



# Southern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists<sup>®</sup>

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## Southern California Conference

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### RAYMOND D. TETZ

Raymond D. Tetz has served as director of Communication and Community Engagement for the Pacific Union Conference since 2015. He served as vice president for strategic communication and corporate development at the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) from 1986 to 1995. For two decades, he successfully operated a consulting and media production company that served dozens of Adventist organizations and ministries. Tetz began his ministry in the Southern California Conference, initially serving as a pastor, Bible teacher, and youth director.

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Southern California Conference is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist church in the Pacific Union Conference.

Territory: Los Angeles and Ventura Counties, that part of Kern County that lies south and east of the Tehachapi Mountains, and that part of Santa Barbara County that lies to the east of the 120th meridian.

Statistics (June 30, 2020): churches, 128; membership, 38,971; population, 11,877,099<sup>1</sup>

### Origins

John B. Judson became the first Adventist minister in southern California when he arrived in 1874 but his work was mainly in territory that ended up in Southeastern California Conference. Evangelism picked up with the arrival of William Healey, who held a series of tent meetings in downtown Los Angeles in 1879. This laid the foundations for the first Adventist church in southern California. After a couple of moves, it became known as

the Central church.<sup>2</sup> These were small beginnings. E. J. Waggoner refers to “the little company at Los Angeles” in an 1884 article in *Signs of the Times*.<sup>3</sup> However, a second church group was soon organized in Norwalk in 1884, and it was the first to construct a church building. Later other churches were built in Los Angeles, San Pedro, and Pasadena.<sup>4</sup>

Everything was under the direction of the California Conference, based in Oakland, until it was decided to divide the conference in June 1901. The portion of the state south of the Tehachapi and Santa Ynez mountains was to be organized into a separate, new conference.

## Organizational History

W. T. Knox, president of the Pacific Union, itself just organized little more than a month before, guided organization of the new Southern California Conference (SCC). At an initial “business meeting” on August 9, 1901 during a camp meeting held in Los Angeles, Knox functioned as temporary chair and as nominating committee chair. Clarence Santee was elected president; C. A. Pedicord, secretary; and Belle H. Baker, treasurer. The conference started operation with four ordained and six licensed ministers, 19 churches and two unorganized companies, a membership of 1,090, and 11 church schools. The conference office was located in Fernando until 1914 when it was moved to Glendale.<sup>5</sup>

Adventist historian Arthur Whitefield Spalding described how the rising prominence of the Adventist mission in southern California paralleled what was happening in the state as a whole at the turn of the century, just when operation of the conference was getting underway. He wrote that while some Adventist work had taken place previously in the southern part of the state, “up to the end of the [nineteenth] century that was minor.” Similarly, “in secular matters southern California was, till about that time, secondary; but its spirit of enterprise and trumpet-tongued publicity began then to awaken. Its inviting climate and, with irrigation, its wealth-producing capacity, began to be exploited, and health seekers poured in to find their El Dorado. Here was an opening in which the most health-impressed church should find great opportunity to give its service and its message.”<sup>6</sup>

Schools and Sanitariums. Adventist activities in the early years of the conference’s history both reflected southern California’s “spirit of enterprise” and continued the trend of innovation and experimentation set from the beginning of the church’s work in California. Health clinics were set up and vegetarian restaurants were opened in Los Angeles and elsewhere, both means of bringing in the public to see Adventist ideas on diet and health in action.

The education program of the church also attracted interest. Though primarily set up to cater for the needs of local churches, Adventist schools developed a reputation that also attracted others from the community, making the schools were very much part of the mission in southern California. The church school begun in 1898 in Centralia, southeast of Los Angeles, was followed in 1902 by schools started in Santa Ana, Pasadena, Norwalk, San Fernando, at the Carr Street church in Los Angeles, and in other cities.<sup>7</sup>

In 1902, its second year of operation, SCC opened Fernando College. Along with secondary education, the school offered an additional one-year training course for those desiring to enter the ministry, Bible work, medical missionary work, business, or teaching. It was renamed Fernando Academy in 1906, then San Fernando Academy in 1914.<sup>8</sup>

But these were only the beginnings. Already in 1902, Ellen White, having only recently settled in California after several years in Australia, was casting a larger vision: "As soon as possible, sanitariums are to be established in different places in Southern California. Let a beginning be made in several places. If possible, let land be purchased on which buildings are already erected. Then, as the prosperity of the work demands, let appropriate enlargements be made."<sup>9</sup>

The Paradise Valley Sanitarium established in 1904 in what soon became territory of Southeastern California Conference, was followed in 1905 by Glendale Sanitarium in greater Los Angeles, the first medical institution established by SCC. In early 1905 Ellen White accompanied a group to Glendale to inspect the "large building" that had recently been purchased to house the sanitarium. "We found this building well adapted to sanitarium use, and conveniently located," she wrote. "The new electric street-car line runs past the property."<sup>10</sup> In 1905 and 1906 Ellen White again directly intervened to secure the Loma Linda property that became not only a sanitarium but the College of Medical Evangelists, later Loma Linda University and Medical Center.

In 1913 a small clinic was opened on East First and Boyle streets in Los Angeles, the first step in meeting the health care needs of that major population center. But what was needed was a full medical institution—a training hospital. The cost of such an enterprise seemed beyond reach. Even though Lida Scott had donated \$5,000 to buy a plot of ground, the cost of construction would be exorbitant. The General Conference Annual Council, meeting in Loma Linda in 1915, was not prepared to take on such a project. However, a group of women, Josephine Gotzian, Hetty Haskell, Emma Gray, and Dr. Florence Keller, persuaded them that they could do so. On December 1, 1916, on Boyle Heights, Los Angeles, the Ellen G. White Memorial Hospital foundations were laid.<sup>11</sup>

Evangelistic Innovation. The evangelistic approach of William Ward Simpson was another exhibit of innovation in the first decade of SCC history. After successful meetings in Redlands, Riverside, Pasadena, San Diego, and San Francisco, Simpson turned his attention to Los Angeles in 1904. He was probably the most successful Adventist evangelist of the time, and was particularly effective in the cities. He experimented with novel ways of attracting a crowd, such as having a Hollywood special-effects studio make life-sized representations of the "beasts" found in the book of Daniel. Simpson's creative style and intriguing presentations captured the interest of many, so that his tent meetings reached some 2,000 in attendance. More than 200 baptisms soon resulted.

Ellen White came to speak at Simpson's tent and gave his methods high commendation:

Brother S is an intelligent evangelist. He speaks with the simplicity of a child. Never does he bring any slur into his discourses. . . . He does not seek for words that would merely impress the people with his learning, but he endeavors to let the Word of God speak to them directly in clear, distinct utterance. . . . I am pleased with the manner in which our brother [Elder Simpson] has used his ingenuity and tact in providing suitable illustrations for the subjects presented—representations that have a convincing power. Such methods will be used more and more in this closing work.<sup>12</sup>

Tragically, Simpson, only 34 years old, died in 1907. Other evangelists took over, such as Luther Warren from 1908 to 1910, J.W. McCord, Fred Paap, Milton St. John, E.J. Hibbard, C.E. Ford, and others. About 1912 Phillip Knox began conducting public meetings with success.<sup>13</sup> Ellen White repeatedly encouraged such activities. In 1905 she wrote: "Special light has been given me regarding the character and magnitude of the work to be done in Los Angeles. Several times messages have been given regarding the duty that rests upon us of proclaiming the third angel's message with power in that city."<sup>14</sup>

Other new directions were also being pursued. In 1905 small house meetings began among the Spanish-speaking population, with eight baptized by E.S. Ballenger in 1906. The conference then hired Augusta S. De Angeles as the first full-time Hispanic Bible worker. By 1907 the first Spanish company was organized, followed in 1909 by the Los Angeles Gless Street church.<sup>15</sup>

In 1906 Jennie Ireland, a nurse who had graduated from the Battle Creek Sanitarium, began doing medical missionary work among the Black population in Los Angeles. As a result, the Furlong (later Wadsworth) Seventh-day Adventist church was organized in 1908 with 23 charter members. Membership grew to 100 before the church had a pastor. The conference's first Black full-time employee was Amy Temple, a Bible instructor.<sup>16</sup>

Divided for Mission. By 1915, SCC membership, at 3,579 in 54 churches, had more than tripled since its organization in 1901. The rapid membership led to a recommendation from the Pacific Union committee that the conference divide into two. The SCC constituency voted in favor of the division in 1915, leading to creation of Southeastern California Conference.<sup>17</sup> The SCC now had 29 churches and 2,193 members in a territory that comprised Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo counties, plus the portion of Kern County lying south of the Tehachapi Mountains. The conference headquarters moved to 417 West Fifth Street in Los Angeles. After two more moves in the Los Angeles area, the office again relocated in 1952 to 1535 E. Chevy Chase Drive in Glendale, where it has remained to the present.<sup>18</sup>

The need for SCC to operate a boarding academy diminished in 1922 when Southeastern California Conference opened La Sierra Academy. Thus, San Fernando Academy closed in 1923 and was replaced by two non-boarding schools – Glendale Academy and Los Angeles Academy. Another academy was started in Long Beach in 1924. In 1938 Lynwood Academy (now Los Angeles Adventist Academy) replaced Long Beach and Los Angeles academies. In 1948 Newbury Park Academy was opened as the conference boarding school. Subsequently, two day academies were added – San Gabriel Academy in 1959 and San Fernando Valley Academy in 1960. All these

schools continue to operate in 2020. In 1941 the conference purchased 160 acres (65 hectares) in the San Bernardino Mountains for a youth camp, named Camp Cedar Falls.<sup>19</sup>

Radio Evangelism's Hour. Public evangelism thrived in new ways during the 1920s to 1940s. In 1923 P.G. Rodgers came to Los Angeles to take over the African American work started by Jennie Ireland. He began a significant ministry that involved pitching a tent on Central Avenue and holding a three-month series throughout the summer. He continued this nearly every summer until 1940. His ministry produced good results and the membership outgrew their Furlong church, necessitating a move to larger premises constructed on the corner of 35<sup>th</sup> Street and Wadsworth Avenue.<sup>20</sup>

Evangelists began experimenting with radio when it became a mass communication medium in the 1920s. By 1944 the "Radio Hours" page in the *Pacific Union Recorder* listed broadcast times for 33 different radio programs airing on 60 stations throughout the union territory, including several originating in southern California.<sup>21</sup> A number of Bible correspondence schools were started in conjunction with these broadcasts. To provide a more systematic approach, the Bible correspondence work was centralized in the conferences, with a "radio secretary" given responsibility for coordination.<sup>22</sup>

H.M.S. Richards, who proved to be the most effective in using radio, began broadcasting the Tabernacle of the Air from Long Beach in 1930. From these early broadcasts sprang the Voice of Prophecy, which began weekly live broadcasts nationwide on 89 stations over the Mutual Broadcasting Network in 1942. The broadcast ministry along with the Voice of Prophecy Bible Correspondence School had its headquarters at Glendale.

Another major, southern California-based initiative occurred when Breath of Life began its first series of telecasts. Walter E. Arties had a vision for a ministry to African Americans while he was affiliated with station KHOF-TV in Glendale, California. C.D. Brooks, General Conference field secretary, was called to be the main speaker, and he continued for 23 years. In 1997 Walter L. Pearson, Jr. took over as the speaker/director, followed by Carlton P. Byrd in 2010.<sup>23</sup>

Exalting Christ by Engaging Diversity. The Southern California Conference has declared that it "exists to exalt Christ by serving its diverse communities through networked and creatively engaged churches and schools."<sup>24</sup> In order to serve an increasingly diverse population more faithfully, SCC added field directors for African-American Ministries, Anglo/Other Ministries, Asian-Pacific Ministries, and Hispanic Ministries in 1995. The system was refined in 2003, with congregations grouped into five regions, each with a director, that remain in place to the present.<sup>25</sup> As of 2020, the Asian-Pacific region has 30 churches ministering in ten different languages: Chinese, English, Filipino, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Samoan, Thai, Tongan and Vietnamese. The Greater Los Angeles Region comprises 19 predominantly Black congregations. The Hispanic Region has some 52 congregations, the most by far of any region. The 27 congregations of the L.A. Metro Region and the 23 congregations of the West Region are English-speaking but these groupings also reflect the racial, ethnic and cultural diversity of southern

California.<sup>26</sup>

## Presidents

Clarence Santee, 1901–905; G.W. Reaser, 1905–1908; E.E. Andross, 1908–1912; F.M. Burg, 1912–1914; E.E. Andross (acting), 1915; B.E. Beddoe, 1915–1916; M.M. Hare, 1917–1920; W.M. Adams, 1920–1924; O.O. Bernstein, 1924–1926; R.D. Quinn, 1926–1927; P.E. Brodersen, 1927–1932; G.A. Roberts, 1932–1936; J.E. Fulton, 1936; David Voth, 1936–1949; C.L. Torrey, 1949–1950; R.R. Bietz, 1950–1960; Cree Sandefur, 1960–1966; Helmuth Retzer, 1966–1972; H.L. Calkins, 1972–1981; Ralph S. Watts, Jr., 1981–1985; L.W. Paytree, 1985–1986; G. Charles Dart, 1986–1993; Bjarne Christensen, 1993–1998; Larry L. Caviness, 1998–2019; Velino A. Salazar 2016– .  
Conference Headquarters: 1535 E. Chevy Chase Drive, Glendale, CA 91206-4107.

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## NOTES

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3. E. J.W[aggoner], "Southern California Camp-Meeting," *Signs of the Times*, May 29, 1884, 336.
4. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. edition (1996) [SDAE], s.v. "Southern California Conference."
5. SDAE, "Southern California Conference"; "The Southern California Conference," *Pacific Union Recorder*, September 12, 1901, 3-4; E. E. Andross, "Change of Headquarters," *Pacific Union Recorder*, June 4, 1914, 6.
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7. SDAE, "Southern California Conference."
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12. Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), 204-205. Ellen White related her visit to Simpson's tent in "Encouraging Letter From California," *The Southern Missionary*, December 1, 1904, Ellen G. White Writings, accessed March 29, 2021, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/442.117#117>.
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20. Ibid.; Douglas Morgan, "Rodgers, Peter Gustavus (1885–1961)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, January 9, 2021, accessed March 29, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=ACFJ>.
21. "Radio Hours," *Pacific Union Recorder*, February 23, 1944, 12.
22. John Cecil Haussler, "The History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in California," (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1945), 270.
23. "Who We Are," Breath of Life, accessed March 29, 2021, <https://breathoflife.tv/about-us/>.
24. "About us," Southern California Conference, accessed March 26, 2020. <https://scc.adventist.org/about>.
25. See the Southern California Conference section of the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks*, 1995 through 2004, General Conference Online Archives, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/Forms/AllItems.aspx>.
26. "Regions," Southern California Conference, accessed March 29, 2021, <https://scc.adventist.org/regions>. The West Region, its make-up less evident from its title than the others, "is a complex of 22 churches, 1 company and several acknowledged groups that service the urban edge of Los Angeles in Hollywood and Culver City; the coast from Santa Monica to Santa Barbara; Burbank and the San Fernando Valley; all of Ventura County; the Santa Clarita Valley up through Frasier Park; and the high desert, with Ridgecrest marking our furthest outpost."

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