

Hawaii Conference

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.

The Hawaii Conference is a church administrative unit in the Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Territory: Hawaii, and Johnston Island.

Statistics (June 30, 2020): churches, 31; membership, 6,283; population, 1,423,939.

Origins

The Adventist message first reached the Hawaiian Islands through the self-supporting literature ministry of Abram La Rue and Henry Scott who arrived from California in 1884. The interest stirred by their work prompted the General Conference to send California minister William Healey to conduct public evangelism in Hawaii, using a tent loaned by the California Conference.¹ Healey, his wife, and 10-year-old daughter traveled steerage class (no cabin) at a fare of \$25 each in order to economize. Nine were baptized in connection with Healey's effort in 1886.²

A. J. Cudney followed Healey to Honolulu, and on July 22, 1888, he organized the nine charter members as the first Adventist church in Hawaii. Nine days later, Cudney set sail for Pitcairn Island, but he and his ship never arrived – all were lost at sea. Because he had not yet sent his report, the General Conference never received the information about the Honolulu church and thus the congregation did not receive recognition of its official status as a church until its reorganization in 1896.³

On her way to Australia in 1891, Ellen White's ship stopped in Honolulu for 19 hours, during which time she spoke to a large audience at the Young Men's Christian Association. She wrote that despite the short notice, "a goodly number were assembled, among them many who were actively interested in temperance and Christian



Hawaii Conference headquarters

Source: Facebook public posting

work.”⁴ In a letter to S.N. Haskell she wrote:

After speaking I was introduced to the prominent members of the Young Men’s Temperance Association, and they expressed much pleasure at the discourse which I gave. They said that they had listened with great interest, that many new ideas had been presented to them, opening broad fields of thought in regard to redemption and the love of God. . . . I thank the Lord for the favorable impression made upon them.⁵

The General Conference did little to support further development of the work in Hawaii until 1895 when the Foreign Mission Board recommended, “That Elder E. H. Gates and wife, of California, and H. H. Brand and wife, of Chicago, go to Honolulu, H. I., to open up mission work.”⁶ Gates reorganized the Honolulu church while his wife, Ida, taught school in their home. The Brands open a school for Chinese boys in 1895, then in 1897 a boarding school first known as Palama Chinese School, later the Anglo-Chinese Academy. Though discontinued in 1903, this school was a forerunner of Hawaiian Mission Academy opened in 1921. These efforts were accompanied by the work led by Dr. Preston Kellogg, a brother of the famed Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, in opening a sanitarium in downtown Honolulu in 1896. This venture, however, was short-lived.⁷

In 1900, after nine years in Australia, Ellen White again stopped in Honolulu on her return trip to the United States. She spoke at the church and then paid a visit to the Palama Chinese School, where, by then, W. E. Howell was the principal:

At the close of the meeting we visited the Chinese school, which is in charge of Brother Howell. He took us over the buildings, showing us the young men and boys engaged in their studies. Brother Howell gives an excellent report of the school. He finds the pupils obedient, kind, and manageable. We see a large field of work for this school, which should be more fully developed. Thus missionaries can be prepared to go to China and labor for their countrymen.⁸

Organizational History

Administrative responsibility for the Hawaiian Mission shifted in 1901 from the General Conference to the newly-formed Pacific Union Conference and the latter immediately sent workers to Hawaii (as well as to Arizona and Alaska). General Conference president A. G. Daniells cited this prompt action as an example of how the reorganization of the church and the creation of union conferences that year was already invigorating the evangelistic activity of the church, since decisions could now be taken at a local level by those “in personal touch with all that demands attention” instead of at the distant General Conference.⁹ In 1903 W.T. Knox, president of the Pacific Union Conference, reported that there were 37 members among a population of 154,000, made up of native Hawaiians, Americans, Chinese, Japanese, and Portuguese. In addition to the Honolulu church, a company of believers worshipped together in Hilo.¹⁰

The Hawaiian Mission was included in the territory transferred out of the Pacific Union to create the new North Pacific Union Conference in 1906. C. D. M. and Lena Williams, sent by the Pacific Union to lead the work in Hawaii, continued under the jurisdiction of the North Pacific Union. Their endeavors resulted in “many new converts” and in 1907 the first Adventist church building in Hawaii was erected, a 28-by-40-foot white frame building constructed by the members on Kinau Street in Honolulu. That same year, the General Conference Committee, noting that the Hawaiian Islands are “not naturally connected” with the North Pacific Union field, voted that Hawaii once again become General Conference territory as of December 31, 1907.¹¹

In 1914 Bethel Grammar School, the first permanent elementary school in the islands, was started. Secondary grades were added later and the school now operates as the Hawaiian Mission Academy.

In 1915 L. T. Heaton and his family answered a call published in the *Review and Herald* for someone to go to the Hawaiian Islands to develop the literature evangelism program there. Previously he had headed the literature evangelism work in Canada. Four years later he returned to Canada for health reasons, but worked in the islands again from January 1930 until April 1946.¹²

In 1921 the church in Hilo on the island of Hawaii was organized with 22 members. The island of Maui became the third island with an organized church when a congregation of 15 members was organized in 1929.¹³ That same year Hawaii, now with three churches with 244 members, was returned to the Pacific Union Conference, where it has remained ever since.¹⁴

Broadcasting became a valuable tool for evangelism in Hawaii, with C. R. Webster giving the first radio broadcast in 1931. After Webster presented his message in English, the final 15 minutes of each broadcast was given to brief messages in either the Hawaiian language, by Robert McKeague, or the Japanese language, by Shohei Miyake, after he arrived from Japan in 1934. Broadcast outreach expanded to include the Voice of Hope (in the Ilocano language), the Voice of Prophecy which began reaching Hawaii in 1942, and later, the Japanese Voice of Prophecy. KULA-TV in Honolulu began carrying the nationwide Faith for Today telecast in 1955.¹⁵

On January 16, 1963 the Adventist-owned Castle Memorial Hospital opened in O’ahu. It was renamed Castle Medical Center in 1983, and more recently Adventist Health Castle, part of the Adventist Health system of healthcare institutions based in Roseville, California.¹⁶

In 1966 land was purchased for the future site of Camp Wai’anae. Beginning with seven cabins, each sponsored by a congregation, it has been developed to include a kitchen and fellowship hall, an outdoor auditorium, a camp fire area, swimming pool, and basketball court. The facility continues to serve the conference for summer camps, camp meetings, Pathfinder and Adventurer Camporees, and other events.¹⁷

Another milestone came in 1976 with completion of a new sanctuary for the Honolulu Central church. Members donated 80,000 volunteer hours to construction of the house of worship, located on a 2.75 acre plot in the Nu’uanu Valley next to the Mauna ‘Ala, the mausoleum for Hawaiian royalty. With a seating capacity of 1,000, it

was the largest church edifice in Honolulu at the time of its completion.¹⁸

The 1970s was a decade of particularly strong growth for the Hawaiian Mission. Beginning at 2,603 in 1970, total membership reached 3,995 at the outset of 1980, a net growth of 54 percent. With its membership now larger than the Nevada-Utah Conference in the Pacific Union and that of at least three other conferences in the North American Division, the status and name of the Hawaiian Mission changed to Hawaii Conference in 1982. This meant that Seventh-day Adventists in Hawaii now elected the officers with executive responsibility for personnel and finance rather than the Pacific Union Conference appointing them. Rather than a mission territory administered directly by the union, the Hawaii Conference was now a full-fledged member of the conferences comprising the Pacific Union. Shigenobu Arakaki, who had been president of the Hawaiian Mission was elected as the first president of the Hawaii Conference.¹⁹

Vision and Mission

The Hawaii Conference's "Each One Reach One!" mission begins with a statement by the conference president, Ralph Watts III: "We embrace people regardless of race, national origin, gender, color, age, marital status, or disability. Hawaii's paradise truly is a microcosm of Heaven's Paradise!"

The threefold mission of the conference is:

To seek those who don't know Christ or have a church home and thus fulfill Christ's command to go and make disciples through sowing, reaping and retaining.

To educate, train, support, and equip our members for ministry and life.

To corporately honor and celebrate God's grace and help people experience a personal relationship with God.²⁰

Superintendents/Presidents

Hawaiian Mission: E. H. Gates, 1895-1897; H. H. Brand (acting), 1897-1898; B. L. Howe, 1898-1901; J. H. Behrens, 1901-1904; C.D.M. Williams, 1904-1913; F. H. Conway, 1913-1918; R. W. Smith (acting), 1918; L. L. Hutchinson, 1918-1926; C. L. Lingenfelter, 1926-1929; W. E. Atkins, 1929-1930; C. R. Webster, 1930-1936; C. S. Prout, 1936-1939; J. E. Fulton, 1939-1940; G. E. Taylor, 1940-1944; W. J. Harris, 1944-1949; C. E. Andross, 1949-1955; Cree Sandefur, 1955-1960; B. W. Mattison, 1960-1965; A. G. Streifling, 1965-1971; Lawrence Davidson, 1971-1978; Thomas Mostert, 1978-1979; Shigenobu Arakaki, 1979-1982.

Hawaii Conference: Shigenobu Arakaki, 1979-1982; Charles Sandefur, 1987-1993; J. Lynn Martell, 1993-2000; Arnold Trujillo, 2000-2005; Ralph Watts III, 2007- .

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NOTES

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2. W. M. Healey, "Hawaiian Islands," *ARH*, April 27, 1886, 267-268; "Our History," Honolulu Central SDA Church, accessed March 13, 2020. <https://www.honcentralsda.org/history>.

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