Caribbean Union Conference

IAN GREENE, AND CLIVE P. DOTTIN

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Caribbean Union is a church administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists. It covers the following territory: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the
The History of the Development, 1926-1975

Although the teachings of Seventh-day Adventism reached the territory of the Caribbean Union in the 1880's, it was not until 1926 that the Union was organized. The territory of the Caribbean Union was part of the West Indian Mission formed in 1897 and the West Indies Union Conference organized in 1906. With the formation of the Inter-American Division in 1922, the present Union territory was assigned to the Eastern Union Group.

The first meeting of the Union leaders was actually held during the General Conference Session of 1926 at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on June 13th. Among those present were M.A. Hollister, D.D. Fitch, and H.J. Edmed. The first meetings in the Caribbean were held from December 12-16, 1926, at the homes of Elders Fitch and Hollister. The agenda consisted of 46 items, one of which was the election of a secretary-treasurer. (The Union officially came into being from January 1, 1927.)

Ethel M. Edmed, who served as secretary-treasurer of the Leeward Islands Conference, then based in Antigua, accepted the call to work with the East Caribbean Union Conference in the same capacity. She served from February to September 1927, but had to return to England on furlough as a result of her mother’s illness.

The Union office was located at the home of M.A. Hollister, the first president, at #1 St. Ann’s Avenue, Port of Spain. It consisted of two large rooms and a hall at the rear entrance. Early in 1929, the office was moved to #107 Queen Street, Port of Spain, and on September 10, 1920, the Union Committee voted to drop the “East” from the name of the Union. On November 30, 1934, the Union Committee voted to relocate the office at the corner of Sackville and Edward Streets, the address being #25 Edward Street, Port of Spain. The office was moved to #7 Rookery Nook, Maraval, in August or September, 1947. In March of that year, C. J. Ritchie was appointed president of the Caribbean Union Mission and immediately began to search for a Medical Missionary.

The Caribbean Union Conference, at the time of its organization, consisted of the present territory except that the French West Indies was also connected to it. From 1936 to 1957, the French West Indian Mission, comprising Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana, belonged to the sisterhood of conferences and missions in the Union. In 1957, the Franco-Haitian Union was formed, and the territories of the French West Indian Mission were annexed to it.

Change of Status: 1945-1966

The Caribbean Union lost conference status in 1945, but this was restored in 1966. In that period, many nationals of the Union territory served at departmental level in the Union. These included J. T. Carrington, E. S. Greaves, S. L. Gadsby, J. B. Ramrattan, and W. W. Weithers. Eric John Murray, who had previously served as secretary-treasurer of the Bahamas and East Caribbean Conferences, replaced K.W. Whitney as secretary-treasurer. He assumed office in 1965 and was the first Caribbean worker to become a Union officer. The first West Indian president was G. Ralph Thompson, who was elected in 1970. His administration ushered in a new era in the history of the Union.

Vibrations at the Top: 1966-1980

Another important organizational change took place in 1945 when, by Inter-American Division Committee action on April 10 that year, the Trinidad-based Caribbean Union Conference was reorganized as a Union Mission. W. E. Read and F. E. Vansickle, the same two men who had functioned as union conference officers before the status change, were appointed by the Inter-American Division to serve as superintendent and secretary-treasurer respectively of the Union Mission.

This new status was maintained for more than two decades, during which time the Union saw two of its subsidiaries, the South Caribbean and Leeward Island Missions, develop into local conferences. During this period, several nationals and other West Indians were elected to serve as Union departmental secretaries. Among them were J. T. Carrington, A. R. Haig, James B. Ramratan, M. G. Nembhard, Earl Parchment, Samuel L. Gadsby, E. S. Greaves, and W. W. Weithers. But the choosing of Union officers was no longer a matter for the Union constituency.

Five Criteria for Elevation to Union Conference:

1.
Leaders, workers, and members of organizations comprising a union field for which conference status is contemplated shall give evidence of possessing a clear perception of the denomination’s primary objectives which are to supply the spiritual needs of the church and obey the Lord’s commission, “Go... and preach the gospel.”

2. The union field should be adequately manned to care for the various lines of activity and, when necessary, be ready to share its workers with other fields.

3. Administrative officers and committees should have demonstrated the ability to recognize problems which affect the welfare of the work, and thus take steps which will resolve these problems.

4. One or more of the local organizations should have attained to conference status and should be operating successfully.

5. The major portion of the financial resources for the operating of organizations and institutions should be found within the union field.

Departmental Leaders during the Thompsonian Era

Elder Thompson, a dynamic and inspiring leader, worked with a team of very talented departmental directors that included K. E. Forde, Harold L. Lee, T. T. Billingy, and K. S. Wiggins, with the efficient Eric John Murray as secretary-treasurer. Elder Thompson has served as a vice-president of the General Conference from July 1975 to April 1980 when he was appointed General Conference secretary. Among the departmental directors were Leon Phillips, Charles Williams, and C. J. Quashie. Eric John Murray was elected president in 1978. Another development that year was the separation of the positions of secretary and treasurer. Elders K. Eugene Forde and Joseph Grimshaw were appointed as secretary and treasurer respectively.

Dr. Naomi Modeste, who charted a new direction in Health and Temperance in the South Caribbean Conference, was appointed as the first Union director. Subsequently, the responsibility of ADRA was coupled with Health and Temperance. She gave outstanding service at both conference and union levels.

After having served with distinction as a vice-president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, G. Ralph Thompson was elected General Conference secretary and subsequently reelected in 1985, 1990, and 1995. In 1983, Grenada Mission began operations, and Pastor Nord Punch was elected as the first president of this Isle of Spice. Meanwhile, Don Crowder baptized over 580 in Georgetown, Guyana. The Caribbean Union Youth Ministries department conducted the 2nd Youth Congress in Port of Spain at the Mucurapo Secondary School in 1984. The nightly devotional services were conducted at the Stanmore Avenue Church. Dick Barron was the speaker.

Grenada Mission intensified its unique outreach activity by opening its first medical clinic in 1985. The following year, 1986, witnessed an explosion of Pathfinder crusades. Over 200 persons were baptized. Caribbean Union College was affiliated with Andrews University retroactive to September, 1985. Responding to the cries for evangelistic literature, the first issue of Caribbean Sentinel was published.

The year of 1987 was an extraordinary one in the growth of the Caribbean Union Conference since membership reached a total of 100,000. Between 1987 and 1990, Evangelist Roosevelt Daniel’s work exploded in the field of evangelism through his trademark Maranatha series. He baptized 589 in Dominica in 1987 and moved to Arnos Vale, St. Vincent, in 1990 where under the power of the Holy Spirit, 972 persons gave their hearts to Jesus Christ.

During 1990, there was significant growth in public as well as personal evangelism. Youth Director Clive P. Dottin launched the 2nd Support Group: Heart to Heart Ministries with a clear focus on ministering to AIDS patients and victims of abuse and their relatives. The following year, the Heart Home was opened. This Home caters for endangered children.

Self-supporting lay evangelist Fitz Henry from Jamaica journeyed to Port of Spain in 1993 and broke the evangelistic record previously established by E. E. Cleveland. He baptized over 1,200 individuals. There was significant movement in 1995 as Union President Gordon Martin Borough was elected vice-president of the Inter-American Division. Peter Prime later replaced him and served as president for three years.

Evangelist Clive Dottin conducted evangelist meetings in Linden, Guyana. In the 1997 Mega Mission Youth Crusade, 334 people gave their hearts to Jesus.

In 1997, the Caribbean Union Conference office was also officially opened at Rookery Nook, Maraval, Port of Spain, Trinidad. Public Administration Minister Wade Mark represented the Panday-led government and delivered a special address. One year later, in 1998, Union President and Pastor Peter Prime was asked to serve as the associate secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

The year of 1998 was also a historic one for the Youth Ministries department of the Caribbean Union Conference. AY Director Dottin launched the Mega Mission Ministry at the Queen’s Park Savannah, Port of Spain. Five institutions
displayed networking capacity and engaged in an unprecedented evangelistic thrust across the region. Five Support Groups were presented:

Friends Forever – Ministry to Drug Addicts

Heart to Heart – Ministry to AIDS Patients & Abuse Clients

Dream Team – School Ministry

C.U.P. – Courage Unlimited Please for Gang Members.

EFFORT – Ministry to the Unemployed

A special initiative was the formation of Missionary Action Groups in the local AY societies.

During 1999, St. Lucia said goodbye, in pleasant tones, to the East Caribbean Conference as it became the St. Lucia Mission. After much debate, the South Caribbean Conference replaced the Caribbean Union Conference in the year 2000 as operators of the Community Hospital of SDA in Cocorite, Trinidad.

Evangelist Fitz Henry returned to the shores of the Caribbean Union Conference in 2001. He held a crusade in Barbados, which resulted in 1,058 baptisms. Everett Howell retired, concluding 40 years of distinguished service nationally and internationally. 2001 must also be recognized for the rise of Heather Small, Women’s & Children’s Ministries director of CUC. She was elected associate director, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Women’s Ministries department.

Celebrating 75 at Caribbean Union College, Edwin Carrington, secretary general of CARICOM, delivered an address at Caribbean Union College at the public launch of the institution’s 75th anniversary celebrations.

On September 6, 2004, a Category 3 hurricane destroyed approximately 90 percent of Grenada’s agriculture, public buildings, and dwelling houses. The hurricane (Ivan) also displaced utility services such as electricity, telephone and water. One week after Ivan, 100 percent of the country (Grenada) was still without electricity and telephone services.

The Community Services department under the dynamic leadership of Pastor Samuel Telemaque pioneered the Nehemiah Skilled Volunteers Project with the following targets:

Project Goals:

1. To erect approximately 500 wooden houses ranging from 16’x16’ or 16’x18’ by December 30, 2004.

2. To repair/renovate 500 house roofs ranging 20’x30’ or 30’x30’ by December 30, 2004.

3. To provide an opportunity for 400 Nehemiah skilled volunteers from around the Caribbean territory to give approximately US$50,000 free labor in the building and renovation of houses for the people of Grenada over a period of five months.

In 2005, the Caribbean Religious Liberty Association staged the first International Religious Liberty Conference in the Caribbean at the Andre Kamperveen Hall, Centre of Excellence, Macoya Road, Trinidad, on January 19-20. The theme was “Building Bridges: The Quest For Freedom & Justice.” John Graz, then PARL director of the General Conference and secretary general of IRLA, gave great support and led a team of internationally acclaimed experts.

The year 2005 was also important for the Youth & Health Ministries departments of the Union. They combined their resources to conduct the AIDS Conference in Port of Spain, Trinidad. Resolutions approved included the formation of a Regional Task Force and the start of support groups such as the Heart to Heart Ministry.

Elder Trotman gave several reasons for the celebrations that occurred in 2003:

This year has been one of rejoicing for us in the Caribbean Union; it not only marks the 75th anniversary of our beloved Caribbean Union College, but it also marks the 100th anniversary of the work in the island of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the 40th anniversary of the Community Hospital. Graduates of Caribbean Union College are now found on every continent in the world and in so many of the islands of the sea. Many have even contributed to the growth of the work in St. Vincent and the Grenadines over the years, while the Community Hospital continues to grow from strength to strength.

2006-Present: Mission Expansion & International Development

This was the era of innovation and institutional development. Operation Nehemiah was embraced by the field leaders, large donations were made, resources were sent, boats were hired beginning with the Tobago ASI, and skilled labor came from several countries. This level of volunteerism proved to be a blessing. Prayer institutions received a special
boost, publications flowed from departments, and evangelism continued and expanded.

Evangelist Claudius Morgan continued to train and give opportunities to emerging evangelists. Pastor Clifmond Shameerudeen, director of the Centre for South Eastern Religions, introduced the Life Hope Centre designed to build bridges with the Hindu-Muslim community and respond to needs of those in the communities. This was the platform which led to the unique instrument: The Yishu Katha.

In 2007, Ushers for Christ Hospitality Ministry staged its first graduation. Pioneer Denise Holder has made this organization a dynamic mission instrument. The Caribbean Union held its first Sabbath School/Personal Ministries summit during July 16-19, 2008, at the Sherbourne Conference Centre, Barbados. After the opening ceremony, the summit moved to the Amaryllis Beach Resort.

Director Samuel Telemaque defined the goal of the Summit; “To Examine the Theological and Philosophical Underpinnings of the Departments of Sabbath School and Personal Ministries.” General Conference Director Dr. Jonathan Kuntaraf; his associate, Elder Gary B. Swanson, and IAD Director Pastor Carl Bayne all participated in this summit.14

Responding to the cries for greater involvement in the community and to acquire Caribbean statistics, the Health Ministries department conducted a Basic Skills Research Workshop in 2009 in conjunction with the Caribbean Health Research Council. Pastor Dottin met with CHRC Director Simeon, and they crafted the programs based on the ideals of the department.

Dr. Noel Braithwaite continued to give specialist support although he left the department in 2008. After the Health Research graduation, it was decided to climax the annual Health Week with a NEWSTART Walk & Exposition using the code-name, “Hands Across the Caribbean.” The theme proposed was, “Protect Your Heart With NEWSTART.” Thousands of persons participated in this event annually across the region.

Publications included the Mega Mission Manual and the Hands Across the Caribbean Operations Manual in 2010. In 2011, the Inter American Division launched the Constant in Prayer initiative in the Caribbean Union Conference at the University of the Southern Caribbean. The focus of this ministry was to deepen the prayer life of our youth. The objectives were outlined in the Manual:

1. Involve the youth and children in the experience of spiritual revival with the program “Constant in Prayer”.

2. Make the 2011 Youth Week of Prayer (March 5-12 or the date assigned by your Union) a week of spiritual revival.

3. Instruct our youth and children regarding the theme of prayer.

4. Motivate our youth and children to make pledges to be men and women of prayer.15

Pastor Anthony Hall responded positively to the call to be Youth & Chaplaincy Ministries director in 2011. With meteoric force, he made an impact using the combination of preaching as well as legal and motivational skills. He also made a profound impact in the Annual PARL conventions and currently serves as vice-president of CARLA: Caribbean Religious Liberty Association.

In 2018, he conducted the Regional Pathfinder Camporee at Loo Creek, Guyana, from March 27-April 1. The theme of the Camp was, “I Dream of Greatness,” utilizing his famous Bible character: Joseph. The grand climax was 32 Pathfinders being baptized on Sabbath, March 31st, declaring their allegiance to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

Pastor Ashton O’Neil was appointed to the post of Personal Ministries, Sabbath School and Special Needs director in November 2013. His major focus has been daily witnessing and training lay evangelists to improve their appeals at the end of their preaching. His seminal publication Everyday Deposits for Jesus was produced in 2018 and has proven to be an effective outreach tool.

In 2014, the Public Affairs & Religious Liberty department hosted their annual Workshop & Convention in St. Vincent. In the past 15 years, PARL & CARLA have conducted these programs in the ten fields of the Caribbean Union. However, in St. Vincent, the Liberty Newsletter was launched and, in 2018, Susan Sealy announced the formation of their website. The Bell, the official journal of the Religious Liberty department, continues to be produced annually.

The year of 2014 was a big one also for the Health Ministries department led by Director Alexander Isaacs. The report given at the 16th Session of the Caribbean Union Conference for the term 2011-2016 provides the focus of the Health Summit:

“The island of Antigua was teeming with health activities as the Caribbean Union Conference, working in collaboration with the South Leeward Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, hosted its first Health Summit. Working under the theme, ‘Take Charge of Your Health,’ more than 200 persons from the fields comprising the Caribbean Union territory, along with national, regional, and international facilitators and presenters, converged at the exotic Jolly Beach Resort and Spa, Bolans Village.”16

“Concurrently with the health summit, the HANDS International Mission team from the USA, conducted a mission outreach in Antigua. This 65-member team, under the capable leadership of Dr. Reynold Agard and his wife, Mrs.
Ingrid Agard, and comprising specialists from a number of medical disciplines, as well as health professionals, did an outstanding job providing free health services to the people of Antigua. Their compassion, care, and commitment to service surely made a positive impact on the Antiguan people. The team also provided free medicines to patients to whom they attended at the various sites and handed over a quantity of drugs and medical supplies to the Ministry of Health.\(^{17}\)

Elder Clifmond Shameerudeen arrived in Trinidad to launch CSAR (Centre for South Asian Religions) in the Caribbean Union. The first Life Hope Centre was opened in 2013 in Orangefield. This offered services that included family counseling, homework assistance, and basic computer skills. In 2015, it moved to Brickfield, and in 2016, there was the emergence of a Cross-Cultural Crusade during which 26 persons gave their hearts to Jesus.

During the next three years, Life Hope Centres were established in Guyana and St. Lucia. The next project will begin in 2020 in Suriname. The Yishu Katha has been conducted in different areas in both Trinidad and Guyana. The Mission Council has been engaged in sending volunteers to several areas with miraculous results and the planting of churches which receive great support from the respective communities.

In 2018, there was a signature event in the Caribbean Union Conference at the University of the Southern Caribbean. For the first time, there was the combination of the Personal Ministries department and the Mission Council to produce the first Festival of the Laity & Cross-Cultural Missions. There were the traditional colorful presentations of the evangelistic accomplishments of the laity. Additionally, there was the highlighting of Mission Initiatives in Hindu-dominated territories.

Of great significance was the training provided by experts who minister in the countries with no established Adventist presence and missionaries who are working in the Inter-American Division. Just like Vision One Million, this festival showcased the synergy between the Inter-American Division and the Caribbean Union Conference.

Finally, 2018 and 2019 witnessed another unique, regional, and cross-cultural evangelistic advancement in two fields: 2018 in Guyana and 2019 in Suriname. Fifty preachers, pastoral as well as lay evangelists, from every conference and mission spread out across the vast land of Guyana. Over 1,227 souls gave their hearts to Jesus.\(^{18}\) In 2019, 25 preachers moved into Suriname, and 427 surrendered to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.\(^{19}\)

### Presidents


### SOURCES

“16th Session Report.” Caribbean Union Conference archives, Maraval, Trinidad, Trinidad and Tobago.


### NOTES

2. Quarterly Report, Caribbean Union Conference, Secretary’s Statistical Report: Third Quarter, November 2019, 1, Caribbean Union Conference archives, Maraval, Trinidad, Trinidad and Tobago.

3. Inter-American Division, Committee Minutes, May 18, 1926, 117.


6. Ibid.

7. Murray, 119.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., 181.

10. Green, 4.


12. Ibid., 3.


17. Ibid.
