

George Town and Savannah Charges realigned.

In what many termed 'a beautiful service' the Robert Young Memorial United Church was linked with the Savannah United Church to become the new Robert Young – Savannah Charge of the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. This leaves the George Town Charge now with two congregations also, and will therefore allow both Charges, which together cover the single most populated geographical area of Cayman, to better focus their resources through the ministries of each congregation. Further details on the move are contained in the Narrative presented at the Service of Realignment, held at Savannah on Sunday 23rd January 2011 (reproduced below). Mr. John Macmillan, who has served the Robert Young Congregation and the former George Town Charge as Lay Pastor for many years since qualifying as a Lay Pastor in 1990, was commissioned as Lay Pastor of the new Charge, at the request of both Congregations. Members of all four Congregations participated in leading different aspects of the service, in confirmation of their commitment to continued harmonious partnership in the ministry of Christ and the United Church, regardless of the changed links that now exist in the restructured Charges. Rev. Dr. Dave Hazle, Minister of the George Town Charge served as Liturgist. Rev. Donovan Myers, Minister of the Robert Young – Savannah Charge, was the preacher, whose very challenging sermon was entitled, "Positioning or Posturing?" And Rev. Myers did not fail to live up to the provocative promise of its title! His challenges to the congregations involved and to the wider United Church were centred around the Scripture texts taken from Joshua 3: 1- 6 and Acts 20: 7 – 12. Both Ministers were especially thanked by the Regional Deputy General Secretary for their thorough work in leading the discernment and subsequent implementation process in the respective Charges. Mr. McFarlane Conolly, Chair of the Cayman Islands Regional Mission Council, led the Act of Realignment and the subsequent commissioning of Lay Pastor Macmillan.

Narrative for the Act of Realignment

For some considerable time now, it has been the aspiration and planned goal of the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands to reach the stage where no Charge comprises more than two congregations, so that all of our congregations can have a sufficient level of Ministerial and other resources. This perhaps became more pressing over the last couple of years as the Church has pursued the special process of renewal and transformation, under which each congregation is to become a focal point of growth and of a ministry of healing, hope and spiritual strengthening in its community. And our Ministers have covenanted to lead and be accountable for this process in their congregations. While a number of charges in Jamaica have been challenged in this aspiration and already some have succeeded in, and others made progress toward, achieving the goal of a maximum of two points, in Cayman only the George Town Charge, with three congregations, has been faced with a necessity for action in this respect. We have, though, applied the principle otherwise, with JGMC having decided a few years ago that the population of West Bay, and its ministries there, had grown to the level that it needed its own Minister, which also positioned Savannah to optimise its ministry in the fastest growing area of Cayman. But the circumstances of our George Town Charge did raise a few questions in comparison to our overall situation in the Cayman Council. For while the three congregations fitted together nicely, in being all in one District, we saw that by the 1999 Census, if not before, that District had grown to comprise about half of the

population of the Island. So, while we had one Minister responsible for a geographical area with half of the Island's population, the rest of the Island was divided amongst 4 other Charges. Perhaps the main inhibiting factors in addressing what no doubt appears to everyone to be an obvious candidate for a restructuring, were the strong historical ties between the three congregations.

In recent years, therefore, the Charge itself began to explore the matter, as it sought to better understand God's purpose for its ministries. There are obviously other challenges in the Charge as each congregation seeks to better position itself for growth, and physical constraints are very real in each case. After prayerfully grappling with the issue for some time, the joint Board reached the decision to become a two point Charge. The first strategy tried was for the Robert Young and George Hicks Congregations to see if a physical merger would both be feasible and position the membership for the renewal and transformation they were aiming for. After a trial period, the Robert Young Congregation decided that it would prefer to remain as a separate congregation, "in their little church they all love so well". At a Congregational Meeting on the 10th October 2010, that congregation voted instead to pursue realignment with the Savannah United Church, which was a one point Charge. The leadership of the Council met with the Congregation, without the Minister present, and was reassured that the Congregation had reached that decision freely and saw that as a positive move for them, as well as for the Church as a whole in Cayman. They felt that in this way they could pursue their objective of ministering both in their immediate community and in particular for those persons who prefer to worship in the intimacy of a smaller congregation. Indeed we were fortunate to have people in the meeting that night who spoke highly of how warmly they had been welcomed into the fellowship there when they first visited the church, and that had led them to stay. And we give God thanks for all of this. The Congregation acknowledged the challenges it faces with restrictions on space and parking in its present location but believes there are good ministry opportunities still in that location and Members were anxious to move ahead and explore new opportunities in conjunction with Savannah United.

Upon being presented with the possibility by Rev. Myers, the Board of Savannah was quite receptive and gave approval on November 18, 2010 and the matter was sent to the Savannah Congregation. The Congregation was apprised of the proposed realignment on Sunday November 28, 2010 and asked to consider it openly and prayerfully. Joint activities between the two congregations were agreed on an exploratory basis, including

- a. A Joint board meeting on December 9, 2010
- b. The Participation of Savannah United Church's choir in RY's Carol Service on December 12, 2010
- c. Participation of RY in Savannah United Church's Carol Service on December 19, 2010

And finally, the Congregation of Savannah United Church approved the proposed realignment on Sunday, January 9, 2011.

The Cayman Islands Regional Mission Council indicated its approval in principle so that plans could be made for this historic service; and at its Meeting on 22nd January 2011 gave its formal ratification of the realignment of the two charges. This will allow the George Town Charge to reach its goal of better focusing its ministries as a two-point charge, and the Robert Young and Savannah Congregations to be linked together in a new partnership to improve, renew and transform the United Church's continued ministry in the Cayman Islands, all to the glory of our Lord and Saviour. Indeed, with the number of sub-divisions and other housing units in that part of Cayman running from east of the Airport through the Savannah, Newlands and Lower Valley areas, I am sure there is a need for *all 4* congregations to work together to ensure no area is missed, as they go out to make disciples. As part of their agreed strategy to move ahead together now, both Robert Young and Savannah have requested that Mr. John Macmillan accompany RY and be commissioned as Lay Pastor to serve the new Charge, as he has heretofore served the GT Charge, and this change also was agreed by the Council yesterday. I therefore invite you now, Chairman, to undertake this historical act of realignment. Thank you.