

South Caribbean Conference

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South Caribbean Conference is part of Caribbean Union Conference in the Inter-America Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

South Caribbean Conference covers the island of Trinidad. Its headquarters is in St. Augustine, Trinidad.

[Statistics](#) (June 30, 2019): Churches, 134; membership, 60,061; population, 1,304,796.¹

Expansion of the Mission

In 1900, five years after the organization of the first church at Couva, the work in Trinidad was still being carried on under the supervision of the denomination's Foreign Mission Board in New York. At that time, the membership had reached 151. The three churches and one company comprised what was then known as the Trinidad Mission.²

In 1903, at the thirty-fifth session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, held in Oakland California, with A. G. Daniels as chairperson, four new local conferences were formed: including River Plate and Brazilian Conference in South America and East Caribbean Conference and Jamaica Conference in the West Indies.

Murray provides critical information on the new organization. "The newly-organized East Caribbean Conference, embracing the territories of Trinidad, the rest of the Lesser Antilles, and the Guianas, began its existence with a nucleus of seven organized churches and other companies in Trinidad. During a general meeting held in a tent in Port of Spain, the three churches in Barbados, Antigua, and St Thomas, and the eight churches in British Guiana were received into the conference."³

The next significant date was June 25, 1906. It was during this constituency meeting that the idea to subdivide the East Caribbean Conference moved from idea to recommendation, and from recommendation to policy. It was agreed that the conference which extended over 1 500 miles, had become a managerial nightmare. Therefore, under the wisdom that flows from the Holy-Spirit and the guidance of proactive leaders, the territory

was restructured in the following manner: East Caribbean Conference: Islands of Barbados and St. Vincent, extending north to the rest of the Lesser Antilles; South Caribbean Conference: Trinidad, Tobago and the Grenadines; British Guiana Conference with Dutch and French Guiana as mission fields.⁴

This session proved to be a defining moment in the evolution of the South Caribbean Conference. "Each of these conferences elected a full corps of offices, adopted a constitution and by-laws, and the property and markers were divided among them without friction or misunderstanding."⁵

This was an historic period not just for the Caribbean but for the world church, since the changes here were but a reflection of its transformational thinking. The mission field was not just North America, but the world. Knight opined that "the year 1901 was pivotal in Adventist history. At the 1901 and 1903 General Conference sessions the denomination thoroughly reorganized to conduct its mission more effectively."⁶ He also pointed out two major flaws in the 1863 model.

The first was overcentralizing power in the General Conference president. The number of local conferences jumped from six to nearly 100, while the membership expanded from 3,500 to 78,000. Secondly there was the lack of unity; departments such as Sabbath school, publishing and medical operated independently.

There were two more momentous changes that were significant in the development of the South Caribbean Conference. The first was in 1943 and the other in 1975. Murray again provides the vital information. "After enjoying the status of a local conference for 38 years, the South Caribbean Conference, acting upon the advice of the Caribbean Union conference administration, decided in 1943 to dissolve its conference organization and reorganize itself into a mission."⁷

An accomplishment of the conference in the health field was the opening of the Community Hospital in 1962.⁸

Major Reorganisation

A special committee established to review the structure and recommend changes to the Caribbean Union executive committee was formed, and on April 26, 1974 they submitted a plan. These radical and comprehensive changes that would alter the organizational landscape of the region were reported in the 1975 issue of the Caribbean Union Gleanings.

Having examined all important factors, the Union Executive committee made the following decisions:

1. That a new organization with the full status of a local conference be created.
2. That the territory of the new organization, to be known as the North Caribbean Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, consists of Anguilla, Antigua, Montserrat, Nevis, St. Kitts, St. Eustatius, Saba, St. Maarten (Dutch section), and the Virgin Islands.

3. That the North Caribbean Conference come into being on January 1, 1976.
4. That the North Caribbean Conference headquarters be sited in St. Croix.

With the creation of the North Caribbean Conference on January 1, 1976, the territories of the two existing conferences will be adjusted to consist of the following islands:

East Caribbean Conference: Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and the Grenadines.

South Caribbean Conference: Trinidad and Tobago.

Barbados and Trinidad will continue to serve as working bases for the East and South Caribbean Conference respectively.

January 1, 1976, will be a historic day for our believers in Guyana also. On that day, the Guyana Mission, having met the criteria for elevation to local conference status, will become the Guyana Conference⁹

In 1970, Caribbean Union College extended its two-year theology course to a four-year programme leading to the Bachelor of Theology degree. On August 2, 1976 another advanced step was taken when Andrews University started a programme in religion on the campus of Caribbean Union College, leading to the M.A. degree.¹⁰

In the Caribbean Union Conference in the 1970s and 1980s, there were many developments that validated the organizational initiatives to decentralize and empower local leadership. This was reflected in health ministries as well as in dynamic evangelistic campaigns where thousands gave their hearts to Jesus. However, one must acknowledge the mentorship provided by international stalwarts such as Dr. Robert Pierson, and Dr. Earl Cleveland who broke the world evangelistic record in 1966 in Trinidad, and the enthusiasm of luminaries such as Kembleton Wiggins from Barbados and Stephen Purcell from Trinidad.¹¹

After 110 Years: Special Session

A specially convened constituency meeting of the South Caribbean Conference was held on April 29, 2001 at Caribbean Union College, to deliberate on a proposal for mission status for Tobago. In attendance were delegates representing all the churches and the church organizations of Trinidad and Tobago, and the administrative representatives of the Caribbean Union Conference. This meeting was held following a consultation in Tobago on April 8, 2001, where it was determined that there was a genuine desire by the membership, as demonstrated by the majority vote, in favour of mission status.

The delegates heard a report from Pastor Tobias which highlighted the activities of the conference since the last constituency meeting in August 1999, and also a proposal for mission status from Pastor Martin Cunningham, chairperson of the Tobago Mission Committee, after which a vote was taken. An agreement was made to

forward a request to the Inter-America Division for consideration of granting mission status to Tobago. This decision was the beginning of a process that continued for many months before the entire process was completed and Tobago could be referred to as a mission.¹²

The historical significance of the special session was described by President Tobias: "Today marks a very important milestone in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad and Tobago, for it is the first time in one hundred and ten (110) years that we have been called to a special session. This is occasioned by the desire of the membership of Tobago to acquire mission status. They view this step as an ideal opportunity for accelerated growth and development in Tobago."¹³

Schools

South Caribbean Conference oversees 12 primary schools: Cumana SDA Primary, Erin SDA Primary, Maracas SDA Primary, Pinehaven SDA Primary, Point Fortin SDA Primary, Port of Spain SDA Primary, Rio Claro SDA Primary, San Fernando SDA Primary, San Juan SDA Primary, Sangre Grande SDA Primary, Siparia SDA Primary and Westport SDA Primary. The three secondary schools are Bates Memorial High School, CUC Secondary School, and Southern Academy.¹⁴

Presidents

Delmer E. Wellman, 1906-1908; Judson Barclay Beckner, 1908-1913; Nathan H. Poole, 1913-1917; Estel Clifton Boger, 1917-1918; William S. Holbrook, 1918-1922; Herbert John Edmed, 1922-1925; Daniel Dewitt Fitch, 1925-1926; Celian E. Andross, 1927-1933; Gordon Oss, 1934-1939; Myron B. Butterfield, 1939-1940; Alfred Robert Ogden, 1940-1941; Charles B. Sutton, 1941-1942; Arnold Orville Dunn, 1942-1944; Cyril Joseph Ritchie, 1944-1947; Vernon Flory, 1947-1950; Bender L. Archbold, 1950-1957; Arthur Audley Ward, 1957-1966; Samuel Lionel Gadsby, 1966-1975; Peter James Prime, 1975-1981; Joseph Grimshaw, 1981-1986; Errol Mitchell, 1986-1999; Kern Tobias, 1999-2003; 2006-2011; Cyril Horrell, 2003-2006; Wayne Andrews, 2011-2015; Leslie Moses, 2015-present.

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NOTES

1. "South Caribbean Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2020), accessed October 27, 2020, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13968>.
2. Eric J. Murray, *A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad and Tobago 1891-1981* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: College Press, 1981), 30.
3. *Ibid.*, 20.
4. *Ibid.*, 32.
5. I. H. Evans, "The East Caribbean Conference," *ARH*, August 2, 1906, 17.
6. George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, 3rd Edition (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2012), 109.
7. Murray, 116.
8. Murray, 106-110.
9. Eric J. Murray, *Caribbean Union Gleanings*, Vol. 48, No. 2 Second Quarter, 1975, 13.
10. Glenn O. Phillips, *Seventh-day Adventists in Barbados: Over A Century of Adventism, 1884-1991* (East Caribbean Conference of SDA, Caribbean Graphics & Letchworth Ltd. Barbados, 1991), 7.
11. *Ibid.*, 89.
12. Aura Stewart Henry, "South Caribbean Constituency Approves Recommendations for Mission Status," *Caribbean Union Gleanings*, 2nd & 3rd Quarter 2001, Vol. 74, No. 3, 14.

13. Ibid., 14.

14. South Caribbean Conference Education Department Report, South Caribbean Conference Education Department Archives, accessed July 16, 2020.

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