

Parish Calendar

September 11-14	West-Central Archdeaconry Congress
October 5	Youth Fundraising Programme
October 25	Diocesan Youth Track Meet
October 27-30	Diocesan Synod 2008
November	Farewell Events for Archbishop Gomez

WELCOME from Fr. Shazzasbazzar A. Turnquest



Fr. Turnquest was ordained to the sacred priesthood November 2004 and has served as Priest-in-Charge of St. Margaret's and St. Mary Magdalene (North Andros) since June 2007.

Dear Readers,

I am really excited about this month's issue! Through our investigations of the history of our church for our website, we have been able to uncover some very interesting facts about the life and time of Parish dating back to the 1800's.

I think that there is so much to be learnt from this information and so it has been decided that our entire October issue will focus on our church's history.

It is hoped that through this essay readers will get a glimpse into the Diocese of the

Bahamas, particularly its mission to Andros, more than a century ago. Sadly, I have found that for the most part, the more things have changed, the more they've stayed the same.

I hope that you will find this issue as fascinating as I did when researching it. Feel free to write your comments in our Guest Book at [www.stmargaretsandros.org/ContactPage.html](http://www.stmargaretsandros.org/ContactPage.html)

UNRAVELING THE MYSTERY OF OUR CHURCH'S HISTORY

The following is a sequential history of the development of the Parish of St. Margaret's using resources from the Canterbury Project online at <http://anglicanhistory.org/wi/bs/> as well as resources from the Bahamas National Archives including the Anglican Mission Quarterly Papers.

In the beginning...

1818 - ?

Bishop Henry Norris Churton (1902-1904), the fifth Bishop of Nassau, writing a Pastoral Letter in the Mission Quarterly Papers of the Diocese suggests that the presence of the church in Andros was unheard of until 1848. The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism website however, suggests in an article about South Andros that the ministry of the Anglican

church in Andros actually began under a leaf tent on the island of Mangrove Cay in 1818. The two men involved in this act of church planting were an English priest Revd. Joseph Evans, and a local man Mr. Arthur Sweeting from Harbour Island both men being former slave traders. However, the actual church building of All Saints was not completed until 1891. The name Sweeting however, would be synonymous with the life and work of the Anglican church on Andros Island.

1865

A Mr. H.T.S Cassell writes in 1865 in the Mission Quarterly Papers of a wonderful fishing holiday spent on Andros where he, a Revd. Saunders and Bishop Venables visit only two stations beginning at Fresh Creek and then heading North to Nicholl's Town, speaking

nothing of any stations in between. He too speaks of a Mr. Sweeting (perhaps the son of Arthur Sweeting?):

"Precisely at five we landed at Fresh Creek, the chief settlement at Andros. Mr. Sweeting, the catechist, met us at the landing, and took us at once to his house, which was a model of cleanliness, with its palmetto-thatched roof and white-washed walls. And now you must remember that every one I shall introduce you to is black, even Mr Sweeting, who is a nice gentlemanly man. The Bishop is very fond of him, and says that he has not a better catechist in his diocese, not even among the white men."

The Revd. Fr. Irwin McSweeny, in a telephone interview, speaks of the 'Apostle of Andros' William Henry Sweeting, a teacher,

catechist, land owner and eventually one of the first black indigenous priests in the Bahamas. Sweeting, as the legend states did much for the church in Andros, even building some of the churches with his own hands (Venables speaks of this during the consecration of the original church in Calabash Bay). He gave much of his land to the church and was very instrumental in its development. Tragedy however, befell him with an outbreak of cholera that nearly wiped out his entire family, killing his wife and most of his children. Legend tells that he too was struck with the disease and thought dead only to miraculously 'rise from the dead' in the graveyard after he appeared to recover enough to regain consciousness before being interred. Sweeting eventually died in 1878 and even to this day much of his handiwork still

CONTACT US

St. Margaret's Rectory · Reeves Street · Nicholl's Town · North Andros

Tel/Fax: 1-242-329-2283 · Vibe Phone: 225-2820 · Website: [www.stmargaretsandros.org](http://www.stmargaretsandros.org) · email: saturnquest@hotmail.com

## UNRAVELING THE MYSTERY OF OUR CHURCH'S HISTORY *Cont'd*

remains where the faithful gather to worship God.

### 1872

The legendary second Bishop of Nassau Bishop Addington Robert Peel Venables (1864-1876), writing the article entitled 'In the Bahamas' in the Mission Life Periodicals dated 1872 speaks of the different churches on the island of Andros including the churches at Mastic Point and Nicholl's Town.

'We arrived in the evening at Mastic Point; but, as the whole population was going to a wake, we could not hold service until the next day. Here I learnt for the first time that it is customary at these wakes to put food outside the door for the dead person to eat. The next morning I examined the day-school in the new church. It appears to be making good progress. Afterwards service was held, Holy Communion was administered, and three persons were confirmed. The service was largely attended; but the new Mission has to contend against strong prejudices.' (Venables indicates at the end of the paper that nine new churches were built in 1871 with St. Mary Magdalene Mastic Point more than likely being one of them.)

Leaving the same day (August 8th) we ran down to Nicoll's Town. The church here was destroyed by the hurricane of 1866, and other circumstances since then have contributed to put things back. At length, however, the Mission is apparently recovering. Stones have been collected for a new church, which the people wish to build more substantially than the last, and before our next anniversary it will, I hope, be in use.

(Frustratingly enough, we know for sure that a church existed here before the hurricane of 1866 but its actual date of establishment still eludes us. As a clue perhaps, the Methodist chapel next door lists its date of establishment as 1842 so perhaps can we infer a presence in Nicholl's Town as far back as that?)

### 1892

The new Rector of all Andros the Revd. Frederick Barrow Matthews recently transferred from San Salvador (Cat Island) speaks about his first missionary trip North from Mangrove Cay, his headquarters, to the stations in Andros in the Mission Quarterly Paper of 1888. All of the hard work of the Apostle of Andros, Revd. W.H. Sweeting appears to be eroding due to the burgeoning sponge trade and subsequent lawlessness associated with it. All of the stations have succumbed to apathy albeit one or two. He writes:

"Leaving Stanyard Creek, saddened and depressed, I made for the next station, Mastic Point...Mastic Point proved a little oasis in the spiritual desert. The Catechist evidently loves his little church, and spoke cheerfully of his congregation. Here one sees the good work Father Fisher has done for the Church in this colony. The Catechist here was an old choir-boy of Father Fisher's, and his early training in St. Agnes, Nassau has stood him well. He has his congregation well in hand, and a nice little Sunday and day school. How important good sound teaching is was illustrated here. I found in his house some powerful books against Infant Baptism given him by Baptist preachers who have been here; also any amount of Plymouth Brethren literature; but he loves his Church, and his anecdotes of Father Fisher show how deeply the teaching of St. Agnes has sunk into him. I spent a happy Sunday here with the usual round of services. Here too, alas! The same decay appears in the fabric; I never celebrated in a more nervous state of mind than I did at this altar. The Eastern wall had started and was bulging out, and it only needed a gentle push to send it down... (The cracks in the Eastern wall are still there...)

He further writes of Nicholl's Town: Nicholl's Town too is a lovely spot

with its coconuts and beautiful beach. Here all the horrors of our unhappy divisions burst upon us. In the centre stands the only decent and well built church in the parish. On one side some 300 yards off stands a large Methodist chapel; on the other side, a little more than a stone's throw, stands a large Baptist chapel; and further on, a preaching house for the Plymouth Brethren; and facing all stands a huge liquor shop which scents the street for a long distance and does more work than all the sects put together!...On the whole I was pleased with the little congregation; they have much to contend with, three different sects persuading them that they are all wrong. The real evil is the liquor shop, for drunken men and women are everywhere.

(Just as Fr. Matthews left things in the late 1880's things are still the same, the Wesley Mount Zion Methodist church stands to the East on a little hill, the Mizpah Baptist Church stands to the West, the Gospel chapel is just down the road and the world famous 'Big Shop' is still open!!)

### 1900?

Fr. Matthews writes again in the Mission Quarterly Paper in his eighth year of service on Andros. After telling of the troubles experienced in Fresh Creek with no men in church to help in the building work after all are out sponging with things no better in Calabash Bay and Stanyard Creek, he tells of Mastic Point:

At Mastic Point, the next station, a little brighter aspect of things was shown. The new chancel, a small addition of twelve feet to the old nave, was at last finished, it having taken one year and seven months to do this small amount of work. But here came a revelation which alarmed me with reference to the future of the church. A son of the Right Hon J. Chamberlain of Birmingham, has settled here, and has begun sisal planting on a vast scale. Last May, near to Mastic Point, I went ashore to get a few young casuarina trees (Spanish cedar) which were growing wild there, evidently washed up by the Gulf Stream.

This time I fairly gasped in astonishment in looking at the same spot. Thousands of acres cut down, burnt, and being planted out with manilla, hemp, and cotton. Two huge houses nearly finished, a broad and spacious road right up from the beach through the clearing into the pine forest, large shops, barracks, and all over the place little shanties for the hundreds of work-people. Men, women, and boys to the number of 400 odd are weekly employed, whilst thirty carpenters from Nassau are working almost night and day at the various large buildings rapidly going up.

(Due to bad weather he could not get to Nicholl's Town on this trip however he laments 'of poor unfortunate Nicoll's Town abandoned to religious strife, drink and immorality.)

And so here ends the first installment of the history of the parish of St. Margaret's North Andros. According to the Revd. G.H. Brookes who appears to have replaced Fr. Matthews later on in the century, the parish of St. Margaret actually stretched from Nicholl's Town down to Fresh Creek. The priest was resident in Fresh Creek and it was only later that the parish of St. Stephen was formed encompassing Behring Point, Bowen Sound, Fresh Creek, Calabash Bay and Stanyard Creek.

Our quest now is to fill in the gaps. The oldest member (about 80 odd) of St. Margaret's showed me a place on the wall where she remembers as a little girl, there was a corner stone, but during building works over the years it has been plastered over and painted over. Perhaps with a little careful excavation we can find some more pieces of the puzzle.

**S.A. Turnquest  
Sept 29, 2008  
The Feast of St. Michael and  
All Angels**

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