

REPORT TO THE PRESIDING BISHOP

by the Bishop of

THE MISSIONARY DISTRICT OF PUERTO RICO

for the calendar year 1951

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INTRODUCTION

During the seven months that I have been in residence in Puerto Rico I have come to feel very much at home and am exceedingly happy with my co-workers. Since my enthronement, June 24 I have visited all our twenty-five churches and our institutions at least once and many of them several times, in the process confirming and receiving from the Roman Catholic Church a total of three hundred and ninety-two persons, and receiving one former Roman Catholic priest into our ministry. There was no 1951 convocation but one is scheduled for February, 1952.

TYPE OF PEOPLE

Although our people include some continentals from the United States, as well as quite a few West Indians, most of those to whom we minister are Spanish-speaking Latins. They are proud of being American citizens but are also very jealous of their Spanish culture and, as exemplified by their own constitution which they are now with U. S. approval preparing and their first elected governor, are asking increasingly for self-government. Although there is a small group which prefers independence it is of no consequence and the present trend is more in the hope eventual statehood. Incidentally a typical example of the present ecclesiastico - political atmosphere in this island, wherein 90% of the population are counted to be Roman Catholics, is the determination of the Popular Party, now in power, to insist that the new constitution contain a clause forbidding government aid to parochial schools. The Roman Church is putting on a strenuous campaign in opposition but as several prominent people recently remarked to me, "The governor holds more power over the people than the Church". The governor's attitude is supported by the local Federation of Evangelical Churches, to which unfortunately we do not belong. (I hope that in the future we may join the Federation but on the one hand our clergy are afraid of being classed as "Protestants" and on the other the Federation is chiefly composed of extreme "saw-dust trail" groups).

TYPE OF WORK

Because the Roman Church originally neglected the rural areas it was among these people that our Church began its ministry and even today after fifty years we have churches in only four cities. The people are on the whole very poor and not too well-educated. Although the services are fully in keeping with Anglican tradition, I have not been impressed with the results. Instead it seems to me that we have become as messy as Rome and, although emphasizing sacramental principles, have largely detached them from the pastoral relationship. Instead of creating loyalty, we have allowed ourselves to be used and little or nothing is ever seen of countless people whom we have baptized, confirmed or married. Although I am whole-heartedly in favor of interdenominational cooperation, I believe that this can bear fruit only if one is first loyal to his own Communion. In contrast our people almost come in one

Missionary District of Puerto Rico

-2-

door and go out the other. We serve momentarily many nominal Roman Catholics whose priest's fees are too high but to serve them only momentarily is from my standpoint sheer magic. I want rather to develop strong, qualitative Christianity and the only way that this can now be done I am convinced, so far as our situation is concerned, is by developing a real and lasting loyalty to the Episcopal Church. Some of the clergy feel that I am impractical but I have insisted that our ministry is only to those who really mean business as Episcopalians and not to those who would use us for sheer convenience. To help bring this about I have forbidden the ministration of the Sacraments to non-Episcopalians and I have insisted on a raising of the minimum age for confirmation, with long periods of instruction before the administration of any Sacrament.

Although I do not mean to imply that a great deal has not been accomplished, because we do have many fine church people, it is also true that at the moment there is not only too little loyalty to the Episcopal Church, there is far too little corporate feeling within the district as a whole. The division, created by the desire for a Puerto Rican Bishop at the time of my election, is of absolutely no consequence now other than the fact that it was a good example of the lack of esprit de corps. The clergy will say themselves that Spanish people are highly individualistic and I have never known so many clergy who know exactly how the Bishop should run his office. Nevertheless, while not wishing to stamp out healthy criticism, I am determined that we shall be and act like a family. To help toward that goal I try to be "in the field" almost constantly, getting to know the clergy so that we may share our work together. This combined with our recent retreat, diocesan services and even my monthly news letter should help. Because the geographical area is only 100 X 30 miles and because we have a relatively small number of churches, I want to be in every station two or three times per year because I assume that a Bishop should consider his pastoral visitations the same way that a priest should regard parish calling - the very essence of his job. Increasingly I hope that we can be bound together and recognize that we are one in union with the one Lord whom we serve.

PERSONNEL

This year we have had twenty priests, one of whom is inactive (he teaches music as his livelihood and helps us only when needed to fill in) and another of whom, although very active as a priest is also a physician and spends most of his time in that work. That leaves us eighteen priests and from this number we are shortly to lose two by retirement (Ex-Church of Jesus priests) and one by transfer to another diocese. Of the remaining fifteen, two are continentals from the U. S. and thirteen are Spanish-Puerto Ricans, several of whom are ex-Roman Catholic priests without adequate Anglican background. These thirteen are truly consecrated men but without exception their training has been inadequate and the Church suffers accordingly. On the whole I prefer to build up a Puerto Rican priesthood rather than to have too many continentals but I must insist on the best possible training and that means college and seminary work in the States. When I came I found that two of our three postulants were "reading for orders" and I promptly discontinued that plan. We shall shortly have two new postulants but I want all five of them to be in the States in school next fall. That means that for the next 5-7 years we shall be very short-handed, but

I am not planning for the next five but rather for the next thirty-five years. It means also that such education will necessitate a great deal of money (I have asked for some increase in our item for theological education in 1952 and will try to find the balance from friends) but money is of no consequence when the life of the Church is at stake. A good, local seminary would cost us even more money, whereas the education of our young men in the States will provide them with the sort of training and vision which will enable them to return to Puerto Rico and to develop the strong Church which we should have in this island - and when I say strong, I mean qualitative more than anything else.

#### SELF-SUPPORT

Believing that the health of missionary work can best be judged by the amount of local leadership and the proportion of financial support that comes from local sources, I am distressed to find that, although some of our clergy receive part of their income from their congregations, such part is over and above their basic salaries, 100% of which in the case of every Puerto Rican priest is paid by the National Council - and this in addition to all the help which the Council provides for administrative expense. There has been need for raising clergy salaries and this has been done but the raise has not come from the congregations - a situation which I consider to be very unhealthy and decidedly poor policy.

It is true that the vast majority of our people are very poor and a few cents a week is all most of them give. It may also be true that, as I am told, the people have been taught to receive and not to give. It is further true that any change should be gradual, but that the change must come there can surely be no doubt. I have talked with the clergy about the situation and expect to deal with it at the time of convocation but meanwhile I have been discouraged by the National Council which stands nothing to lose and everything to gain. I have specifically proposed that our very high missionary quota be reduced by about two-thirds. This same amount of money would then be available locally for clergy salaries and that part of the salaries provided by the National Council would be reduced accordingly. It seems highly inefficient to me for the Church in Puerto Rico to be asked to pay a high quota, when simultaneously the Council with its other hand is providing us with a very high budget. To accept the proposed plan would mean the loss of not a single cent by the Council but our local people would then really begin to pay the salaries of their own clergy and this incentive would mean the beginning of a graduated plan looking forward to greater local giving every year and eventual self-support. Surely my own ministry personifies my belief in the missionary work of the whole Church and I believe that Puerto Rico should always have at least a nominal quota but the present arrangement is from my standpoint grossly inefficient, uneconomical and discouraging. I am determined to increase local support but approval of my proposal, advanced several months ago, would give us the start that we need. Then the National Council's contribution could go increasingly into expansion and capital outlay, two areas in which a poor missionary Church can make but little contribution.

#### CAPITAL OUTLAY

Although I have found a number of new buildings in the district,

thanks to the Reconstruction and Advance Fund, the Woman's Auxiliary, the Birthday Thank Offering, the Youth Offering and the Rental Construction Account, all of our wooden structures, of which there are many, are old and full of termites. I have asked on a number of occasions for capital funds, but in every single instance I have been refused or discouraged. I know only too well from my own experience what a tremendous problem this is to the National Council but when one has to live in and ask others to live or work in the sort of houses and churches that I have in mind, it is hard, sir, simply to be told that nothing can be done. I recently presented a survey showing an estimated need of over \$300,000. I know that we cannot have this at once but I wonder what we may expect in the future. If there is some plan or some hope, the knowledge of it would mean a great deal psychologically in spite of the present disgrace.

#### INSTITUTIONS AND GROUP WORK

One of our greatest assets in this district is the institutional work personified by St. Luke's Hospital and its school of nursing. Not only are we providing the best possible medical care with three exceptionally fine U. S. doctors, along with an excellent P. R. staff, but the graduate nurses are now all over the island.

St. Just School for boys has had its best year in history and turned out its first class of high school graduates. The faculty is doing an excellent job but I have asked for a second missionary teacher to help preserve the religious character of this growing institution. We are also in decided need of capital funds for permanent buildings but, although I have asked for a comparatively small increase in the administrative budget, increasingly is current income being provided by students who can pay their own tuition. I want always, however, to have adequate funds for scholarships because it is from St. Just School that we will get our leadership for the Church in the future.

St. Andrew's Craft Shop continues to provide employment for some two hundred Puerto Rican women but its main problem has been that of adequate sales of its products in the States. It is hoped that an exhibition at General Convention will provide us with new outlets for the very fine needlework which these women do.

Increasingly has the Church in Puerto Rico felt the need for parochial education. Government schools are inadequate and our children should not have to be subjected to the propaganda of Rome. At the moment, as the fight goes on over whether or not the new constitution will permit or prohibit government funds for parochial schools, non-Roman parents have been told that unless they sign the Roman-circulated petition, there may be no room for their children in the schools next year. Even Roman parents are starting to send their children to the few schools that we have and our Cathedral Academy has had nearly four hundred students this year, although it only goes through the fifth grade. All our parochial schools are self-supporting.

One of the most active of our diocesan committees is that on Youth Work and our summer conferences in 1951, held at St. Just School, were remarkably successful. The work in preparing material in Spanish for a curriculum in Religious Education continues and we have been as-

## Missionary District of Puerto Rico

-5-

sured of help from the National Council in translating the material which it is now producing.

There is no real problem of work among Puerto Rican armed forces so long as they are stationed in this island, but we have requested a \$1,000. grant from the Armed Forces Division of the National Council to make possible the translation into Spanish of devotional material which can then be sent to the increasingly large number of our young men who are being sent overseas and for whom the only ministry provided is by Roman Catholic chaplains - on the assumption that all Puerto Ricans belong to that Church.

### FUTURE GROWTH

As I have already pointed out our main work has been a rural one and in the past the major portion of the population has lived in those areas. The situation today, however, is completely reversed, the cities have grown large and everyone is "moving to town". We have opened only one new city church in the last twenty years but we should be in at least six new urban areas. Some of our rural priests are providing a magnificent ministry but we are doing almost nothing about the actual thousands of educated Puerto Rican, who, although perhaps nominal Roman Catholics, really have no religion at all. Because of the Roman situation in this island, a sophisticated person now considers religion, as he sees it, to be old-fashioned and out of keeping with his newly-acquired learning. It is not a question of proselyting - but rather one of meeting the needs of such people as the government officials, university professors and white-collared workers whose souls cry out for God. Again this sort of expansion can come only from the National Council but to fail to meet this need will not be simply to remain static - rather will it eventually mean the end of the Episcopal Church in Puerto Rico.

### THE LANGUAGE

I would add this personal note simply to comment that my work as the Bishop of Puerto Rico has been decidedly hampered by my complete lack of Spanish which means that I am not yet close to the people whom I have been sent to serve. I can celebrate and confirm in my new language and I am studying constantly but it is very difficult for me at my age and particularly so along with the other responsibilities of my office. Nevertheless, I am determined to learn it but not until I do will I be able really to be a Bishop to these people.

### PLEA FOR A VISIT

Although I have been assured of the confidence of the Church at home, I know only too well how new I am both as a Bishop and as a resident of a Latin area. Sometimes the isolation is almost overbearing and sometimes I feel that I have failed properly to convey our situation to the National Council - too often, in spite of my years as a Council officer, do my ideas seem to be out of harmony with present policy and so many times does the relationship with the Council seem hard and unyielding. I know that I was asked to come here to do what the Church wants in ministering to these people and believe

Missionary District of Puerto Rico

-6-

me, sir, I am trying. However, to my knowledge a Presiding Bishop has never visited Puerto Rico and not for twenty-five years has the Director of the Overseas Department personally surveyed this district. Please sir, come see us before long, and if it cannot be soon then will Bishop Bentley please come. A visit from one of you would mean more than I can describe to our people, it would give us an opportunity to share our joys and problems together at first-hand and it would help me to become the Bishop that I should be.

Faithfully yours,

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A. Ervine Swift.