



Bonaire Mission headquarters.

Photo courtesy of Shurman R. Kook.

## Bonaire Mission

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### SHURMAN R. KOOK

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Bonaire Mission was organized in 2017 as a part of the restructuring of Curaçao and Bonaire Conference. Its territory comprises the island of Bonaire. In June 2018, it had three churches and 419 members in a population of 21,000.

## Leading Activities and Accomplishments

On May 5, 2018, Bonaire Mission opened its main office, a book store, and a radio station. The lieutenant governor of Bonaire, Edison Rijna, was present at the opening with almost all the Island Council members represented.<sup>1</sup> On June 7, 2018, a journalist named Franklin Antoine who was also present at the inauguration ran articles about the church in the local newspaper. In the first one, he reported the inauguration of the office, bookstore, and radio station.<sup>2</sup> In the second one, he expressed his positive impressions about the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bonaire. He cited a Dutch historian and claimed that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was active in Bonaire since 1925.<sup>3</sup> Examples were given of the prejudice against the church in years gone by. Antoine highlighted the work of ADRA that has been breaking prejudices in the community. He also emphasized the notable presence of active youth of the Adventist church.

Currently, Bonaire Mission has one credentialed minister who serves as mission president, one licensed minister, a well-organized ADRA foundation, four congregations, a bookstore, and the radio station. The church in Bonaire also owns a sport hall, and, unlike the church in the rest of the Dutch Caribbean territory, the church in Bonaire has its own cemetery. From the beginning of 2016 to the end of 2018, 38 individuals joined the church through baptism, one joined by profession of faith, and one has been rebaptized.<sup>4</sup>

## Origin and Development of Seventh-day Adventist Work

In 1932, a man named José Lancrey claimed to have heard the voice of God as he walked on the pontoon bridge in Curaçao calling him to start a church in Bonaire.<sup>5</sup> In that same year, he moved to Bonaire and opened a store, where he sold clothing and household goods. Brother Lancrey placed a piece of tract in every package of goods sold. This way, many people became interested in Bible studies. In 1934, a piece of land was donated to build a church.<sup>6</sup> Currently, even though sources provide conflicting dates about when that happened, there are at least five premises in Bonaire that belong to the Seventh-day Adventists. "One of the first SDAs in Bonaire was Eustacia Felida, a granddaughter of a man named Cornelius Martin, who late in the eighteenth century was a preacher-farmer on the island. Martin and his wife taught the people about the second advent of Christ and were known for their godly lives."<sup>7</sup> A church was organized in Bonaire in 1941.<sup>8</sup>

Bonaire has been a difficult field to manage, partly because of its small population and partly because the main offices overseeing it reside in Curaçao. In 2003, a zone structure was introduced in Bonaire to facilitate initiatives from the island and give some autonomy in decision-making.<sup>9</sup> The administration also placed two workers on the island, as opposed to the traditional one-worker district, to boost the work on the island. However, this didn't last long, and the island was left with one worker until 2009, when the new administration of the then-called Curaçao and Bonaire Conference was determined to make something happen in Bonaire.<sup>10</sup> Again, the emphasis was to give more autonomy in decision-making, to foster initiative, and to encourage ownership of the

mission to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bonaire. An important action taken by Curaçao and Bonaire Conference in 2010 was to allocate a portion of the total mission development fund to Bonaire for their own distribution according to the will of the Bonaire zone coordinating committee.<sup>11</sup> Early in 2014, the zone coordinator retired, a new coordinator was appointed as senior pastor of the island, and a young licensed minister continues to assist in the district.

## Organizational History

The Netherlands Antilles Mission was organized from the Venezuela Mission around 1935.<sup>12</sup> Politically, Aruba separated from the Netherlands Antilles since 1986. For some time, the local field that served the islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao was known as the “Netherlands Antilles and Aruba Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” which was later renamed “Curaçao and Bonaire Conference.”<sup>13</sup> Three reasons exist for this name change. First, the territory covered by this administrative unit did not represent the entire country of the Netherlands Antilles. Second, the islands served by this church administrative unit since 2007 had been organized into Aruba Mission and the conference serving the islands of Bonaire and Curaçao. Third, in October 2010, the country of the Netherlands Antilles was dissolved. Each of the two islands that remained in the administrative unit represented two different countries, Curaçao and the Netherlands, with Bonaire being a special municipality of the Netherlands.

In 2010, ADRA Bonaire was organized as ADRA Foundation Bonaire to serve the community of Bonaire.<sup>14</sup> ADRA Bonaire operates a food pantry and a second-hand clothing shop. Besides those, ADRA organizes several projects like the successful reading contest for primary schools on the island. ADRA Bonaire contributes to the Bonaire community and positively projects the image of the church in society.

A daily one-hour radio program provides the church with the opportunity to reach a wide range of people with inspiring messages and children’s stories every morning. For financial reasons, this program has been cut to only air on Sundays. Nonetheless, God has miraculously provided the opportunity for the church in Bonaire to obtain the license of the radio station from which the daily program has aired.<sup>15</sup>

In 2012, the Inter-American Division took an action to recommend to the General Conference to reorganize Venezuela-Antilles Union Mission and to operate Aruba Mission and Curaçao and Bonaire Conference as attached fields to the Inter-American Division.<sup>16</sup> This was in consideration of the complex political structure and the need for a more autonomous decision-making process for the territory. It was also requested in an effort to foster initiative, to encourage ownership of the mission to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bonaire, and to provide more funding for mission activities and development. On January 23, 2014, a recommendation for the change of status of the congregations in Bonaire was voted.<sup>17</sup> During the Inter-American Division year-end meetings held in Willemstad, Curaçao, on October 29, 2014, a vote was taken to “authorize the operation of the

Bonaire Region, with headquarters in Bonaire, in the Curaçao and Bonaire Conference from January 1, 2015.<sup>18</sup> Since the Inter-American Division no longer has a provision for “Regions” in its operating policy, it agreed for the Dutch Caribbean Union Mission to vote the operating policy for the Bonaire Mission of Seventh-day Adventists on March 27, 2017.<sup>19</sup> A nominating committee was also organized during that meeting. On May 20, 2017, during a ceremony attended by the Inter-American Division president, the administrators of the Curaçao and Bonaire Conference symbolically handed Bonaire over as a mission field to the Dutch Caribbean Union Mission.<sup>20</sup> In an extraordinary executive committee meeting celebrated in Buena Vista, Curaçao, on May 21, 2017, Elder Surrandy Selassa was appointed the first president of Bonaire Mission of Seventh-day Adventists.<sup>21</sup>

## President

Surrandy Selassa (2017- ).

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## NOTES

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