

The Rev. Canon David S. Howell Silva  
English Speaking Parish  
St. John's Episcopal Cathedral  
December 1997

### A History of the English Speaking Parish at St. John's

From a report written in 1901 by Bishop Peterkin, Bishop in charge of Puerto Rico, the first St. John's congregation had its first service on March 12, 1899 in a hall on the Plaza in what is now Old San Juan. In 1900, the average attendance had been sixty to seventy people from various ethnic groups (Continental, West Indians, Black-Americans, and Puerto Ricans) that we have represented in the English Speaking congregation today. By 1901, because of troops leaving the island, the congregation had dropped to 35. Bishop Peterkin presented the hope that when the congregation became settled in a suitable church building that the Church could do her part in proclaiming to the community the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Rev. James Van Buren arrived in Puerto Rico in February, 1901. On Christmas Eve, 1901, the mission of St. John the Baptist was organized as a parish. Father Van Buren was elected as the first Rector. He succeeded in gathering both a congregation of English Speaking residents and a Spanish Speaking congregation.

Father Van Buren was elected to be Bishop of Puerto Rico. He wrote the following in an article while he was in the U.S. after his consecration.

"In Puerta de Tierra, a suburb of San Juan, we have many English Speaking members and communicants who have come to Puerto Rico from the parishes in St. Thomas and St. Croix. They must not lose the Church and its saving influence. At present they are scattered as sheep having no shepherd. Some of them come to the Church in San Juan, but only a few. I want to provide for them a church on chapel and a clergyman who shall make them his especial care".

Two significant events happened in 1902. On December 26th the cornerstone was laid for the Church building of the St. John's congregation in San Juan. Also, a house was secured and remodelled for use as a chapel in Puerta de Tierra. This building became known as St. Luke's.

At the General Convention of 1913, the House of Bishops elected the Very Rev. Charles Colmore as Bishop of Puerto Rico. In late August 1928, Bishop Colmore had made public his intention to consolidate the work of the Church in San Juan. When St. John's was built in Old San Juan it was in a residential area. The growth of the business section of the city and the movement of residents to other locations caused both St. John's and St. Luke's to suffer from the population shift. The Bishop proposed to sell the buildings and relocate the two congregations. In 1929, Bishop Colmore spoke of the complex, at Stop 20 in Santurce, including the new St. John's Church and St. Catherine's Training School for women. Later it was hoped that St. John's Day School (in another location), St. John's Rectory, and possibly a Church Seminary would be added.

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Ground was broken on February 22, 1929, and on St. John the Baptist Day the cornerstone was laid for the new Church of St. John the Baptist. The new Church was opened for services February, 1930.

The depression had its effects on the Church in Puerto Rico. The U.S. Church had not been able to meet budget expenses, and the same was true in Puerto Rico. In addition on September 22, 1932 a hurricane brought destruction to Puerto Rico. Due to reductions of money for Puerto Rico, St. Catherine's School was closed in June, 1934.

In December 1938, Bishop Colmore had been Bishop of Puerto Rico for twenty-five years. On December 18, at service commemorating the Bishop's anniversary, the Senior Warden of the Parish presented to the Bishop a set of resolutions offering the

plans for uniting the congregations have been discussed.

In the English Speaking Parish, many priests have served. Information is scarce. People who were present during the ministries of some of the priests can remember little about them.

<u>PERIOD</u>	<u>PRIEST</u>	<u>RECOLLECTIONS BY THE COMMUNITY</u>
1938 - 1944	Bruce Reddish	Tall, good with youth, served in days of segregation.
1944 - 1947	William S. Anthony	Went on to serve in places like Java, Bequia, St. Lucia, & Grenada.
1947	James Blake	Athletic and ran in races.
1948	James Conner	(nothing submitted)
1949 - 1953	Frederic Haskin	Was originally involved with St. Luke's Hospital in Ponce.
1953 - 1959	Edward Turner	Became Bishop of Virgin Islands.
1959 - 1960	Paul Kellogg	Became Bishop of the Dominican Republic.
1960 - 1962	Theodore P. Ball	Active in parish and pastoral visits
1962 - 1964	Francisco Reus	In charge of both parishes and became first native bishop of Puerto Rico.
1965 - 1966	Richard Harms	In 1980 became Archdeacon in the Diocese of San Diego.
1966 - 1970	F. S. Cutler	Died a few years ago in Fajardo, PR.
1971 - 1972	James Harkins	Married sister of Bishop Reus Currently serving in Venice, Italy.
1972 - 1986	Victor Burset	Rector of English Speaking Parish, eventually became Dean.
1987 - 1988	Gary DeHope	Served as interim and is Headmaster of the Cathedral School.
1988 - 1995	Alexander Zabriskie	Active with other English Speaking pastors in San Juan and participated as the Spiritual Director with the Emmaus Movement.
1995 - Present	David Silva Howell	Re-established parish's relationship with the Diocese at Puerto Rico.

Source: *St. John's Cathedral records for Baptisms, Confirmations, Burials, and Marriages - 1955-58, pgs. 41-42.*

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At his last Convention - Bishop Colmore made this statement:

"Puerto Rico has been my home for 33 years and the work of this District has been my single thought and interest during that time. I love the Islands and their people whom I have ever carried in my heart. There is no greater wish for me to leave you than that all of you will serve the Church and her Lord with ever greater zeal and sincerity."

*[Majority of this report was adapted directly from an extensive history by Father Victor Buset with contributions by Father Juan Pablo Perez and Seminarian Lucia Ramirez]*