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## Jamaica Union Conference

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The Jamaica Union Conference was organized in 1944 as the British West Indies Union Mission. In 1959, it was renamed the West Indies Union Conference. The conference was reorganized, and the territory divided, again in

2010 when it was renamed the Jamaica Union Conference. The Jamaica Union Conference is comprised of the territory of Jamaica including the Central Jamaica, East Jamaica, North East Jamaica, North Jamaica, and West Jamaica Conferences.<sup>1</sup>

As of June 30, 2018, the Jamaica Union Conference had 803 churches with a membership of 310,762 amongst a population of 2,899,000.<sup>2</sup>

## History

The Jamaica Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has had a long and rich history. Literature from the International Tract Society, commissioned by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, began arriving on the island somewhere between the late 1870s and the late 1880s.<sup>3</sup> The first missionary, Elder A. J. Haysmer, arrived in 1893.<sup>4</sup> The first church was organized on March 2, 1894, with thirty-seven members. In 1895, the first Jamaica Committee was organized with A. J. Haysmer, chairman and treasurer. The other committee members were F. I. Richardson and W. W. Eastman.<sup>5</sup>

Initially, Jamaica fell under the direct supervision of the Foreign Missions Board of the General Conference. Growth of the work in Jamaica and the Caribbean area resulted in the need for organizational structure. Thus, the Foreign Missions Board of the General Conference voted on December 5, 1897, to recommend, "That our work in Central America, Bay Islands, the West Indies and Northern South America, including Guiana, be united under the head of, The West Indian Mission Field."<sup>6</sup> In November 1897, the first general meeting of workers in the West Indies convened in Kingston, Jamaica. Allan Moon represented the General Conference and the Foreign Missions Board. At the meeting, the West Indian Mission was organized with headquarters in Kingston, Jamaica. A. J. Haysmer was asked to act as superintendent of this new [union] mission field that was located in Kingston, Jamaica.<sup>7</sup> This was the first union to include the Jamaican field.

Growth of the work in Jamaica itself demanded a local organizational structure. So, in 1899 the Foreign Missions Board of the General Conference organized the Jamaica Mission with F. I. Richardson as its superintendent.<sup>8</sup> Five years later the membership of the church in Jamaica had grown to around 1200 in seventeen churches and twenty companies.<sup>9</sup> At that time, the Jamaica Mission was upgraded to conference status, the first field in the Caribbean to attain this status.<sup>10</sup> The first president was J. B. Beckner.<sup>11</sup>

In 1906, the West Indian Union Mission achieved conference status, the headquarters remaining in Jamaica. The first president was George F. Enoch with D. Wellman as vice president.<sup>12</sup> In 1907, the first union conference meeting in Kingston, with over four hundred delegates, was interrupted by an earthquake that destroyed the city. Though the building sustained damages, no person was injured. In 1908, the union headquarters moved to Colon, Canal Zone, but that move was short-lived. It returned to Jamaica in 1911. In 1909, W. Bender served as president of the union. He began the health work in Jamaica with "treatment rooms" located in Kingston.<sup>13</sup>

For the next fifteen years, frequent turnover in leadership resulted in stagnation. By 1923, the West Indian Union had been dissolved and the Jamaica Conference became part of a newly organized Antillean Union Mission where it remained for the next twenty years. In 1943, the Jamaica Conference grew to almost 10,000 members. The Inter-American Division then decided to create two missions—East and West Jamaica.<sup>14</sup> Before the end of 1944, each had grown to become a full-fledged conference. The Inter-American Division, also in 1943, decided to create the British West Indies Union Mission with headquarters in Jamaica. Consequently, Jamaica was removed from the Antillean Union and combined with the Bahamas Islands, Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, and British Honduras. The General Conference Committee ratified the decision making it effective January 1, 1944.<sup>15</sup>

On December 2, 1943, W. E. Atkin was chosen as the interim superintendent and a call was extended to R. H. Pierson to become the permanent superintendent by June or July 1944, in which capacity he served until 1948.<sup>16</sup> At its December 20, 1943, meeting the new union mission was named the British West Indies Union Mission.<sup>17</sup> During his tenure, the two missions in Jamaica became full-fledged conferences, Andrews Memorial Hospital was built and opened and Kingsway High School was established.<sup>18</sup> He was succeeded by R. W. Numbers who served from 1948 to 1953. Under his leadership, the Harrison Memorial High School in Montego Bay was established and the membership continued to grow.<sup>19</sup> In May 1953, the Inter-American Division chose A. C. Stockhausen as the first Jamaican national to become a union president. He assumed office in June 1953.<sup>20</sup> Since then, the British West Indies, and subsequently the Jamaica Union, presidents have either been Jamaicans or from the union territory and church growth has flourished.

The accomplishments under Stockhausen's leadership included the change of the field's name to the West Indies Union in 1959, the renaming of the West Indian Training College to West Indies College, S. O. Beaumont becoming the first native president of West Indies College, the addition of the Central Jamaica Conference to make three conferences in Jamaica in 1961, the growth of primary schools to forty-three institutions,<sup>21</sup> and an increase in membership in Jamaica to over 32,000 members.<sup>22</sup> In seventeen years membership grew by more than 20,000. In 1962, W. U. Campbell became the new union president. He served until 1968. During his tenure, Willowdene High School in Spanish Town, Port Maria High School in St. Mary, and Savanna-la-Mar High School in Westmoreland were added. West Indies College began offering Bachelor's and Master's degrees as well.<sup>23</sup>

H. S. Walters, one of the young graduates of West Indian Training College who had earlier brought new dynamism to the work and had served in the Jamaica Conference, in the British West Indian Union, and as president of both the West Jamaica and the Central Jamaica Conferences, became union president in 1968. At the end of 1968, the union

membership was 50,305 with Jamaica's three conferences accounting for 48,098 of the total membership.<sup>24</sup> Walters's focus on and "a passion for" evangelism<sup>25</sup> led to a program enhancing the skills of evangelists. Those who baptized at least a hundred people in a year were taken on a retreat for further training and expertise development. By the end of Walters's tenure in 1976, the membership in Jamaica had grown by 35,847 to 83,945, while the membership of the union had grown by 37,891 to 88,196.<sup>26</sup>

Walters was a visionary. The *West Indies Union Visitor reports*,

He believed that the path of education was God's provision for the youth of the church. Many church schools and high schools owe their existence to him. He assisted in upgrading West Indies College to Senior College status and encouraged the development of Andrews Memorial Hospital to a training facility for nurses. More than any other leader, he supported plans to help many workers earn advance degrees and has personally directed programmes [sic.] for Adventist workers to own their homes.<sup>27</sup>

It was during Walters's tenure that the Central Jamaica Conference acquired the Camp Verley property for the development of its youth center.<sup>28</sup> The esteem with which he was held, both denominationally and nationally, is reflected by the number of church institutions that today bear his name and for the fact that he was the first Adventist Church leader to be honored by the Jamaican government.<sup>29</sup>

Walters was succeeded by N. S. Fraser, who served for nine years. During his tenure, the membership explosion continued, new high schools were added, and the Capital Development Fund was launched.<sup>30</sup> He was succeeded by Silburn Reid, who served from 1985 to 1990, during which time church membership in the union passed 100,000—the second union in the Inter-American Division to do so.<sup>31</sup> By 1992, Jamaica's membership expanded to 153,314 in 503 churches. There was an Adventist for every 15 persons in Jamaica.<sup>32</sup> By then the president of the union was Silas McKinney, the first and only Bahamian to hold the office. He served from 1990 to 1997. During his tenure, the membership growth continued in Jamaica and the entire union territory as extensive radio and television ministries were fostered. He was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, II<sup>33</sup>

Leon Wellington succeeded McKinney. He served for three years before being called to the Inter-American Division. Wellington oversaw the transition of West Indies College to Northern Caribbean University and the completion of renovations to the union office.<sup>34</sup> By 2002, Jamaica's membership stood at 185,480. At that time, a fourth conference was formed—the North Jamaica Mission (now a conference). By then the leadership of the union had passed to Patrick Allen. Under his leadership, the membership continued to grow dramatically. Sometime during 2004, church membership in Jamaica surpassed 200,000 members. By the end of 2005, the membership stood at 215,592. So, in 2006, a fifth field—the Northeast Jamaica Mission (now a conference) was added.

Several actions taken by Allen improved the financial security and development of workers, added conferences, and set the stage for significant milestones in the development of Seventh-day Adventism in Jamaica. His presidency was cut short in 2009 when the government of Jamaica invited him to become the Governor General—the representative of Her Majesty the Queen of England in Jamaica. His term of office was completed by Derick Bignal.

In 2010, with continued growth of the church in Jamaica and the entire union, an organizational change became necessary. On November 4, 2008, at its year-end meetings, the Inter-American Division voted to pass on to the General Conference the request of the West Indies Union Conference that study be given to the readiness of the territory for readjustment.<sup>35</sup> At its spring meeting on April 7, 2010, the ADCOM Steering Committee of the General Conference voted to approve the recommendation of the Inter-American Division to divide the West Indies Union Conference into two fields—the Jamaica Union with, five conferences (serving the island of Jamaica), and the Atlantic Caribbean Union Mission, with two conferences and two missions (serving the Bahamas, Cayman, and Turks and Caicos Islands).<sup>36</sup> This action was fully executed at the 2010 year-end meetings of the West Indies Union. It was then that the ceremony of separation took place with the official vote to dissolve it and divide its assets between the Jamaica Union and the Atlantic Caribbean Union.<sup>37</sup> The new unions were then instituted. Since it was a session meeting, the new officers were elected by the delegates at the session.

The first president of the new Jamaican field was Everette Brown, the former president of the Central Jamaica Conference. When he assumed office in 2010, the membership was 268,620.<sup>38</sup> By 2017, the membership had become 304,021 in 683 churches. As of April 22, 2019, the membership was in excess of 310,762 in 703 churches.<sup>39</sup> Under Brown's leadership, the finances of the union have been stabilized, social programs have been improved, and the Church's impact on country and nation has been enhanced.

The Jamaica Union Conference operates two medical facilities—the Andrews Memorial Hospital and the Andrews Memorial Hospital Dental Clinic, both located in Kingston, Jamaica, at 27 Hope Road. The union operates one institution of higher learning—Northern Caribbean University and its affiliate high school—the Victor Dixon High School.<sup>40</sup>

Through the years, the Jamaican field has had inspired leadership that has not only advanced the growth of the church in Jamaica and impacted the nation positively, but has also advanced the work in the Inter-American Division and fulfilled the mission of the Adventist church generally. Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the largest denomination in Jamaica. Currently, several prominent national leaders are Seventh-day Adventists and others identify as such. In addition, the Church is impacting the educational system. Recently, the Pathfinder Club was embraced by the Ministry of Education to be used in the public-school system. This is a moment of tremendous opportunity for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Leadership has accepted the challenge and is committed to

forge ahead in fulfilling the union's mission by making education more accessible to all, strengthening the financial base of the Northern Caribbean University, and impacting the country through community development and rekindling lay evangelism.

## List of Executive Officers<sup>41</sup>

Presidents: G. F. Enoch (1906); U. Bender (1907-1913); J. A. Haysmer (1914-1918); G. A. Roberts (1919-?); W. E. Atkin (1943); R. H. Pierson (1944-1948); R. W. Numbers (1948-1953); A. C. Stockhausen (1953-1962); W. U. Campbell (1962-1968); H. S. Walters (1968-1976); N. S. Fraser (1976-1985); S. M. Reid (1985-1990); S. N. McKinney (1990-1997); L. B. Wellington (1997-2000); P. L. Allen (2000-2009); D. Bignal (2009-2010); Everett E. Brown (2010- ).

Secretaries: J. a. Strickland (1906-1907); H. H. Cobban (1906-1913); F. H. Raley (1914-2017); W. R. White (1918); J. G. Pettey (1919); W. E. Atkin (1943-1944); C. O. Franz (1945-1950); A. L. Edeburn (1951-1952); S. E. White (1953-1954); R. S. Blackburn (1955-1959); Alfred Fossey (1960-1961); M. G. Nembhard (1962-1975); S. N. McKinney (1975-1980); K. G. Vaz (1980-1985); M. E. Weir (1985-1997); N. S. Fraser (1997-2000); W. R. McMillian (2000-2005); D. Bignall (2006-2009); G. O. Samuels (2009-2010); Milton Gregory (2010-2015); Meric D. Walker (2015- ).

Treasurers: H. H. Cobban (1906-1913); F. H. Raley (1914-2017); W. R. White (2018); J. G. Pettey (1919); W. E. Atkin (1943-1944); C. O. Franz (1945-1950); A. L. Edeburn (1951-1952); S. E. White (1953-1954); R. S. Blackburn (1955-1959); Alfred Fossey (1960-1961); V. T. Boyce (1962-1968); Roy F. Williams (1968-1970); L. H. Fletcher (1972-1973); W. R. McMillian (1974-1977); A. A. Barnes (1977-1980); J. G. Bennett (1980-1985); A. A. Barnes (1985-1990); H. S. Ming (2000-2007); C. Findlay (2008-2010); Bancroft Barwise (2010- ).

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## NOTES

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2. Ibid.?
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13. "Presidents Who Served," *West Indies Union Visitor*, Special Centennial Ed. 2006, 21.?
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17. *Minutes of Meeting of the Inter-American Division Committee* held at General Peraza, Cuba, December 20, 1943, 1093, Inter-American Division archives.?
18. Ibid.?
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20. *British West Indies Union Visitor*, May 1, 1953, 8; *British West Indies Union Visitor*, June 1, 1953, 1. Several other sources incorrectly claim Stockhausen became president of Jamaica in 1952 or 1954. See *SDA Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Jamaica;" "Presidents Who Served," 21; and Linette Mitchell, *Thy Light has Come: A Short History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: NP, 2003), 93.?
21. Ibid.?
22. Mitchell, 2.?
23. "Presidents Who Served," 21. See also, Mitchell, 93.?
24. The details were deduced from "106<sup>th</sup> Annual Statistical Report of Seventh-day Adventists 1968," accessed September 16, 2019, [http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR1968.pdf.?](http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR1968.pdf.)
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41. Lists compiled from the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks* from 1906 to 2019.?

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