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Per K.O. Miller
San Juan
P.R.*

The New Church Project

in

San Juan, Porto Rico

Historical

When the United States Government took possession of the Island of Porto Rico in 1898, a number of Americans were already there and others soon came to join them. Among them as well as among the officers and enlisted men of the army of occupation, were a number of Episcopalians. The Army Chaplain, a Churchman, began holding services for them immediately. For several years, the congregation worshipped in rented quarters, being compelled to move from one place to another until finally, in March, 1903, property was purchased in the old city of San Juan and a Church built upon it. A part of the funds for this Church were raised locally, the remainder being secured by Bishop Van Buren in the North. In March of this year (1928), just twenty-five years after the original purchase of the land, the Church property was sold to the Higher Scottish Rite Rodies of the Masonic Order of San Juan.

Present Situation

When St. John's Church was built, San Juan was a residential as well as a business center. The business growth of the city has been rapid and the residential section has crept farther and farther out into Santurce, until today, practically all of the members of St.



Old Church of St. John the Baptist. Picture taken in March, 1928, on the day of the sale, just 25 years after the original purchase of the property.

John's Church live anywhere from three- to five miles or more from the old Church. The result of all this is, that the Church in San Juan is no longer adequately serving its people. In a semi-tropical land, one does not move about any more than one has to, so that the Church is no longer a center of activity. A new Church in the district of Santurce has become an absolute necessity to the life of the parish.



St. Catherine's Training School, building and grounds, Santurce, where new centralized church group is to be located.

Further Work of the Church in San Juan

Besides the work in connection with St. John's Church, there are several other Church institutions here being maintained under conditions which force us to consider them in our plans for the future.

St. Luke's Church

In 1903, another congregation composed of English-speaking colored people who had migrated to Porto Rico from the Islands of the British West Indies, was formed in Puerta de Tierra ("Gate of the Land"), the district situated between San Juan proper and San-



Rear of Bishop's Residence showing St. John's Church School classes in Sunday Session. Other classes meet in the Bishop's office and garage.



One of the classes in the church school of the English Colored Congregation, at St. Luke's.

ture. These people had been trained in the Church of England and were therefore eager to accept our ministrations. A Church was soon built for them but the march of business and commerce has pushed these people, also for the most part, into Santurce so that they too, are compelled to come a considerable distance to Church and many of them cannot afford the trolley or bus fares. Not long after this Church was built, work was begun among the Spanish-speaking Portoricans of the neighborhood in St. Luke's, and although many of these, as well, have moved to Santurce, yet there is a fairly strong work still being carried on among them by a Portorican priest who is courageously sticking to the job.

St. Catherine's Training School

Located in Santurce, on the main thoroughfare from San Juan to various parts of the Island is the St. Catherine's Training School which is endeavoring to train Portorican girls to become Church workers in the various mission stations of the Island. The school occupies an old wooden house which is quite inadequate to its needs but situated on a fairly large piece of property. It is on this property that the new centralized institution is to be located, comprising a Church, Parish House and Training School Building.

St. John's Day School

St. John's School situated in another part of Santurce, provides education through the grades, for American and Portorican children. It has been entirely reorganized and, except for its build-



St. John's Day School Buildings. Two more buildings are located in the rear, one of which can be seen. The other is a garage converted into a school room.

ings and equipment which are very poor indeed and inadequate, is maintaining a high standard of scholarship.

The **Rectory** for the rector of St. John's Church who also has charge of the colored congregation in St. Luke's, is located in still another part of Santurce. The Church (Sunday) School for American children is now using the Bishop's Chapel, office and garage under his residence, and one of his porches, for its sessions, as the most suitable place available under the present conditions. These children gave an average of over two dollars each in their miteboxes this year, to go toward the maintenance of the Church's Missionary work.



St. John's Church Rectory, in the Condado, purchased with the help of the American Church Building Fund Commission.

The parish is now struggling to pay off the indebtedness.

The Plan

The new plan for a well equipped and centralized institution in San Juan, which has been accepted locally and which has the approval of the National Council, calls for a Church, Parish House and new Training School building to be erected on the lot now occupied by the present Training School. The American and the English colored congregations will be transferred there and Spanish work among the Porto Ricans of the neighborhood will be undertaken. Eventually, St. John's Day School and the Rectory will also be located there, on adjoining property.

St. John's Church being sold, the congregation is worshipping in temporary quarters in St. Catherine's Training

School Chapel which is much too small but has to serve until the new Church is built. Plans for this Church, which is to be the first unit of the group to be erected, are being drawn, and we hope to have it ready for occupancy before very many months to come. The plan also includes the sale of St. Luke's Church, the proceeds of the sale to be used for the erection of a temporary Chapel in another part of Puerta de Tierra to care for the existing work there, and for the erection of the Parish House in Santurce.

The Advantages

The advantages of such a combination and centralization of work need hardly be pointed out. Our Church in San Juan is at present endeavoring to

carry on its work through four institutions, with five different groups of buildings and to five groups of people. Each building or group of buildings is widely separated from the others, and separate maintenance has to be provided. All of this work will be brought into one center with one outlying Chapel. Economy in expense, efficiency in administration and a great saving in time and effort is bound to be the result. Can anyone fail to see the absolute necessity of this move and the tremendous advantages to be gained for the Church in San Juan when once it can be realized.

The Cost

Several thousand dollars have already been raised for the new Training School building, which will cost in the neighborhood of \$35,000 but much more is needed. St. John's Day School will probably cost at least \$30,000. All of this amount must still be raised. The Parish House cost will be partially covered by the proceeds from the sale of St. Luke's Church, but not all, and \$10,000 will probably have to be raised.

The Church, however, is the **First Necessity** and an **Urgent** one. It will cost at least \$40,000 according to the closest estimate that can be made at present. Towards this amount we have **already** approximately \$23,000 with some additional gifts for lighting fixtures and other articles of furniture. There are two sources from which the remainder must come. The local people will do all that they can. The American congregation is small but their

St. Luke's Church, Puerta de Tierra.
Two congregations use this church:
[1]—Porto Rican (Spanish language);
[2]—Colored (English language).

efforts in the past to keep the parish together have been splendid and we believe they will do their uttermost to raise their share of this amount now. We are compelled, however, to depend on our friends in the North, physical and spiritual, for a large part of the remainder. We need a new Church, not only for the American congregation which is practically Churchless at present but for their neighbors, the colored and the Porto Rican, as well.

The American population here in Porto Rico is transient as is also the English colored population. The Americans are here for the most part for only two or three years, in local branch

offices of continental concerns. The Colored folk have, to a great extent, come in as a stepping stone to the States. This increases the responsibility of our Church in looking after them

but lessens the possibility of local self support for the parish. We are striving for it however, and, as far as these two groups are concerned, are hoping to bring it to pass in the near future.



Map of San Juan and Santurce. The Condado is about 3 miles from San Juan proper.

Rev. KENNETH O. MILLER, Rector
 P. O. BOX 3757
 SANTURCE, PORTO RICO



The new project, showing the proposed Church, Parish House and St. Catherine's Training School.