



Headquarters of Southeast Korean Conference, 2020.

Photo courtesy of Southeast Korean Conference.

Southeast Korean Conference

SI CHANG NAM

Si Chang Nam (B.A. in theology, Sahmyook University; M.Div., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Philippines) started his ministry at the Bonghwa Church. He worked at Pohang Central Church, Busan Adventist Hospital, and Jinju Central Church. He served as secretary of Southeast Korean Conference (SEKC) from 2012 to 2015, and was appointed SEKC president in 2021.

The Southeast Korean Conference (aka Yungnamhaphoe) is one of the five belonging to the Korean Union Conference of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists. First organized as the South Chosen Mission in 1919,¹ it was restructured as the Southeast Korean Mission in 1952 when Korean leadership separated the South Chosen Mission into two missions.² After being divided into the North Kyong Mission and South Kyong Mission in 1965,³ it was then again merged into the Southeast Korean Mission in 1967.⁴ Finally, the mission was elevated into the Southeast Korean Conference (SEKC) in 1983⁵ and continues as such today.

The territory of the SEKC includes the cities of Busan, Taegu, and Ulsan, and the provinces of Kyungbuk and Kyungnam. As of June 30, 2019, the territory has a population of 13,070,377 while the conference itself consists of 123 churches and 34,410 church members. The conference operates one educational institution (Yungnam Sahmyook Academy). The address of the SEKC is 125 Worldcup-ro, Soosung-gu, Daegu, South Korea⁶

Origin of Adventist Work in the Conference Territory

The first Seventh-day Adventist missionary activities in the region began in 1910. In February of that year the Korean Mission divided the Korean Peninsula into four mission fields, placing a mission station in the south at Kyungsan, Kyunbuk Province, with Rufus C. Wangerin as director.⁷ In the summer of 1911, he purchased an acre of land in Kyungsan, and on August 29 he set up a tent there and with the help of such individuals as Kyu-hyuk Kim and Young-shin Lim, held an evangelistic meeting. About 20 people decided to believe in Adventism.⁸ The leaders of the Korean Mission constructed a mission headquarters in November 1911, and organized the Kyungsan Church in May after erecting a church building during February 1912, which became the first Adventist congregation in the Yungnam region.⁹

In November 1910, leadership sent Kyu-hyuk Kim to evangelize the Kimcheon area, and at the end of 1912, Geun-eok Lee, Ki-chang Jeong, and Seong-il Lee conducted an evangelistic series in Daegu. In 1913, evangelistic work also took place in Kupo, Busanjin. Although missionary activities were at first limited in this area, the pace increased after the establishment of the Chosen Union Mission in 1919. The organizational history of the SEKC began at this time.

Organizational History

The Chosen Union Mission consisted of the West Chosen Conference, the Central Chosen Mission, and the South Chosen Mission, the predecessor of the SEKC. Pastor Harold A. Oberg became the South Chosen director. The territory of the South Chosen Mission then included the provinces of North and South Kyungsang, the provinces of North and South Chulla, and parts of the North and South Chungcheong provinces.¹⁰ Because missionary work was then in its early stages with few churches, the territory belonging to the South Chosen Mission was vast. The region had only five Sabbath Schools in the North and South Kyungsang provinces during 1921.¹¹ In 1924, the annual meeting of the South Chosen Mission convened at the Kyungsan Church, when the number of church members in the provinces of Kyungnam and Kyungbuk totaled just 102.¹²

In 1925, the number of Sabbath Schools in the region increased to 25, 15 in Kyungsangbuk-do and 10 in Kyungsangnam-do.¹³ During the 1920s the mission established congregations in Daegu, Kyungsan, Andong, Uiseong, Jinju, Dongnae, Tongyeong, Whasan-ri, Yeongju, Samcheonpo, Hadong, and Sangju. By the 1930s, missionary work had expanded even further. Thus, the Chosen Union Mission at a meeting held on May 30, 1934, divided the South Chosen Mission into the Southeast Chosen and the Southwest Chosen missions and

appointed Pastor Hang-mo Kim as director of the Southeast Chosen Mission.¹⁴

However, as the economic and political situations became difficult in the late 1930s, the Chosen Union Mission again decided to combine the Southeast Chosen Mission and Southwest Chosen Mission into the South Chosen Mission at the eleventh general meeting in April 1939. According to this resolution, the territory of the South Chosen Mission again expanded to Kyungsang-do, Chulla-do, most of Chungcheong-do, and Uljin-gun and Samcheok-gun in Kangwon-do, and the headquarter of the mission relocated to Daejeon.¹⁵

In the 1940s, the Korean Adventist Church, suffering under the restrictions imposed by Japanese imperialism, had to disband on December 28, 1943.¹⁶ However, about two years later, on August 15, 1945, Korea was liberated from Japanese rule, and the Adventist Church was reestablished. In 1947, during the reconstruction of the Korean church, its leaders also reorganized the South Chosen Mission. At the council meeting of the Chosen Union Mission held on June 8 of that year, church administration divided the Chosen Union Mission into the North Chosen Mission, the Central Chosen Mission, and the South Chosen Mission, and appointed Dong-sim Chung as the president of the South Chosen Mission.¹⁷ The South Chosen Mission suffered from the effects of the Korean War in June 1950, but began to develop in earnest when reorganized into the Southeast Korean Mission in 1952.

The sixteenth general meeting of the Korean Union Mission in May 1952, divided the South Korean Mission into the Southeast Korean Mission and Southwest Korean Mission, and appointed Pastor Dong-sim Chung as the president of the latter.¹⁸ The mission consisted of 15 churches and companies, 645 church members and 2,878 Sabbath School members, as it moved its headquarters to Daegu in August 1953.¹⁹ From then until 1965, the Southeast Korean Mission achieved great church growth. The mission grew to 1,225 church members and 4,644 Sabbath School members in 1956,²⁰ and 3,505 church members and 14,526 Sabbath School members in 1961.²¹ By the end of 1963, the mission had expanded to 4,409 church members and 20,832 Sabbath School members.²²

Thanks to such growth, church administration separated the Southeast Korean Mission into the North Kyung and South Kyung missions in January 1965. The North Kyung Mission consisted of 91 churches and companies, 2,924 church members, and 8,725 Sabbath School members, while the South Kyung Mission comprised 73 churches and companies, 3,867 church members and 9,000 Sabbath School members. However, after 1966, the Korean Church shrank and could no longer support the so many conferences. In response, the Korea Union Mission merged the North Kyung Mission and South Kyung Mission into the Southeast Korean Mission at the twenty-third general meeting held in September 1967, and elected Pastor Ok-jin Yoon as its president.²³

In the 1970s, the Southeast Korean Mission again began to grow thanks to the missionary activities of laypeople. In particular, the leaders of the mission focused on educational projects such as developing Yungnam Sahmyook Academy and operating elementary schools in Busan and Daegu. Because of such efforts, the Southeast Korean Mission expanded to 138 churches and companies and 4,325 church members as early as 1976.²⁴ By the end of

1982, it had risen to 141 churches and companies and 7,591 church members.²⁵ As a result, church administration elevated the mission into the Southeast Korean Conference (SEKC) in 1983.

The SEKC aggressively promoted the efforts of lay believers. From 1983 to 1988, the SEKC pioneered 15 churches, growing to 153 churches and companies, 11,527 church members.²⁶ Then from 1989 to 1991 it began 25 new churches, and from 1992 to 1994, added 11 more. By the end of 1994, the SEKC had reached 184 churches and companies and 17,116 church members.²⁷ Similar church development continued until the end of the twentieth century.

In the 2000s, however, the growth of the SEKC began to slow. Statistics show that the number of church members in the SEKC was 22,523 in 2001. In October 2004, the number of church members reported to be 24,923, an increase of only 2,400.²⁸ The reason why the increase in church members had lagged reflected social changes that emerged in the new millennium. To address this problem, the SEKC pursued several strategies.

The first was to strengthen missionary outreach through church merger, thus creating stronger support bases. In the early 2000s, the SEKC merged eight congregations into four.²⁹ The second strategy is to expand urban missionary work in large cities such as Busan, Daegu, Ulsan, etc. In particular, the SEKC planned to establish a General Mission Center in Daegu and establish Sahmyook Foreign Language Institutes in Gumi and Changwon.³⁰ The third strategy was to actively participate in public health and welfare and relief projects. The SEKC encouraged churches and church members to actively participate in such projects as childcare centers, nursing homes, welfare centers for the disabled, local children's centers, women's counseling centers, and elderly care centers.³¹ Through such approaches, the conference has developed the sharing of Christ's love to neighbors as a major thrust.

However, despite these strategies, the missionary downturn of the conference became entrenched in 2010. The number of new church members being baptized lessened every year. In the case of the SEKC, the decrease totaled 42 people in 2010 when compared to the previous year.³² In July 2011, the SEKC announced a vision statement for the second century of missionary work in commemoration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the conference. Its core was that "we do our best to fulfill the mission of evangelism."³³

In the second century of the mission, the SEKC established the Cheongdo Training Center in November 2011 and pioneered new churches in Uiryong-gun, Goryeong-gun, and Dalseong-gun, areas that the mission did not enter until 2014.³⁴ By promoting the construction of a General Mission Center in Daegu in 2019, the SEKC is striving to realize its vision for missionary work in the second century. The center was completed in November 2020 and opened the era of Siji-dong of the SEKC.³⁵

List of Presidents

South Chosen Mission: R. C. Wangerin (1910-1916); W. R. Smith (1916-1919); H. A. Oberg (1919-1922); Clinton W. Lee (1923-1928); W. J. Pudwell (1928-1934).

Southeast Chosen Mission: Hang Mo Kim (1935-1937); Chi Hwan Cho (1937-1939), Hang Mo Kim (1939-1940); Bung Sang Chung (1940-1942); Dong Shim Chung (1946-1953).

Southeast Korean Mission: Jung Kyun Shin (1953-1957); Dong Shim Chung (1958-1961); Yong Jin Lee (1962-1965); Won Shil Park (1965-1966); Jung Kyun Shin (1965-1966); Ok Jin Yoon (1967-1975); Jung Hak Bae (1976-1982).

Southeast Korean Conference: Dae Shik Kim (1983-1988); Jung Yong Chung (1989-1991); Young Jun Park (1992-1994); Yong Keun Jeong (1995-2000); Yong Soo Jeong (2001-2003); Kwang Soo Seo (2004-2005); Myung Kil Kang (2005-2009); Ji Chun Lee (2010-2011); Hye Joo Bae (2012-2015); Won Sang Kim (2016-2020); Si Chang Nam (2021-).

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NOTES

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2. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1953), 113.
3. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1966), 124, 125.
4. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1968), 129.
5. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1984), 136-139.
6. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2020), 226.
7. I. H. Evans, "The Korea General Meeting," *ARH*, November 24, 1910, 9.
8. R. C. Wangerin, "A New Mission Station in South," *ARH*, October 5, 1911, 24.
9. *Church Compass*, September 1925, 1.
10. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1920), 158, 159.
11. *Church Compass*, August 1921, 8.
12. *Church Compass*, February 1925, 30.
13. *Church Compass*, June 1925, 27.
14. *Church Compass*, June 1935, 16; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1935), 120, 121.
15. *Church Compass*, June 1939, 26; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1940), 126-128.
16. *Church Compass*, October 1954, 21.
17. *Church Compass*, July 1947, 16.
18. *Church Compass*, October 1952, 36.
19. *Church Compass*, September 1953, 36.
20. "A Report of the Southeast Korean Mission," Minutes of the 17th General Meeting of Korean Union Mission (Seoul: Korean Union Mission, 1956), 3.

21. "A Report of the Southeast Korean Mission," Minutes of the 20th General Meeting of Korean Union Mission (Seoul: Korean Union Mission, 1961), 15.
22. "A Report of the Southeast Korean Mission," Minutes of the 21st General Meeting of Korean Union Mission (Seoul: Korean Union Mission, 1963), 16.
23. *Church Compass*, October 1967, 44.
24. "A Report of the President," Minutes of the 22nd General Meeting of Southeast Korean Mission (Taegu: Southeast Korean Mission, 1976).
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