



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

**SET CELEBRATES EASTER**

Easter activities were celebrated spiritually in the community with a small group of residents, complying with all the social distancing and healthy measures.



**Good Friday**

The community was called to celebrate Good Friday on April 2, at 3:00 pm, at the Resurrection Chapel. The program was prepared by Chaplain Francisco Marrero, based on the Seven Last Words Sermon.



The service was conducted by Rector Carlos E. Ham S., Professors Daniel Montoya, Francisco Marrero, Marianela de la Paz, and students Susana Arévalo, Anays Noda and Pastor Alicia Sevilla.

**Easter Sunday**



Easter Sunday, the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ over death was celebrated this year without the multitudinous congregation of previous years; however, with the same spirituality and hope. On the morning of

April 4 at 8:00 am, the community remembered that morning when the women of Jerusalem discovered the glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Vice Rector Clara Luz Ajo, Presbyter Tania Petersson, Presbyter Ary Fernández and Presbyter Pastor Beidy Casas conducted the Last Supper at the Resurrection Chapel, based on the program prepared by Chaplain Francisco Marrero.

Pastor Alicia Sevilla shared with us her reflections while waiting for sunrise on Easter Sunday:



*A new Easter Sunday, sitting at the top of the mountain, I wait for sunrise looking towards the horizon where the river, the sea and the mountain come together. Different from others with music, liturgy and the gathered ecumenical crowd, this year Easter was in silent wait. Nostalgia for those Resurrections.*

*Nonetheless, there is an especial mystery today in this silent, but not solitary, waiting; that morning of the walking women searching for the body of love seems nearer.*



*Each year sunrise has been more revealing for me; I feel that the message of resurrection comes riding the sun rays, in the perfect and unique combination they make with all there is around them. Many wait for the horizon to be clear and complain for the clouds. However, in a cloudy horizon the different hues of light and color are more diverse, beautiful and unique.*



*Then my life resurrects with the message: light always makes way and in so doing, crates wonders...*

## **CALL FOR A NEW PROGRAM: CUBAN SCHOOL OF DIAKONIA**

Sponsored by the Evangelical Seminary of theology of Matanzas (SET), the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center (MLKC) and the Diakonia Area of the Council of Churches of Cuba (CCC), the eighth issue of the Cuban School of Diakonia calls for participants. This school is designed as a theoretical-practical training space in the field of diakonia with the purposes: to deepen into the biblical-theological and ecumenical training as the grounds for diakonia; to strengthen the capacities and abilities of participants in the diakonial ministry; to promote a space of meeting and exchange of experiences among participants and to promote the knowledge and application of the UN Sustainable Development Objectives (SDO).

Interested participants can proceed with registration from 6-10 September 2021. You must contact the Registrar of our Seminary, Sissi Subiaurt (see contacts below) ASAP. You should also present in the central campus in Matanzas the following documents: Middle School certificate, reference letter from pastor and two photographs.

Contact:

Phone: 45-290575

Email: [s.subiaurt@seminario.co.cu](mailto:s.subiaurt@seminario.co.cu)

Registration fee - 100 CUP

Monthly fee – 100 CUP

The School will work in modular meetings, which can be in distance learning form if necessary, according to the following schedule:

**First meeting** – October 4-8. Experiential Moment. History of the Church and Diakonia; Introduction to Diakonia; Context Analysis (at SET).

**Second Meeting** – November 22-26. Biblical Fundamentals for Diakonia; Theological Fundamentals of Diakonia; Ecumenical Movement and Diakonia; Gender Equity (at SET)

**Third Meeting** – January 10-14. Popular Education and Community Work; Tools for Communication (at MLKC, Havana)

**Fourth Meeting** – March 7-11. Planning and Designing Diakonal Work; Project Management; Sustainable Development Objectives (SDO-UN); Local Development; Research Methodology, Action and Participation Research; Final Paper Seminar (at SET)

**Fifth Meeting** – May 9-13. Ecumenical Holistic Diakonia for Local Development: Practical Experiences; Final Evaluation (at SET).

Welcome all!

## **DEANS REPORT**

Dean Amos Lopez and Vice Dean Reinerio Arce report on the academic situation at both campuses.

In the midst of the present limitations imposed by the complex situation of the pandemic in the country, SET continues developing some of its programs online.

Third year students from the Baccalaureate in Theology Program continue their courses: Denomination II; Ethics and Theology; Mission and Diakonia; New Testament II; Social Sciences I and Theology of the Old Testament. On the other hand, fourth year students are receiving Gender and Other Identities.

The Baccalaureate in Biblical-Theological Studies in Matanzas restarted their program receiving the courses Jesus, the Christ of God and Introduction to New Testament I. The Baccalaureate in Biblical-Theological Studies in Havana is receiving the courses Philosophical Knowledge and Pastoral Accompaniment, the last ones to finish first year.

Moreover, we are also calling for the new doctoral program in Ministry (DMin) as part of an agreement between SET and the Graduate Theological Foundation (GTF) from the United States. The first meeting of this program will take place next November.

The Higher Ecumenical Institute of Sciences of Religion (ISECRE) in Havana began the first cycle of the second online semester in April. At present there are 70 active students: 24 first-year; 16 second-year; 9 third-year; 7 fourth-year and 14 fifth-year students; the latter in the final stage before graduation. They represent the following churches: Presbyterian-Reformed in Cuba, Episcopal in Cuba; Church of God in Cuba; Evangelical League; Inclusive Evangelical Church; Baptist Western Convention and Roman Catholic; and other faiths and associations like Islam, Yoruba, Spiritism, International Society for the Krishna Conscience and Masons.

First year students received the courses Psychology by Prof. Aurora García; Science and Religion by Prof. Eduardo F. Casanova and History of Philosophy II by Prof. Maximiliano Trujillo. Second year students received Religion and Art II by Prof. Lázara Menéndez, PhD; Cultural Anthropology by Prf. Joaquín B. Santana; and Literature and Religiosity by Prof. Leonardo Sarría. The courses imparted in third year were Christianity II by Amos Lopez; Sociology of Religion by Ofelia Pérez; and Religion and Ecology by Daylins Rufín. Fourth and fifth year students are studying and preparing for the final exam or writing their thesis.

## **ONLINE COURSES**

Theology Professor Clara Luz Ajo, PhD who is imparting the course Jesus, the Christ of God in the Baccalaureate in Biblical-Theological Studies Program shared with us her impressions of the course she is presenting online now:

I am developing now the course Jesus, the Christ of God via WhatsApp. I send the study materials via email. This way allows for a constant interaction professor-student-professor and student-student. The lesson is always active; students are participating constantly.

We use the written form via WhatsApp – by voice message it would be too long – and in this way we observe the students' thoughts, the way they express them, the power of interpreting, analyzing and synthesizing. We feel we are all enriched with the shared opinions. Besides, once the lesson is finished and they have to answer their homework, they can relive the learning process independently; the professor can evaluate the student, and the student evaluates the lesson imparted. The advantage of this method is that students can receive their classes from their respective spaces and they are all compelled to answer questions or do their homework to be evaluated. Before, in the classroom, not all students participated. Now if they do not participate, they are considered as absent from the virtual class.

The professor must be carefully organized and record all activities: sending the material to study the week before; record participation and reception of assignments.

The greatest difficulty is technological: lack of smartphones, or phones that do not support the necessary speed; lack of PCs or laptops to interact with smartphones. Besides, it is important for

professors and students to have the ability to use the networks. Another inconvenient is that via email we cannot send materials or PDFs larger than one Mb. Sometimes the document must be divided into several small ones, and this takes a lot of time for the professor; not to speak of the occasional slow or failing connectivity.

Moreover, we must organize, check and prepare the necessary bibliography according to the different modules and in the adequate support to send whether via WhatsApp or by email. This process could be previously done by the registrar.

We have begun to walk a new path at SET. The assessments students have made at the end of each meeting indicate that they are forced to study and be ready to actively participate in class.

## **ADMINISTRATOR REPORT**

Luis Gustavo Cepero, SET administrator reports that since the epidemic situation forced SET to close its doors, a series of actions have been implemented to develop different capacities such as the electrical, hydraulic and sanitation areas, resulting in a positive impact on the improvement of infrastructure. Furthermore, this has saved financial resources by avoiding losses in the three areas mentioned earlier.



In reference to the electric capacity, the “hot zones” were eliminated by changing the wiring and improving the charge compensation. The circuits were identified and the malfunctioning or old breakers were changed.

The outdoor lighting system connections were improved and the light switches were individualized. The lamps in the garden were switched to lower consumption ones, and the mercury lamps were replaced with high quality LED lamps, which means better output and more energy saving. The outdoor and indoor lamps of the Chapel were also replaced with new ones.

The electric networks of the general panel of distribution were improved. All the AC systems were given maintenance and were protected from leaking. We modified the schedule of starting the turbines away from the electricity peak times and the use of the main turbine was brought down to 8 hours, instead of the previous 16.

These are the main measures taken to save energy during this period. The program will continue to be executed with 30 other scheduled measures.

Regarding hydraulics and hydro-sanitary systems, faucets, showers and sinks were replaced with new ones to eliminate water leaks. Automatic closing mechanism valves were installed in the elevated tanks and maintenance was given to the sanitary system.

It is important to mention that the Living Waters for the World program has continued working during this pandemic period, daily supplying more than 2 thousand liters of purified water to the population, tending to more than a hundred people each day.

## MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES OF SET DIRECTIVE



SET Rector Carlos E. Ham Stanard developed these meetings and video-conferences via zoom during the month of April 2021:

- April 8<sup>th</sup>. Meeting with representatives of the USA-Cuba Presbyterian Partnership Network; with Christie Neufeldt, General coordinator for Latin-America and the Caribbean from the United Church of Canada and with leaders of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Cuba
- April 12<sup>th</sup>. First virtual meeting with the SET Academic Commission
- April 14-15<sup>th</sup>. Video-conference with Marilyn Borst and with representatives of the Outreach Foundation from the USA
- April 27<sup>th</sup>. Seminar for the study, reflection and follow up of the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Encounter of the Global Christian Forum, celebrated in Bogota, Colombia on April, 2018
- April 28<sup>th</sup>. Meeting with Marcelo Schneider, PhD, from the Communications Department of the World Council of Churches (WCC)
- April 28<sup>th</sup>. Meeting with Laura Macías, Director of Relations of Mission of the Trinity Presbyterian United Church from California, USA
- April 30<sup>th</sup>. Participation and closing words in the closure service the Assembly of the Christian Student Movement

## AIPRAL CONFERENCE CYCLE *MIRADAS*

The Association of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of Latin-America (AIPRAL by its acronym in Spanish) convened a series of encounters, *Miradas*, with the purpose of rethinking Diakonia and the mission of the Church and encourage dialogue, reflections and practices related to these topics and to the vitality of the post-pandemic Church and its prophetic unfolding in society. Another objective of the meetings was bonding reformed men and women theologians in Latin-America and the Caribbean to generate collaboration and exchange with Seminary students, and discuss pastoral roles and leadership of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Each encounter will be developed in one or various reformed and or ecumenical seminaries of the continent and will be zoomed on the fourth Saturday each month.

In this last year, the Latin-American societies have gone through critical situations because of the spreading of Covid-19 in the region. *Miradas* proposes the encounter from different perspectives in the evangelical and ecumenical spaces in our Continent, with the objective of reflecting on the pandemic issue and the five challenges we identified: Impoverishment and Concentration of Wealth; Climate

Change; Forced Migration; Gender Violence and Disasters. These challenges will be developed as topics in a panel of three speakers presenting different experiences and contexts. A second part of the conference will be comments and questions from the participants to be answered by the panel. Each encounter will have a three-hour duration time.

On April 24, Rector Carlos Emilio Ham S. participated in the first cycle of *Miradas*, and the topic or challenge addressed was Impoverishment and Concentration of Wealth. SET has been invited to appoint a professor to develop a topic in the online event to be celebrated on September 25.

## THE LEGEND OF THE HILL

*An old Matanzas legend tells the story of an old soothsayer who arrived in the village when the aboriginal Coalina was born. The prophet said that the child would grow up to be a beautiful woman, but she would have to be careful for a disaster would befall when she fell in love.*

*The beautiful Coalina grew up and her father took her away to the top of a hill to prevent any young man from meeting the girl. However, this didn't prevent the Syboney Chieftain Nerey, from the far land of Camagüey to travel to meet her. Thus, he arrived in the hill and the hut where the princess was hidden; and she saw her, all adorned with flowers.*

*He immediately fell in love with her. He observed from the distance until he found the moment when she was alone to talk to her. He spoke to her with such beautiful words that the innocent Coalina fell in love with him as well. Days went by and they kept secretly seeing each other; but with each beautiful love word they said to one another, they felt the ground shaking harder every time. Their love grew deeper and deeper until one day when the young man finished confessing his love and kissed her, the earth shook violently, but they continued kissing. A loud sound frightened Coalina who then embraced the brave Nerey. Then the mountain opened up and the two youngsters fell to the depth of the earth and the waters from the river claimed the two love birds, dragging them into the depths.*

*The legend goes that in full moon nights when the wind blows through the inlet of the Yumuri river, you can hear it whispering: Coalina and Nerey...*

On this hill where the legend tells of the two lovers, the ecological garden of the Matanzas Evangelical Seminary of Theology is located.

This ecological garden is a project that emerged jointly with the growth of the development of the urban agriculture in the country – as an alternative for the production of vegetables and legumes – in 1999 with the support of the Program for Sustainable Development of the Council of Churches of Cuba (DECAP).



Friendly hands joined in and helped us to achieve this purpose; new obstacles such as the steep slopes in the terrain and the water for the irrigation system were defeated. The waste land and the weeds disappeared and terraces were built to prevent erosion of the ground. In the following years, 120 flowerbeds and 11 terraces (23000 m<sup>2</sup>) were destined to grow vegetables, with 28 terraces for plantain and fruit trees.

The years went by, some workers retired and others started to work. The hurricanes, the rainy seasons, and then droughts hit us hard, because according to weather experts, this last decade has been the most active for this weather events in Cuba.



The potent hurricane named Irma hit us in 2017. The ecological garden received the force of the winds; abundant rain made the soil slide and destroyed the irrigation system; the plantain and fruit harvest was lost; avocado, coconut, mango, mamey, cherimoya, tree, and some timber trees like cedar, laurel and teak lay on the ground. We could not recover from many these losses; it was hard to reestablish the irrigation system; acquiring seeds and compost became difficult, even the human resources had its losses when our technician retired. In May 2018 the country, was hit by the sub-tropical storm Alberto, so the soils were flooded for a long time because of the rains, so atypical for this time of the year. All these issues influenced in a very low production.

In the second semester of 2019, organization and administrative problems imposed adjustments which lead to new hiring process of workers for the organic garden and production began in January of 2020. Because of the pandemic, the seminary suspended its academic and working activities since March 2020. The activities related to the organic garden were rescheduled according to the new situation of the country. The materials needed to repair and prepare the flowerbeds, the compost for the soil and the seeds were impossible to acquire.

It was very difficult for our community to see this organic garden with the flowerbeds filled with weeds early this year. The SET Directive decided to hire new labor force for the organic garden and restructure it, but activities were again stopped because of the increase of the pandemic.

Born in San José de los Ramos in Colón, Matanzas, Luis Manuel Latorre Rodríguez is a third generation farmer of his family; works as part of the administration staff and also lives at SET with his wife, Susana Arévalo, who is currently a student of the Baccalaureate in Theology at SET. Luis tells us that he felt very sad to see the organic garden abandoned; a place where once so much food was produced.

The SET directives became aware of his concern and involved Luis in the restoration of the garden.



A plumbing brigade fixed the irrigation system, the main water supply connection of the Seminary was also fixed and the cistern was cleaned.





The hardest task was to clean and prepare the first flowerbeds and then begin to plant them. Despite the quarantine declared in the province because of the pandemic, you could see Luis Manuel every morning and afternoon working in the garden. He currently talks to us with a smile on his face, and with satisfaction informs us that the flowerbeds are improving with new soil, and there are 30 producing flowerbeds with lettuce, red pepper, leek, scallion, plantain and banana, tomatoes, spinach, corn, manioc, sweet potato, green pepper and squash.



Luis Manuel is a graduate from the Technological School in Agronomy and Agricultural Machinery; he comes every day to work the land, and holds the furrow with loving hands, working the mountain, whether the breeze blows or the wind becomes hostile. There may be other hurricanes with names, but they will not take away Luis' dreams. He hopes God gives him the strength to continue improving the organic garden, stimulate the covered growing house and perfect the irrigation



system.



He even wants to fulfill his dream of breeding pigs, poultry and rabbits for the self-sustaining consumption of the Seminary.

Yes, we will see the land farmed with fruits and vegetables, and the green leaves will again grow in the fences, swaying to the rhythm of the wind...and from time to time, we will listen to the names of the legend sweethearts.

We thank the churches and sister organizations that throughout the years have collaborated with this garden and have been with us in prayer.

## SAD NEWS

### Rev. Juan Ramón de la Paz Cerezo



On April 18 we witnessed the passing away of the beloved **Rev. Juan Ramón de la Paz Cerezo** (1937-2021). As a Pastor of the Episcopal Church in Cuba, he was one of the inspirations of the Cuban ecumenical movement. He walked among us serving, accompanying and teaching us that the love of God becomes real and effective when we live it in the dimensions of the human and historic reality.

He was ordained as a Deacon in 1960 and became an Elder two years later. He directed various commissions and departments in his church and his pastoral service was plentiful in large parts of the island and more than 20 congregations. In the international field, he represented the Episcopal Church and the Council of Churches of Cuba in numerous events, giving testimony of the

work done by the Cuban churches. For several years he represented Cuba in the Latin-American Evangelical Commission of Christian Education (CELADEC).

His studies began here at the Seminary, where he met his wife Nerva Cot Aguilera (consecrated as suffragan Bishop in 2008). Juan Ramón graduated in the Baccalaureate in Theology class of 1959 and later as Master in Theology in 2002. He also served as President of the Directive Board of SET. His family has been linked to the Seminary work, his son Aurelio and daughter Marianela also graduated as Baccalaureates in Theology and his grand-daughter Patricia enrolled in the Master in Liturgy. Professor Marianela is currently the Vice-Dean at SET.

He dedicated a large part of his life to the theological education of lay people from the Episcopal Church as founder with Rev. Iván González of the formation of New Ministries program. He was one of the founders and a professor of the Higher Ecumenical Institute of Theological and Biblical Studies (ISEBIT).

Juan Ramón will also be remembered for his authentic and coherent life, and the way he articulated his Christian faith with his political and patriotic beliefs. He was also a delegate of the 12<sup>th</sup> district in the Vedado-Malecón neighborhood.

Juan Ramon's ecumenical vocation went beyond an active ecumenism among churches to embrace all human causes that commit themselves to dialog, understanding and peace. His commitment born from faith to dialog made him one of the first people to warn us against the perils of fundamentalism in all its phases, not only for the life of the church and religion in general, but also for the country.

Love of country, the human being and church are virtues that come from the heart of God, and that should always be with us as Christian men and women, in the interest of continuing to serve our people in an effective way.

We remember and come together in prayer with his family. It was his last wish that his ashes be placed in the Peace Garden at SET next to his wife's, when the pandemic situation allows it.

(Adapted from the written note by Rev. Amós López Rubio, SET Dean)

### **Rev. Pablo Odén Marichal Rodríguez**



In the early hours of this morning, May 3, the Minister of the Episcopal Church in Cuba and prominent ecumenical leader Rev. Pablo Odén Marichal Rodríguez (81) passed away in the city of Matanzas. Odén was born in the San Juan de Dios country estate, Esmeralda municipality, Camagüey province, on January 26, 1940. He was a student at the Evangelical Seminary of Theology in the first half of the 60's, and in 1965 he graduated from the Baccalaureate in Theology program. He obtained the

Master Degree in Theology at SET in 2000, where he served and left part of his ecumenical legacy as teacher, Rector (1948-1993) and Vice- rector (1978-84;1998-2000; 2006-12). Rev. Marichal's career is extensive; he held, among others, the position of President of the Council of Churches of Cuba (1996-2000); in 1999 he organized the First Cuban Evangelical Celebration with the motto *Love, Peace and Unity*. He was the first coordinator of the Cuban Interfaith Platform and served, until his death, as deputy of the National Assembly of the People's Power, a duty he exercised in various legislatures (1998-2021).

It was his last wish that his body be cremated. He was outlived by his wife Laura and two children from his first marriage, whom we express our deepest condolences on behalf of the Seminary.

When we say goodbye to Rev. Pablo Odén Marichal Rodríguez we remember the words of the Apostol José Martí, DEATH IS NOT TRUE WHEN THE WORK OF A LIFETIME HAS BEEN WELL FULFILLED.

This was Oden's life, a continuous effort to be coherent in his thought and ideas. May he rest in peace.  
(Written by elder Francisco Marrero Gutierrez, SET chaplain)

## **NOTE FOR HISTORY: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **THE 50'S**

The 50's were the time of SET consolidation. The first Rector, Alfonso Rodríguez Hidalgo, PhD. (1907-1993) had a fundamental role in the consolidation of the Seminary. During this period the land was widened and new buildings were built, like the library Margaret McDougall Memorial and the Resurrection Chapel, built out of Presbyterian and Episcopal funding, respectively.

New plans for the Baccalaureate in Theology and Christian Education emerged and the faculty was strengthened. At the same time, the praxis of pastoral work continued on weekends; it had started in 1948 and according to Vice- Rector Rev. Maurice Cecil Daily (1910-1997), it was established to "give a rehearsal opportunity to students" who "would have the opportunity to frequently preach throughout the three-year study period."

The strengthening of the bonds with the Cuban Council of Evangelical Churches (CCIE) was obvious from that time on. One of the projects of active collaboration was the incorporation of SET to the literacy program with the Laubach method, promoted by CCIE in the city and the rural areas in the province of Matanzas. This way the work in rural areas that has distinguished this institution from the beginning was solidified.

The impact of SET was also manifested in its cultural work. A significant proof was creation of the choir; according to Rodríguez Hidalgo, they did a magnificent work. Throughout its national tours a select repertoire was presented to the public, with hymns in Latin, English and Spanish, some of which

were recorded in a phonogram in 1957 and broadcasted by NBC International. This choir performed in the Seminary, in churches and cultural programs in the city.

SET work in the community was very much recognized by the city, so the Matanzas City Hall gave its founders the Adoptive Children of the City Diploma.

(Taken from the booklet *A Lab of the Ecumenical Movement: Notes for the History of the Evangelical Seminary of Theology of Matanzas*)



*If you wish to contribute to the Evangelical Seminary of Matanzas, you should send your donation to Ofelia Ortega Endowment Fund, Fund ID 89726, Account 1020094701. This information should be written on the memorandum line of the check. Contributions can be made by individuals or by congregations or presbyteries. The check must then be sent to Presbyterian Foundation, 200 East 12 Street, Jeffersonville, IN 47130.*

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