



Our delegation, L to R: Rev. Jim Hornsby, Rev. Holly Hartman, Vicky Goss, Lucy Bixby, Bill Murray, Angela Scheepers, Rev. Noble Scheepers



Happy moment. Clean water!

To Cuba with Love A Nantucket Story

This is a story about compassion, advocacy, global understanding and building bridges. And, it's a story of how St. Paul's Nantucket, joining with other parishes, became a force for good in our world.

The story began to unfold in 2016 when a group of four from St. Paul's – Rev. John Beach, Denise Beneteau, Lucy Bixby, Libby Tracey – went to Cuba on a religious/education mission. That trip opened their eyes to the many unmet needs Cuban Episcopalians face on a daily basis.

From that initial journey and a return trip, Lucy Bixby was deeply inspired to build support locally and within the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts for the critical needs of her new "friends and family" in Cuba.

In spring 2017, a companionship relationship was formally set up by Bixby and Episcopal Bishop Griselda Delgado of Cuba, with the Church of San Juan Evangelista, in the sugar cane manufacturing town of Vertientes. "We felt the most vital help would be to install a water purification system on the church grounds, following one of the four long-term goals of the Bishop," said Bixby.

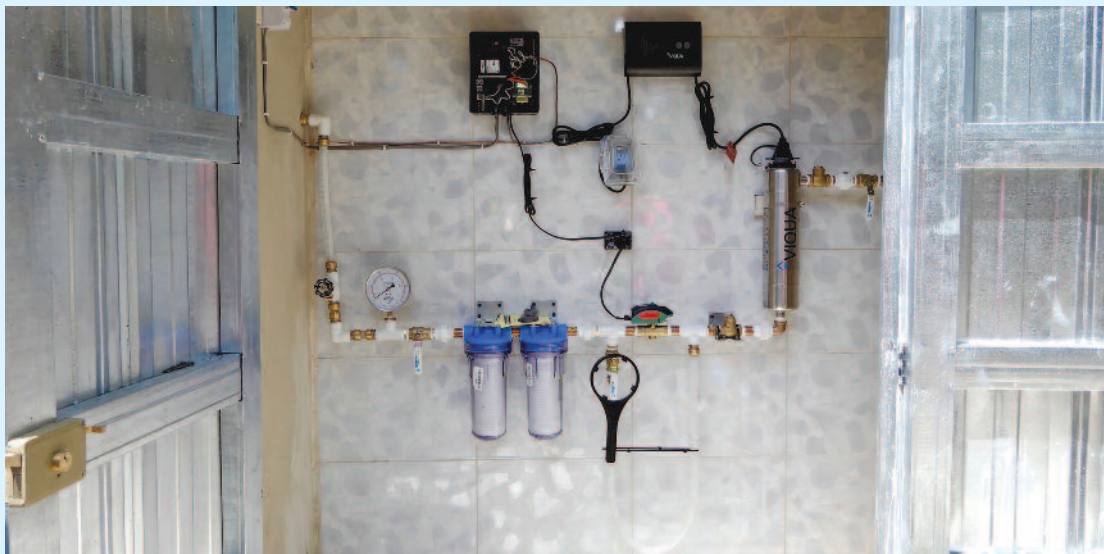
"I had seen this done in Ceballos in 2017, and the effect was

far-reaching. Clean water would be available on the Vertientes church property and free to the local townspeople," Bixby added.

As with any cause, funds must be generated to support and sustain important initiatives. Bixby did her homework, such as researching water systems and how they work, and she wrote a matching grant proposal to the Massachusetts Episcopal Diocese's Global Mission Committee and St. Paul's was awarded a \$10,000 grant. At the same time, Bixby and others got busy raising another \$10,000 in matching dollars from members of St. Paul's and three other parishes in the Massachusetts diocese. In addition, those traveling to Cuba handled their own expenses.

The other two St. Paul's Nantucket "angels" who travelled in this recent mission to Cuba were Vicky Goss and Bill Murray. "Gratitude and sincere appreciation best describe how the three of us feel after returning. A water purification system in every parish is only a step, but it's a very important step we could take. We did it! With God's help, and with the help of so many in our Nantucket community and elsewhere, we did it," said Goss.

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The complete water filtration system installed

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Many thanks go to those who gave gifts of humanitarian aid, from sewing kits assembled by the youth of St. Paul's to crayons, markers, craft projects, baseball caps and balls, Spanish language Bibles for children, knitting and medical supplies and much more. Huge thanks go to St. Paul's Altar Guild for donating vintage altar linens and to Eddie Moreau of Plumbers Supply for donating many specific parts to bring the water project together.

Preparing for the trip south

In advance of the March mission, more than six dozen parts for the water system were ordered, and began arriving on Nantucket, nuts and bolts and fittings and pipes and the most crucial, the UV filter, tube, and housing. All were labelled and re-packed, ready for travel. Meanwhile, in the small town of Vertientes, pipes were installed, cement and tile laid, and a compact water house was prepared.

With Cuban visas in hand, suitcases packed with your gifts of humanitarian aid, and three large crates of water system parts and tools, the three Nantucketers joined the rest of our group in Boston, flying to Miami with a mountain of packages and luggage.



Bishop Griselda Delgado blesses water with Lucy Bixby

Landing in Cuba; local hospitality at its best

The arrival at the Camaguey airport became rather unnerving. "At the Customs/Arrival area, we waited, and waited, and waited some more. The customs officers didn't seem to know what to make of the water system parts. We explained, showed letters of documentation, but the crated parts would remain overnight until supervisors arrived next morning. We worried, but boarding our small Cathedral Bus, we were off to Vertientes," Goss said.

With a long drive ahead on a not-so-smooth central Cuban road, the mission group passed sugar cane fields, small towns and villages, a few old American cars, some trucks, bicycles, and people on horseback traveling along the road.

"We arrived in a small town with a wide, tree-lined street, and everyone from the church was there to greet us, and every one of them kissed and welcomed us," the three noted.

"We explained the Customs dilemma, much to the dismay of the crew of workers who were prepared to dive straight to work. Each of us was then led to our "homes," given the best

rooms, and warmly and lovingly welcomed. We felt this love and warmth and spirit of giving throughout our stay. Lunch and dinner were taken as a group in the Rectory, and Cuban coffee was offered throughout the day. On our first night there, and for every meal thereafter, the women of the church prepared dinner, fed us plentifully, and cleaned up afterwards, all in a one-cook kitchen," the group explained.

Bixby is fluent in Spanish. A few Cubans practiced their English, while some in the group picked up "survival" Spanish. Rev. Jim (Hornsby from St. Luke's, Fall River) regained his fluency from Seminary days in Puerto Rico, helping to translate. Language was an issue only in details. Gestures and smiles DO communicate across all borders!

Bishop Griselda arrived from Havana the next day, to persuade Customs to release the myriad of water system parts. It took about five hours, but finally the parts were released and arrived in Vertientes. The men, including Rev. Santiago and two Priests from other parishes, began their work. They worked until midnight, most of the day Sunday and well into the night, and by mid-day on Monday the system was completely installed. Pure, drinkable water was available at the turn of a tap! The bishop blessed it and everyone tasted the water, and cheered.

"It felt truly miraculous. This was what the Cuba Mission had journeyed for, and was the culmination of many months of preparation and planning," Bixby exclaimed.

Much more to do; what's ahead

The next stage of this Cuba Mission is to raise funds for a new church for San Juan Evangelista in Vertientes since the destruction of the original wooden building years ago.

There are architectural plans in place and a recent "go-ahead" for construction of the new church. Permits are pending for the addition of a church school/community center, offices, and two dormitory rooms. Services now are held in the main room of the Rectory, with pews sufficient only for a small congregation.

"We participated in the Mass there on the Fourth Sunday of Lent. Reverend Santiago is clearly a loving and engaging priest, with a beautiful speaking and singing voice. The parish is very much involved in the life of the church, from small children, to teens, to the elderly. The history of the Church and parish is on display, with photographs of the original sanctuary, and its families in history, from grandparents on their wedding day to their grandchildren being baptized," noted Goss.

With a new church, San Juan Evangelista would have room to grow, and they fully expect that they will. The new water purification system is available to the public, gratis, in the afternoons, and has already involved more of the Vertientes community and will gently introduce them to the church.

Although religious expression was discouraged for many decades, the Anglican Church has remained active throughout Cuba, dating back to the 16th century. Now there is less restriction, and with the inspiration and leadership of Bishop Griselda, the Episcopal Church of Cuba is flourishing throughout the country.

"We would like to support the rebirth of the parish of San Juan Evangelista. They have the labor force and skills to create a beautiful church that will last for generations. We can be the partner angels in helping them financially. With contributions from the parishes whose clergy travelled with us, we are well on our way to achieving this goal," Bixby said.

A 'Miracle'



Vicky Goss

I don't know about you, but when a box arrives with an appliance, a toy, something that says "some assembly required," I feel a moment of panic, sure that some key, irregular, irreplaceable, essential piece will be missing and that I will become aware of its absence only at the very end of the assembly. Imagine then the chutzpah of Lucy Bixby in undertaking to order from multiple sources the hundreds of components, that if all present and in working order would be required to build a water purification system - the assembly to be done, not in a workshop, but in place, on the ground, in a small remote town without so much as a hardware store!

Following a prescribed parts list provided by someone who had assembled 10 or so such systems before, Lucy ordered, labeled and then packed for shipment the sundry parts that arrived over a period of several weeks, including necessary tools for the work. The pieces were transported in their three large crates, along with a waist high coil of plastic tubing which could not be packed into a box, from Nantucket to Camaguey, Cuba, by car, boat, bus, taxi and airplane.

On arrival, Cuban Customs officials embargoed the shipment thinking there had to be some nefarious purpose afoot! As if, Lucy, Vicky Goss, Bill Murray, two priests and a deacon clearly posed an existential threat to the pastoral and utopian countryside that they had obtained visas to visit. After a tense 24 hours, and a visit to the airport by the Bishop of Cuba, who secured their release, the boxes were finally freed.



Preparing the parts

In Vertientes, we were all waiting, anxiously. When the parts arrived they were greeted with shouts of joy and the men began their work, which they continued, tirelessly, well into the night, for 2 1/2 days. The anticipated phenomenon of the missing part did occur, but the errant piece was found and the job completed.

A true miracle, enabled by Lucy's vision, tenacity and faith!

Perhaps to be considered a lesser miracle, Lucy also shepherded six Episcopalians through the journey to a country new to them all. She had expected to be a co-leader with someone more experienced, but due to a death in the family, our friend, Julia, could not come, and Lucy was left to hold all of our hands by herself. With grace, unflagging good humor, and endless tact, she introduced us to a country and people she had grown to know and love. There were, as you would expect, changes in schedules, and flexibility and adaptability were necessary. Each of us, with our own egos and expectations, was listened to and soothed and cheered onward and upward by Lucy. For 10 days we journeyed together under her guidance, and came home, each of us, with new understanding and a deeper knowledge of how to live and work together in our church and in the world.

*With deep appreciation,
Vicky Goss*



Our young friends



Highway to Vertientes



Lifting cistern into place



A fond farewell from our friends in Cuba

To our **GENEROUS DONORS:**

Hooraaaay!!

**THE CUBA MISSION FLOURISHES
BY VIRTUE OF YOUR GENEROSITY!**

*A thousand thanks for
your blessed spirit!*

BE the SPIRIT of our Cuba Mission!
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Online: go to stpaulschurchnantucket.org
Click: **Donate Now** Memo: **Cuba Mission**

And many, many thanks in advance!