



A History of Mexico in The Anglican Diocese of the Southwest

The work of the Anglican Church in North America in Mexico began about eight years ago with three congregations. One congregation, Iglesia del Gran Pastor, was under the oversight of Bishop Stuart Ruch in Wheaton, IL, and the other two congregations, Jesús es la Resurrección and La Trinidad, were working closely with the Greenhouse Movement. Upon reception by the ACNA of Diocesan status for The Anglican Diocese of the Southwest and based upon consultation and because of our proximity to Mexico, these congregations were transferred to the ADSW (Jesús es la Resurrección and La Trinidad in the Fall of 2013, and Gran Pastor in the Fall of 2014). As you may be aware, the ADSW borders the international boundary of Mexico and the United States. Nonetheless, Mexico is a very large expansive country, and these three congregations are long distances from the border. This largely will be a chronological account of the development of our relationships in Mexico (updated through of June 1, 2020).

Our largest congregation is in Fresnillo. This congregation, Iglesia del Gran Pastor, grew out of a mission to children called Christ For Children International (CFCI). Doug Jones, a missionary with CFCI in Fresnillo, was called by God to become an Anglican priest and was ordained by the Anglican Mission in America in 1998. Doug and his family lived there for over fifteen years. When they moved to Fresnillo, Doug could not speak Spanish. CFCI and Gran Pastor reached into the neighborhood and continued to minister to children, and then to youth and adults as well. They started with a weekly a Kid's Bible Club and a "torta" or sandwich ministry. This work continues today with help from another missionary named Meredith Omland. Meredith has a huge heart for the children of Fresnillo and has worked in that community for about twenty years. She also helps with the education of the lay catechists in the area using the MOCLAM (Moore College in Latin America) programs.

Our visit to the congregation was instigated upon the departure of Pastor Doug and his family in 2014, who were moving back to the United States due to various reasons. This was a time of transition, and the congregation questioned its relationship with Anglicanism. From the beginning, Jonathan Kindberg, a priest in Greenhouse, worked beside us. Jonathan is a child of South American missionaries, and his knowledge of the culture and language has been invaluable. As a result of his language competency, his cultural understanding, and his previous relationship to the churches involved, Jonathan was appointed our initial Dean of the Mexico deanery.

Everything in Mexico is driven by trust and relationships. History has taught Mexicans to be wary of "help" from across the border. In time, after many visits and lots of communication, we have been able to establish a good working relationship with the Anglicans in central Mexico, and they have desired to continue in the ACNA. We have learned from each other and we are growing to understand each other's cultures.

The work in central Mexico has been greatly aided by the tireless efforts of two Anglican Mexican priests in Aguascalientes, Elías Rosales Méndez, and his wife, María del Rayo Jiménez Victoria. They have been invaluable in helping to establish the work in Mexico, and their church is Jesús es la Resurrección. When work began in Mexico, Elías and Rayito were the only ordained clergy that we worked with in the entire country (they had been ordained by the Episcopal Church of Mexico and were received by ACNA in 2013). Through the years, this relationship has grown and prospered. Elías has travelled extensively to provide teaching and sacramental ministry where it would not otherwise be available. Elías and Rayito have also participated in the life of the diocese by coming to our Synods and serving on our Standing Committee.

Our third existing congregation in central Mexico, La Trinidad in Guadalajara, is a member of our Diocese led by a missionary family from Chile. Manuel Norambuena Cleveland and his son-in-law, Miguel Merino Lobos, a bi-vocational lay pastor, planted this house-church in Guadalajara. Miguel is an ADSW postulant and oversees La Trinidad. Manuel and Miguel were largely formed in Chile through Cursillo and Anglican Marriage Encounter. The Anglican Church in Chile has grown tremendously through these renewal events. Chile has organized two Anglican Marriage Encounter weekends in Central Mexico which have been well attended.

In recent years we have sought to plant a church in a suburb of Fresnillo called La Estación. We had hoped to use one of the couples, Juan Herrera and Rocío Valdéz, who had been serving as lay pastors in Fresnillo under the direction of Doug. However, due to various reasons, such as violence and lack of adequate preparation, this dream has not been realized yet. Despite these setbacks, the vestry and many members of Gran Pastor, Fresnillo (who live in La Estación), are still interested in the possibility of a plant from their congregation. Currently, there are six couples who meet with Juan and Rocío on a weekly basis.

As a path forward, we moved to ordain the lay pastor at Gran Pastor, Marcos Farhid Adabache Pinedo, who was formed and trained to the diaconate under the supervision of Doug and Elías. He had faithfully led Gran Pastor as a lay pastor for over four years, was mentored by Elías, and had been faithful in working to complete his studies using the MOCLAM curriculum under the mentorship of Meredith Omland. Pastor Farhid was ordained to the Presbyterate in November of 2019, and continued to lead Iglesia Gran Pastor until his unfortunate kidnapping, and his miraculous rescue by the national police. His kidnapping was not related to his church work. Pastor Farhid and his family are currently on sabbatical in the United States. Presently, Iglesia Gran Pastor is in the process of discerning its next steps, as Farhid is no longer Gran Pastor's rector.

Signs in Aguascalientes point to the church growing. Elías is investigating ways to increase the size of their physical plant. MOCLAM is moving to establish Aguascalientes as a hub in Mexico for theological learning.

Recently, Deacon Roger Griffin, who was under the jurisdiction of the Anglican Diocese of South Carolina and Bishop Mark Lawrence, relocated to Aguascalientes to help encourage what God is doing there. Deacon Roger joined us at Synod 2018 in El Paso, where he agreed to transfer to the ADSW, and was appointed Dean of the Mexico deanery. All of which is to say that all these initiatives need to be held in prayer. We see a great move of the Holy Spirit in Mexico.

Caminemos Juntos held regular annual events in central Mexico from 2014-2018. Our relationship with Reverend Eduardo Gonzalez, academic dean of Seminario Todos las Naciones, has grown greatly. It became clear that there was an interest in many of the students from the Seminario in Anglicanism. Eduardo was ordained an Anglican priest at Synod 2018, and has requested that we begin working together in order to install an Anglican tract at the Seminario. As brief background, he was invited to St. Clement's over eight years ago. Eduardo is a beloved teacher at the Seminary of All Nations in Ciudad Juarez. His love of the Anglican tradition overflows in his teaching, and many of the students who have learned from him have caught his enthusiasm and desire to learn much more about our worship. These students and graduates from the

Seminario have given us a tremendous opportunity to expand the ACNA in Mexico and move toward the goal of eventually establishing an independent Mexican diocese with its own bishop.

In 2017, an intensive exposure to Anglicanism in Fresnillo took place. Bishop Tito Zavala's brother, Pablo, from the Anglican seminary in Chile, came and did a good bit of teaching. An Anglican pastor named Cristian Zúñiga from Dallas was also brought in to teach and help with worship. Greenhouse and Bishop Mark also offered courses. Approximately 25 students and faculty from the Seminario in Juarez made the 21-hour bus ride down to Gran Pastor in Fresnillo. Initially there was apprehension about Anglicanism among everyone attending the conference. However, by the second day, fear gave way to excitement. The teaching was first rate, and the worship was powerful. We closed the conference with Holy Eucharist and a missionary commissioning of those in attendance to "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." We did so with a foot washing ceremony. As Moses commissioned the Levites by washing their hands and feet, this has become an important part of our work in Mexico. It has symbolized the important message that "He who would be great in the Kingdom of God must be the servant of all." It has also sent the message that a bishop who will wash their feet is not going to "Lord it over them," but rather seek to help them grow the Kingdom of God.

The students from the seminary went back to Juarez and carried with them their enthusiasm from the conference. They requested another conference in Juarez for the people who were not able to make it to Fresnillo. As a result, Caminemos Juntos returned to Fresnillo in 2018. Our research has unearthed the need to charter an Anglican Church in Mexico, through the Mexican government. We have found that a few individual charters exist. However, we are working to create a new charter that will be inclusive of all Anglican ACNA churches in Mexico. Once again, the Spirit blessed our time together, and from that time, a number of churches that are led by graduates of the Seminario are seeking to become part of the Diocese. Eduardo has been working with these congregations and pastors to help bring them up to speed on how we do life together as Anglicans. Most, if not all, are graduates from the Seminario. This is all very exciting, because until recently, we did not have an Anglican presence in Juarez. These churches in Juarez are currently as follows:

- 1) Iglesia Rey de Justicia in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico is led by Pastor Isaí Valenzuela Lopez, who will be ordained to the diaconate as soon as travel can begin again, and we will receive the whole church. Rey de Justicia is supported in part by the Mission Board at Church of St. Clement, El Paso, TX.
- 2) La Piedra Angular in Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico led by Pastor Heber Gil Heras, who will be ordained to the diaconate as soon as travel can begin again, and we will receive the whole church. La Roca Angular is supported, in part by the Mission Board of the Church of St. Clement, El Paso, TX.
- 3) Camino Verdad y Vida is a Church plant in Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico led by Jose Alfonso Ramos Avila and Maribel Favela Isais, both of whom are in process with ADSW. Camino Verdad y Vida is supported, in part by the Mission Board of the Church of St. Clement, El Paso, Texas. Jose and Maribel hope to be ordained to the Diaconate this year.

In the Fall of 2018, we received a new congregation into the Diocese, Iglesia Anglicana de Puerto Vallarta, led by the Rev. Jack Wehrs. His congregation number approximately 75 regular worshippers. Jack and his wife, Shirley, also came out of the Episcopal Church and through contact with Elías and Rayito, became connected with the ADSW. The focus of their ministry is primarily on Americans and Canadians, but recently various Mexicans who can speak English have decided to join their church. In February of 2020, Fernando Sandoval was ordained to the diaconate in Puerto Vallarta, and he continues his distance learning with Trinity School for Ministry as he is an ADSW deacon, with an aim to be ordained as a presbyter.

Another connection made through the Caminemos Juntos events brought us into contact with an Anglican missionary, Joel Rene González García, in the community of Puebla, in the Mexican state of Puebla. Joel attended our Synod in 2018, and then our Bishop Mark Zimmerman and our Director of Missions for the Diocese, L Gus Haddad, traveled to Puebla twice, in 2019 and again in 2020. As a result of Joel's efforts we

met with six pastors, who have all become interested in the Anglican way. Joel, a Cuban by birth, trained as a medical doctor, and upon leaving Cuba, his degrees were not recognized. Feeling the call to mission, Joel and his family moved to Scotland, where he was educated and formed in Anglicanism under John Stott. After becoming associated with a missionary sending organization from England named Latin Link, Joel and his family moved to Puebla, Mexico. Joel is currently a professor of Theology and Homiletics and his wife, Mayra, is also a professor of Old and New Testaments at The Bible College in Puebla, Puebla, Mexico. They have been leading a team of six couples for the past four months in preparation for their launch of a church plant. Joel Rene González García is an ADSW postulant.

In addition to the various interested pastors in Puebla, there are also two pastors in Veracruz (about three hours away from Puebla), who have been in discussions with Joel. One of these pastors is Alexis González Matus, now an ADSW postulant. He leads La Iglesia Bíblica Comunidad de Gracia, Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico, a small community of approximately twenty believers, and they are looking forward to becoming part of the Anglican Diocese of the Southwest.

Until the pandemic appeared on the worldwide stage, we had been exploring a missionary partnership for a series of events meant to promote Anglicanism in concert with Comunidad Cristiana, Pastor Gabriel Borja's independent church in Puebla, Mexico. Discussions have been centered around the following: a clergy event and training, open to all clergy in the Puebla area in order to provide more specific information on Anglicanism; a large youth, young adult exposition, designed to familiarize high school and college age young people with Anglicanism; and finally an extension of the Seminario de Todos Las Naciones in Puebla, in partnership with Comunidad Cristiana.

Which brings us to today. The growth in Mexico has been very organic up to this point. But it is also clear that the Holy Spirit has been moving in the hearts of many to bless what really started as a "mustard seed" in central Mexico. Now, as the church grows and we are moving toward ordaining some leaders, it is clear that we need to establish structures and develop more relationships. Chile has already blessed us by organizing the Marriage Encounters and sending missionaries to lead them. Chile also sent Tito's brother, Pablo, to teach at the event in Fresnillo. We, through +Tito, +Flavio (Brazil), Bishop Mark and Gus, are currently working with the Seminario in Juarez to establish an on-line track for Anglicans throughout South and Central America. The Seminario has a great platform and many introductory theology classes. Pablo can help provide Anglican specific material for the Anglican on-line track.

In moving toward ordinations, it has become clear that the relationship with the Anglican Diocese of the Southwest needs to be strengthened. In the long run, this will be a blessing to the work in Mexico and that the Mexican Anglican Church will be a blessing to us. In the short run, we need to prayerfully navigate the waters of honoring the canons of the ACNA, while understanding that some of those canons will be difficult in a Mexican culture and situation. We want to perform "due diligence" while not stifling what the Spirit is doing. We need to "strike while the iron is hot", but not move precipitously and cause problems for the Mexican church down the road. The traditional approach in the United States has been more academic in emphasis and seeks to identify potential problems of belief, physical and psychological issues, and to look into backgrounds to prevent possible moral failures. Both approaches have strengths and weaknesses.

Would you prayerfully consider partnering with us in this important mission, as we ***"PROCLAIM CHRIST FAITHFULLY TO MEXICO"***?