

## AME Church returns to Cuba after 51 years

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(Photo by Emanuel Haas on Unsplash)

After more than half a century, the African Methodist Episcopal Church has reestablished a presence in Cuba. The first AME church in Cuba is believed to have been founded in 1898 in Santiago, and until 1960, when the Communist Party took over the country, there were many active AME congregations in Cuba. But after the revolution, the AME presence diminished and became almost non-existent.

In hopes of an eventual return, the Cuban Annual Conference was never legally dissolved by the General Conference, and various attempts were made to restore AME congregations on the island. In May 2020, these hopes were realized when Ilesido Perez Carrion, pastor of Jehovah Nisi Church, requested membership in the denomination.

Perez Carrion learned about the church from a Brazilian AME member and inquired about joining. He and his church were received into the denomination on May 21. Five other pastors and congregations were received as well, pending appropriate vetting by the Dominican Republic Annual Conference, which will have temporary administrative oversight of the AME congregations in Cuba.

“Returning to Cuba has long been a dream of my predecessors,” said Anne Henning Byfield, the president of the AME council of bishops who, until July, also served as presiding prelate of the AME 16th Episcopal District, which includes South America and the Caribbean. “I thank God to be able to bear witness to this moment—even amid the suffering of this global pandemic.”

Byfield’s official request for the AME Church to be reactivated as a denomination has been received by the Cuban government, and full restoration is expected. —The Christian Recorder