



*Evangelical Seminary of Theology
Matanzas, Cuba
ACONTECER / JUNE 2021*

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RECTOR'S REPORT



Less than two months are left for Monday, August 30, the beginning of the 2021-2022 terms. God willing, we are determined to start, even though the situation of the pandemic will prevent our physical meeting yet. The Academic Commission and staff have been working to continue the process of preparation for the beginning of the course for any of the possible scenarios that may come, including virtual learning in its different modalities.

Dean Amos Lopez will give details of the organization of the course shortly. SET Direction and administration are organizing the logistics. We are also working on the preparations for teaching: scanning documents; updating bibliography; preparing the different modules for the different courses

in adequate support, printed as well as digital to be sent through email; increasing connectivity; acquiring new electronic equipment, among other things.

SET SUPPORTS STRUGGLE VS PANDEMIC IN MATANZAS

Inserted in the context for the mission of the church in Cuba today, SET is a Cuban Christian institution indispensable to disseminate the contents of ecumenical theological education it promotes. Staff and students foster in their classrooms the contemporary ecumenical theological thinking so necessary to face the challenges of the mission of the church, with the view to actively participate in the current issues of the society.

Being coherent with its vision and the teachings it promotes, SET felt committed to accept the request of the Ministry of Public Health of the Province of Matanzas to support the struggle against the epidemic of Covid-19 with our facilities, as an annex to “Eliseo N. Caamaño” Provincial Children’s Hospital, the only one in Matanzas – with a limited capacity due to this pandemic –, to receive sick children, their companions and those who are suspicious of having the Covid-19 disease.

1. HEALTH INTERVENTION WITH VACCINE CANDIDATE ABDALA

Matanzas municipality was chosen to begin the health intervention in risk groups of the population starting from 19-year-old people on with Abdala, one of the vaccine candidates. The administration of the first dose began on May 31, and the second and third doses on June 14 and 28 respectively,



according to the Abdala schedule. SET was one of the chosen institutions to support this campaign by ensuring the necessary resources like chairs, tables, refrigerator, electric fans, and the like.

The “Abraham Lincoln” Community Center, across from the Seminary – a project fostered by the Seminary and sponsored by the Federation of Aid to Protestantism (FAP) and the Ministry of Culture – was the starting point for the vaccination campaign of Family Doctor’s Offices 12 and 13 from the “José Luis Dubrok” Polyclinic Center.



The opening words for this vaccine campaign on May 31 were presented by SET Professor Ofelia Ortega, Director of the Christian Institute of Gender Studies. She was grateful for all the efforts of the country to provide the population with the vaccine candidates that will protect our health.



The SET community as well as the 1 050 people from this community who were vaccinated appreciated the kind service and help of the Seminary and the professionalism of the Ministry of Public Health staff.

2. ANNEX WARD OF THE PEDIATRIC HOSPITAL OF MATANZAS PROVINCE AT SET FACILITIES



During the past days of June, the Provincial Pediatric Hospital in Matanzas exceeded its maximum capacity. The Ministry of Public Health requested SET to serve as an annex center to the Hospital to receive sick or suspicious Covid-19 children with their respective companions. Obviously, we agreed to this, following the long tradition of service of our Seminary to the Matanzas Civil Society.

Then on June 20, after prayers, a joint meeting took place and we all worked intensively to create the conditions in the visitors' building, prioritizing protection above all of the members of our community as well as the properties. We were able to accommodate 120 capacities for children patients who had tested positive to the disease, children suspicious of having it and one family companion. We also hosted a team of 10 people, doctors and nurses for hospital aid. All capacities have been occupied since June 21, discharging those who recovered from the disease and transferring those who needed to the Intensive Care Unit.



At present, ten SET workers are working in the different areas. The kitchen team prepares food for 140 people every day including breakfast, lunch, dinner and two snacks. Even when the Ministry of Public Health is supplying with all the logistics, including foodstuff, SET assumes the infrastructure and human resources.

We pray to God so that He allows us to continue with this ministry that will be extended for indefinite time, according to what we observe. Jesus said, *“Allow the little children to come to Me, and do not hinder them; for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these.”* (Math 19:14 NIV)

NEW APPOINTMENT



SET Direction decided to support the administrative personnel. For this reason Adiel González was appointed as the new Registrar. Adiel is currently finishing his studies in the 4th year of the Baccalaureate in Theology and will be graduating soon. He began working since July 1, Mondays to Friday from 8-12 noon. We appreciate the work of the former Registrar Sissi Subiaurt, who was also working as the Rector's Secretary and who will continue performing only this work from now on.

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SET DIRECTION IN MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

June 14 – the World Council of Churches called for the conference *Antiracist in Christ. Repent, Reflection and Christian Ecumenical Action on Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia*. Dr. Dora Arce participated as panelist on behalf of SET in the Section *Placing Racism in the Colonial and Neo Imperial Context*.



June 19 - Waldemar Murguido, head of the Financial Department at SET participated in the meeting of Young Adults organized by the Baptist for Peace in North America. The objective of the meeting was to analyze and assess where they are going and where they are called as an organization, to reflect on the vision and the purpose of peace rooted in justice.



June 25 – Rector Carlos E. Ham and Professor Dora Arce were invited to participate in a process of renewal of the Conference of Churches of the Caribbean (CCC). The objective of the Conference was to develop a proposal to offer a new self-understanding of the organization, as well as recommendations for its mission, role and function according to the said self-understanding.

June 29 – Rector Carlos E. Ham participated in the online seminar on *Enriching the Plans of Climate Incidence – Towards COP26* (Conference of Parties Directive Board of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) organized by the ACT Alliance and the Program for Climate Justice of the World Lutheran Federation. A panel of experts reported on the results of the preparations for COP26 to increase immediate climate incidence and validate the plans and synergies identified by the countries of the region.

DONATIONS OF BOOKS FOR MARGARET MCDUGALL MEMORIAL LIBRARY



The Margaret McDougall Memorial Library at SET received a donation of two personal libraries. Over a hundred books belonging to the late Presbyterian Carlos M. Camps, who was Vice Rector and Professor from our Seminary, who passed away on March 5, 2015, were donated by his family.



Vice Rector and Professor Clara Luz Ajo received the books, mostly theology and other topics related to the subjects offered at the seminary. She also donated some of her books to the library.

We thank Professor Alina and Carlos, both Professor Camps' children, and Professor Clara Luz for their generous donation that increase the library collection with valuable books.

FAREWELL FOR A GOOF BROTHER AND FRIEND

Our dear brother and friend, 95-year-old Rev. Dean Lewis (1926-2021) is in the presence of the Lord as of June 14 this year. A retired pastor from the US Presbyterian Church, he and his wife accompanied the Cuban churches and the Seminary for many decades, showing his passion and commitment with the mission of the church in Cuba. He helped found the *Presbyterian Cuba Connection* organization in 1995, in the midst of the 'special period'.



He used to say that some of the purposes of this organization were to keep in touch with the development of associations in Cuba; educating US Presbyterians about Cuba and Cuban Presbyterians; generating financial support for the Cuban churches and fostering new associations.

With his characteristic simplicity and humbleness, he travelled innumerable times to Cuba, staying here in the campus for long periods; you could find him sharing with students and the community; walking along the gardens or expecting the sunrise. There was no obstacle whatsoever for him, including the blockade of the United States against Cuba, that could hinder the relations of love and friendship among brothers and sisters from both countries. For he was convinced "that neither death, nor life, neither angels, nor demons, neither the present, nor the future, nor any powers, neither height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39, NIV)

In this conviction, we say farewell to a great friend and brother, a ‘faithful servant’, thanking the Lord for the life of Dean Lewis, who helped us to be better people. “For this God is our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to end.” (Psalm 48:14, NIV)

SEVENTY YEARS OF EPISCOPAL OFFICIAL PRESENCE AT SET

Seventy years ago, the Episcopal Church of Cuba joined the educational project of the Evangelical Seminary of Theology of Matanzas (SET), founded in 1946. In a meeting held on June 16, 1951, Bishop Alexander H. Blankingship, Reverend Jorge H. Piloto and Reverend Romualdo González reported to the SET Directive Board that his church accepted the bases presented by the Board for an official cooperation with the Seminary.



As part of this collaboration and among many other contributions, there was the construction of the Resurrection Chapel, consecrated on January 22, 1956.

We should also emphasize that before the union of both institutions there were Episcopalian students at SET, the first one was Juan Emilio Martín, who entered the Seminary in 1947.

Many Episcopalians have contributed to the Seminary, among them Jorge A. Perera (1966-1969) and Pablo Odén Marichal (1984-1993) who came to be Rectors of the Seminary. Both were also professors, as well as other Episcopalians like Ramón Viñas, Milton R. Le Roy, Dionisio de Lara, Romualdo González, Emilio Hernández, Iván González, Clara Luz Ajo, Pedro Triana, Marianela de la Paz and Gilberto Caballero.

Many Episcopal cleric and lay people have been part of the SET Directive Board, like Odette Naranjo, Juan Ramón de la Paz, and Bishops José Agustín González, Nerva Cot, Miguel Tamayo and María Griselda Delgado.

(A post by Carlos R. Molina, professor of History of the Church at SET in his Facebook account on June 16, 2021 with the #CubaMemoriaProtestante)

HUNDRED AND THIRTY FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF PRESBYTERIANISM IN CUBA



The Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba (IPRC) – a SET founding church in 1946 – celebrated on June 26 its 130 anniversaries of the arrival of Presbyterianism in Cuba. Congratulations on behalf of the Seminary to the Directive

Board and members of this beloved Church that has professed its faith with perseverance.

“Life, death, resurrection and the promised return of Jesus Christ have established the model for the mission of the Church... The Church follows this model in its way of life and its model of work. Living and serving in this way is confessing Christ as the Lord.” *CONFESSION OF FAITH OF THE PRESBYTERIAN-REFORMED CHURCH IN CUBA, 1977*

BEFORE LEAVING

Student: Gustavo Saurí Garcés,
Church of God in Cuba

Program: Baccalaureate in Theology

The Evangelical Seminary of Theology, more than a physical space located in Dos de Mayo, Matanzas is an experience in life and of community life. The students the Seminary receives to study there are marked in a particular way; I dare say that in a similar way, professors are marked too.

Before arriving here to study, I had heard that this place became familiar, and so it does. Together, men and women go through each moment in their lives; sometimes very busy with tasks and things to do; others in pain for the loss of a loved one here in the community; others, the ever present opportune collective laughter most of the times. As I have observed, we enjoy very much most of our subjects and courses, sometimes having trouble with the pronunciation of a word.

However, I always have in my mind excellent and unforgettable moments in the Systematic Theology classes, in my first year; personally, I will never forget a phrase by Professor Daylín Rufín that became a fact: “You’ll see, you’ll fall in love with Hebrew!”. For me it was a fact, not without some or other headache at the beginning.

Clearly, I had not imagined that I would find in this campus one of the most beautiful surprises I have had in my life. First, a beautiful friendship with one of my classmates; then we fell in love, and we got married in our summer vacations after finishing our second year.

When we were going through our third year, on March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic interrupted our studies and we went home. We continued our classes through internet, WhatsApp groups, and email. We regretted the absence and the interruption, but we reacted responsibly to continue learning and obtaining knowledge.

In the second term of our fourth and last year of our Baccalaureate, there was a bigger outbreak of the pandemic and face-to-face classes were interrupted again. However, since we had a previous experience, we continued the course through internet. We were so grateful for this, because we could

finish our studies on time. In addition, I add extra gratitude because in this last period, even when classes continued virtually, our family was allowed to stay in campus.

I believe I will take with me a community experience from all these years of study, of living and sharing with other students from different parts of the country as well as international students, with professors and ecumenical leaders. I will take with me a lot from this place, family, friends, and beautiful memories; including a little dog, Musy, who chose us when she simply chose our apartment to live, so we decided to adopt it and she became part of our family.

I feel that the next steps in the church, in the family, in my environment will be marked by this time of personal growth. Thanks to SET, to the administration, to all workers, professors, students who gathered here and shared their lives.

Thanks to all brothers and organizations that help this project to come true!

NOTES FOR HISTORY: ON THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF SET (1946-2021)

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

THE SEVENTIES

Relations between the State and the Church deteriorated even more. In spite of the fact that the thesis and resolutions approved in the I Congress of the Communist Party (PCC) in 1975 the section *On the Policy in Relation to Religion that the Church and Believers* stated that the churches were allowed to continue their work, the 1976 Constitution of the Republic of Cuba stated that the Socialist State “based its educational and cultural policy in the scientific conception of the world, established and developed by Marxism-Leninism” (Article 38-2-A).

The declared atheism encouraged the isolation of the members of the churches; consequently, there was a decrease of students entering SET and the decade was poor in graduates. The crisis of pastoral vocations was critical due to the insecurity that prevailed in the churches and the increase of economic difficulties; however the firm faith in God and the desire and commitment to collaborate, improve the conditions of life and work never wavered. It is fair to emphasize that the students and faculty maintained their work in the pastoral field and offered their help in agricultural activities.

The decrease in enrollment did not affect the relevance of the institution that also functioned as a center of meeting for Latin American theologians and social scientists. In 1978, the program of Master in Theology started with specialization in the areas of Christian Education, Biblical Studies, History of the Church, Systematic Theology, Christian Ethics, Culture and Christianity and Pastoral Problems.

The disruption of political and economic relations between Cuba and the USA coming from the previous decade, affected the link among churches of both countries. Therefore, in this epoch the relations with churches, Theology Schools and ecumenical organizations from Latin America, Europe, Canada and other regions were boosted, diversified and strengthened.

(Source: Booklet *A Laboratory of the Ecumenical Movement: Notes for the History of the Evangelical Seminary of Theology of Matanzas*)



Contributions to Evangelical Seminary of Theology in Matanzas should be made to the Ofelia Ortega Endowment Fund, Fund ID: 89726, Account: 1020094701. This information should be written on the memo line of the check. Contributions may be made either by individuals or congregations or presbyteries. The check should then be mailed to: Presbyterian Foundation, 200 East 12th Street, Jeffersonville, IN 47130.

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