



The headquarters for the East Mediterranean Union Mission, the Physiotherapy Clinic, the Voice of Prophecy, and Lebanon Section.

Photo courtesy of Melanie Wixwat.

East Mediterranean Union Mission (1951–1961)

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Territory and Statistics

The East Mediterranean Union Mission (EMUM) began in 1951 as part of the newly formed Middle East Division, also organized that same year. Its territory at the time included the countries of Cyprus, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and the portion of Arabia bordering on the Persian Gulf, together with Oman. Listed under its jurisdiction were the Iraq, Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon-Syria missions. In 1953 leadership added the Cyprus Mission. The Lebanon-Syria Mission split into two separate sections in 1959, and in 1960 additional countries were added to the Iraq Mission, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Neutral Territories, Qatar, Eastern Saudi Arabia, and the Trucial Coast.¹

The EMUM headquarters office was located at various addresses in Beirut, Lebanon, throughout its tenure, beginning in Sioufi, Achrafieh (Elias Helou Building, Akel Soukayem and Bshara Baroody up until 1958), then moving to the Evangelistic Center on Hotel Dieu Street in 1959 and in 1960 to Sabtieh, Jdeidet El Maten.² At the time of its organization the regional population was 45,200,000 and membership a mere 670 worshipping in 17 churches.³ Ten years later the population had decreased to 43,622,000 with a membership of 1,012 belonging to 18 churches.⁴

Organizational History

The territories of the East Mediterranean Union Mission experienced several reorganizations from the time the Seventh-day Adventist Church established itself in the Middle East. The first record of the Oriental Union Mission appears in the 1901 General Conference Yearbook, comprising the Egyptian, Syrian, and Turkish missions. The Levant Union Mission superseded it in 1907, and from 1924 to 1927 as "Missions Operated by the European Division." At the end of 1927 the Arabic Union Mission organized and functioned as such for 17 years until 1944 when church administration formed the Middle East Union Mission and attached it directly to the General Conference.⁵

Growing concerns, however, developed regarding the status of several such attached unions. At the General Conference session in 1950 the newly elected GC president, W. H. Branson, made a statement promoting the idea that all unions should be affiliated with a divisional organization. He stated: "It is believed that our divisional organization is a plan God has given to his people. It has proved to be a great strength to our work in all parts of the world."⁶

Shortly afterward, delegates voted a motion to organize the Middle East Division based on the following reasoning: "The vast territory comprising this union [the Middle East Union Mission] is too large for one union organization properly to foster the work of evangelizing its tremendous population." Church administration decided to divide the new division into two union mission fields, of which the East Mediterranean Union Mission became one and the Nile Union the other. Because of the political situation in the territories of Iran and Israel, those countries became detached fields under the division.⁷

The EMUM functioned as a union organization with a coordinating role during its ten years, serving the local missions through its departmental directors, promoting evangelism, providing literature in Arabic and other languages, as well as running a successful correspondence school for the whole territory. However, at some point leaders began to feel that it was neither practical nor cost effective to have a union as an extra layer of organization. A prime example of this was in the operations of the division magazine, *The Middle East Messenger*, where all reports bypassed the union and came directly to the division from the various missions and institutions.⁸

At the union session held in Brumanna, Lebanon, November 20 to 25, 1958, "The delegates accepted the report from the Nominating Committee, which recommended the suggestions made by the Division, that as far as possible the Division care for the interests of the Union as well, exceptions being that A.W. Fund will continue as union secretary-treasurer and auditor, and George Khoury will serve as assistant Publishing secretary for the Union."⁹

The division president, R. A. Wilcox, then took over as union president along with his division responsibilities,¹⁰ and in 1960 division treasurer A. V. Fenn added the roles of EMUM secretary-treasurer and auditor.¹¹ At some point in 1961 or 1962 it was officially decided to attach EMUM sections directly to the division.¹² The quadrennial session of the Middle East Division, November 28 to December 5, elected the officers of the different sections. R. R. Figuhr (GC president), and W. L. Pascoe (GC assistant treasurer), attended.¹³ By then both the East Mediterranean Union Mission and the Nile Union Mission had ceased functioning.

Main Institutions and Ministries Supported by the EMUM

Education

Middle East College (founded in 1939), expanded significantly between 1951 and 1961, including the number of buildings constructed on campus, the addition of four new majors to the curriculum, and by 1961 the largest enrollment the college had seen so far.¹⁴

Publishing

Middle East Press became a publishing house with printing facilities in 1953, located on land owned by Middle East College, and was fully operational by 1961.¹⁵

Medical Institutions

Dar El Salam Hospital, founded in Iraq in 1945, operated until 1958 after which it closed when the Iraqi government nationalized it.

A physiotherapy clinic functioned in Lebanon from 1958 to 1968, its purpose to augment the evangelistic program of the church through the health program.¹⁶

Media

The Voice of Prophecy Bible school began in 1948 with headquarters located in Lebanon. Shukri Nowfel, who corresponded with more than 800 interests resulting in numerous baptisms, managed it from 1950 to 1960.

An Arabic radio broadcast started in 1953 on the campus of Middle East College, the first such program for the Adventist church in the Middle East.¹⁷

Ministries

As mentioned earlier, EMUM functioned in a coordinating role, assisting the fields and regions in their many outreach programs and initiatives. During its ten years of operation, it gave special attention to the development of youth programs such as Junior Missionary Volunteer programs, youth camps, and Master Guide training camps. A strong evangelism thrust promoted by the union resulted in a rapid expansion in countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. It established welfare societies in Jordan, Libya, and Iraq. A home visitation plan launched in 1952 for the entire union resulted in hundreds of correspondence school enrollments within its first year.¹⁸

A.W. Fund, secretary-treasurer of the union, gave a report in the *Middle East Messenger* of the third year (1954) of operation of the EMUM. It included the following points:

The first issues of a number of tracts and books printed at Middle East Press will vitally affect the work in the union.

The first Master Guide Camp in the union (Lebanon) trained leaders for future junior camp responsibilities.

The largest literature evangelist group earned valuable experiences and credits toward their college education.

The union needed well-trained ministerial students and related office help to become laborers in the missions.

The greatest emphasis had been placed on soul-winning by leaders and staff.

Also included was a report of both a good increase in membership and tithes recorded for the previous (1953) year. In 1959 the union office moved a short distance to the newly built evangelistic center in Achrafieh, Beirut,

which also housed the Voice of Prophecy staff and the physical therapy clinic. A new Voice of Prophecy office also opened in Cyprus. It sent out lessons in Greek and Turkish.¹⁹

At the end of 1954 the Sabbath School membership of the union more than doubled the church membership.²⁰ By the end of 1961, church membership had also doubled.²¹ The reports from the different missions indicated further progress and growth throughout the union until the end of its existence in 1961.

Executive Officers

Presidents: R. H. Hartwell (1951-1958); R. A. Wilcox (1959-1961)

Secretary-treasurers: A. B. King (1951), A. W. Fund (1952-1959), V. A. Fenn (1960-1961)²²

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