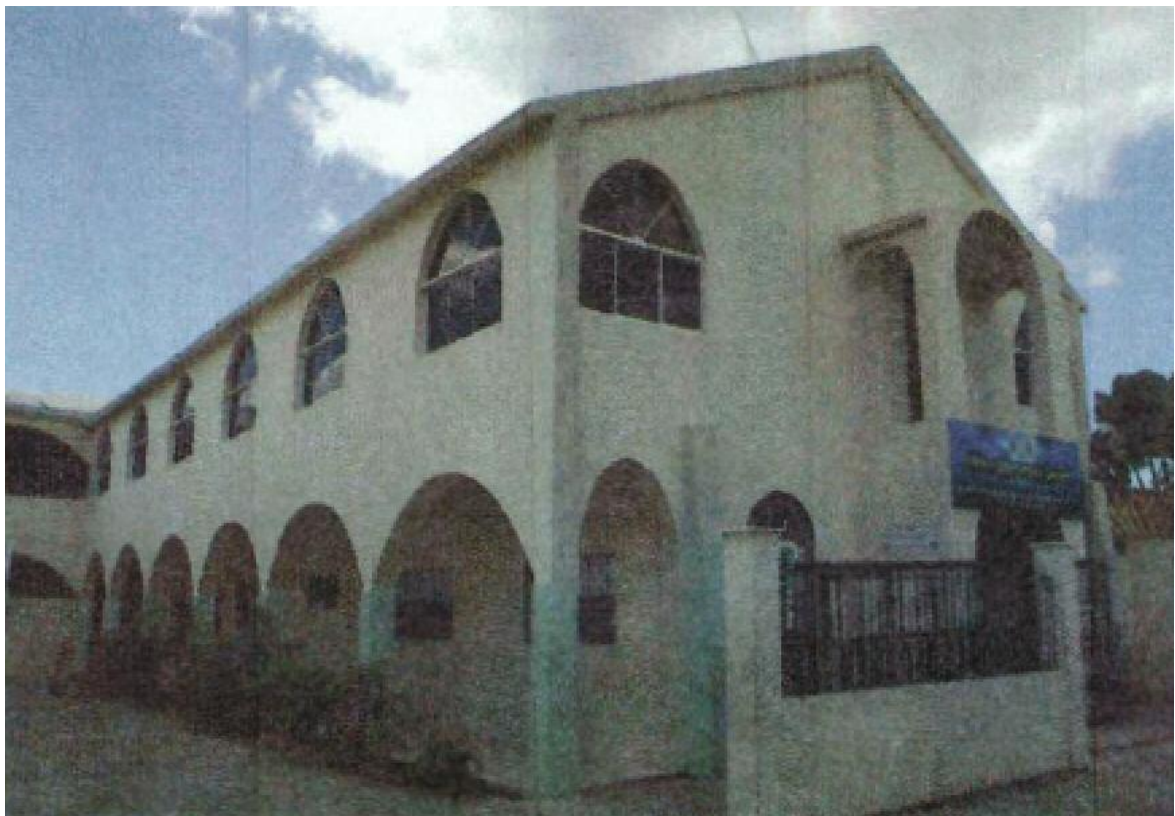
Sisters of the Transfiguration meeting in Santo Domingo, 1979



Ordination to the Diaconate of Bishop Julio César Holguín,
June 11, 1976



Consecration of Bishop Julio César Holguín, 16 August 1991



Hope and Charity Clinic, San Pedro de Macorís



Seminarians at the Center for Theological Education, 2007 - 2008



Closing Eucharist at the First Encounter in Mission, April 12- 14, 2013



Closing Eucharist at the First Encounter in Mission, April 12- 14, 2013