

Dear Reformed Episcopal Bishops, Clergy, and Laity,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who has saved us by His Grace to transform us into lives of gratitude with praise and thanksgiving!

I am writing to announce that our Council of Bishops has elected a Missionary Suffragan Bishop for Cuba. By way of background to this decision, I had announced to General Council this past June the need for additional missionary episcopal oversight in Cuba. I explained the canonical procedure for the election of a missionary bishop starting with the Council of Bishops, consents by Standing Committees, and confirmation by General Council or General Committee if outside of six months prior to a council. Since our Missionary Diocese of Cuba is international and not part of the Anglican Church in North America, the bishop will not need to be confirmed by the College of Bishops. After discussion, it was recommended that the proposal be moved and approved by council, since the election would be more than six months prior to the next General Council. The motion carried with unanimity. I made it known that recommendations of candidates were then open for consideration by the Council of Bishops. At a meeting of the Board of Foreign Missions, I also asked for any recommendations from them. The Council of Bishops subsequently began to meet, form a search process, narrow to two men for discernment, complete interviews, prayerfully seek the leading of the Holy Spirit, and conduct the vote among the Bishops for the final determination of God's man.

Therefore, I am pleased to present the announcement of the election of the Rev. Canon John Boonzaaijer for the position of Missionary Suffragan Bishop for Cuba. However, prior to any further communications to the General Committee and the REC, it has been necessary to obtain the consent of Diocesan Standing Committees. They have given their unanimous consent to the election. Now as specified by our canons this election will need to be confirmed by the General Committee since the election is prior to six months before a General Council. This confirmation is not a "second election" but confirmation unless some Biblical or canonical impediment is demonstrated. The next General Committee meeting is scheduled for December 15. If confirmed by the General Committee, Canon John will become Bishop-Elect. A date will then be set for consecration to be determined subject to the coordination of the bishops' schedules. A minimum of three Bishops is required by the Prayer Book and the Canons for consecration.

For your information, the Rev. Canon John Boonzaaijer has been raised up by God with a distinguished background in ministry, education, mission work, and leadership. Born in Michigan to a Dutch immigrant family of nine children, John worked in the family's European Pastry Bakery and on area farms. An international youth driving a truck cross country for a year between his curacy and first pastorate provided some of his best training for life "on the docks." He and Christine married in 1994, when he began his first pastorate in Sand Springs, Oklahoma. After Bishop Banek invited him into The Reformed Episcopal Church in 2002, the family moved to Tyler, Texas, learning to teach school and eventually becoming his Assistant Rector. In 2007, he was called to The Chapel of the Cross (Dallas, TX) as rector, where he and Christine also began a classical day school as a missional parish ministry, in which he

taught mathematics, moral philosophy, and Bible. The five Boonzaaijer children now range from eighteen to twenty-four years old and are filling out their own lives within the Church.

John grew up in the Christian Reformed School System in Kalamazoo, MI, after which he began an agricultural pre-med major at Western Michigan University in 1986, with the intent of serving as a missionary veterinarian. He ended up being called to pastoral ministry, earning his B.Th. from Toronto Baptist Seminary and Bible College in 1991; during subsequent ministry he earned his M.Div. from Cummins Reformed Episcopal Seminary in 2004 and his Th.M. from Cranmer Theological House in 2009. He is now in the final stages of his D.Min. program at Nashotah House, researching “The Parish School.” His favorite hobbies include working on boats and sailing them, woodworking, karate, piano, reading, baking bread, singing in choir, and sometimes getting back to organ and trumpet. He believes a full, living, parish in the Anglican Tradition is precisely what our culture needs to develop capable, knowledgeable, virtuous, and devout disciples of Jesus for generational faithfulness.

The international community of his youth as a bilingual “third culture kid” (TCK) continued to foster his interest in missions—a teenage construction trip to Haiti, living in Canada for four years, completing a ministerial internship in the Netherlands, and visiting fellow seminary graduates in France, Germany, Belgium, and the U.K. After responding to Bishop Grote’s call for missions at General Council 2014, John was invited to attend synod in Croatia to propose a partnered mission project, which led to the Reformation Heritage Museum in Osijek. He served and trained under Canon Bill Jerdan as his assistant for three years until our beloved servant became ill and had to step down. Upon his recommendation and before his untimely passing to be with the Lord, Canon Bill recommended Fr. John to be his successor. In my capacity as Presiding Bishop, I appointed Fr. John, also President of the Board of Foreign Missions, to be Canon for Foreign Missions.

Canon John has labored as advocate for The Missionary Diocese of Cuba with Bishop and Mrs. Dorrington, and then more directly as member of the Joint REC/ANiC Cuba Mission Society. He collects and brings medicines, liturgical supplies, and water filters to Cuba, also providing clerical teaching, fellowship, and financial accountability, together with his Canadian counterpart, Canon Barclay Mayo. He has been learning the Spanish language and hosts an Hispanic congregation in his own parish in Dallas. Being multi-lingual he is already able to conduct the Prayer Book services in Spanish, is conversational in the language, and with further development will be able to preach in Spanish. His work has also included restoring refugee Cuban clergy to active ministry along with their families. He has made multiple trips to Cuba for ministry. On a recent trip this month he conferred with the Cuban clergy to begin their own local tithes and offerings, out of their poverty, and to begin funding their own local mission efforts and Saturday schools with these tithes—which have begun to flourish. After unusually high losses and disintegration during the pandemic, the Missionary Diocese of Cuba is in need of regathering its faithful, and of an informed and Anglican vision of its re-organization and focused ministry through the godly leadership of those who wish to remain in the country to serve and to build the *Iglesia Episcopal Reformada de Cuba*.

Therefore, let us give thanks together to God for providing another godly man uniquely formed and guided for work in foreign missions on behalf of the Reformed Episcopal Church. I ask for your prayers for him and his family. Since his position is part-time, he will continue to serve as Rector of Chapel of the Cross in Dallas, Texas. This is not without precedent. The first Bishop to Foreign Missions in the REC (circa the late 1990s and the early 2000s) was the Rt. Rev. Robert Booth of blessed memory. Bishop Booth was not only a Suffragan Bishop in the Diocese of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, he also served as Rector of parishes in conjunction with his work in foreign Missions. Following a similar path of service, please also pray for Fr. John's parish ministry in the Diocese of Mid America. Fr. John will also remain President of the Board of Foreign Missions. Pray for this part of the REC's invaluable outreach to the world with the Gospel.

As we enter the season of the Feast of Thanksgiving, there is much for which we should give thanks. We especially thank God for the success of the Gospel to the end of the establishment of a Missionary Diocese in Cuba. Now we thank the Lord for providing new and additional leadership. Let us also at the same time give praise and prayer to God for our other vital missionary work in Germany, the Missionary Diocese of Croatia and Serbia, and elsewhere. And let us thank our Sovereign God for the historic, 150-year-old ministry of the REC and an exceptional season of growth domestically and internationally. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

In Christ,

+Ray

The Most Rev. Dr. Ray R. Sutton

Presiding Bishop