

# Gadsby, Samuel Lionel (1913–1997)

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MELVIN GADSBY

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Samuel Lionel Gadsby was an Adventist minister in Trinidad and Tobago and the first native Trinidadian to serve as president of the South Caribbean Conference.

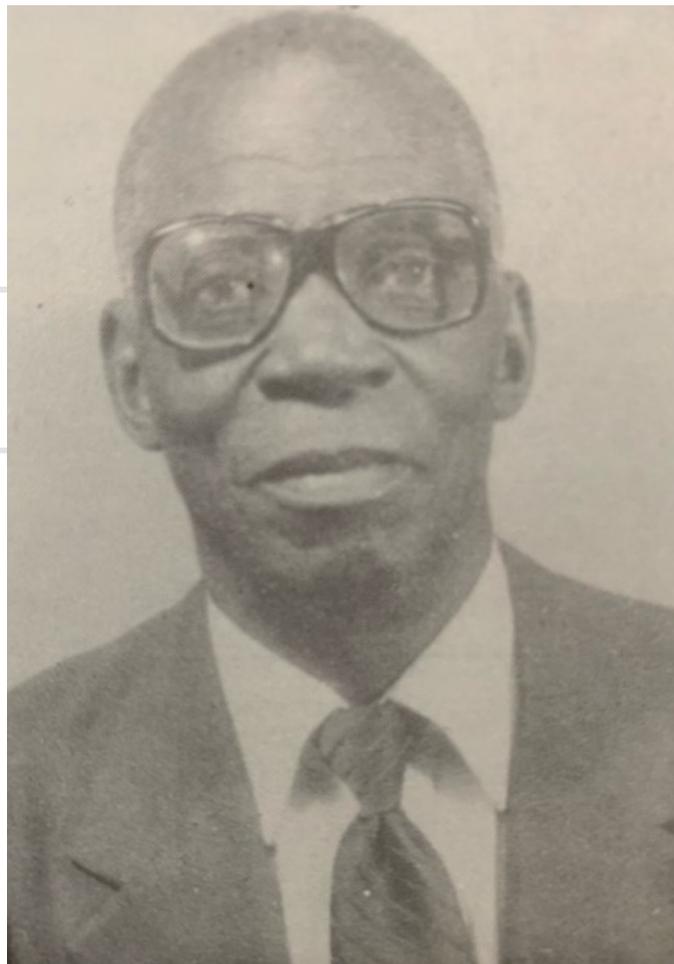
## Early Life

Born in Princes Town, Trinidad on October 18, 1913, Samuel Lionel Gadsby was the son of Joseph Gadsby, a naturalized Trinidadian sugarcane farmer of Barbadian origin, and Mary, a housewife of Tobagonian stock. Both parents were staunch Seventh-day Adventists. Samuel Gadsby was named after his mother's favorite Bible character, Samuel.

His middle name, Lionel, was inspired by the biblical phrase the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah." Although his parents could not anticipate his future career when they gave him these names, in hindsight they appeared prophetic.<sup>1</sup>

Gadsby's primary school education was limited with never enough books because of his family's indigence. What he lacked academically was compensated by the work ethic instilled in him through his parents' instruction.

Gadsby embarked on a new, though uncertain, career in the carpenter's trade in 1929 when he was sixteen years old. Although the odds were heavily stacked against him because of his Adventist standards, he worked for nine years (1929-1938) in this field, obtaining the early practical training that would prepare him for the work of church and institutional construction that he would undertake with such distinction in later years. All the while, he was engaged in lay evangelistic work with his friend and mentor Claudius Payison, who encouraged him to consider becoming an evangelist. It was no surprise, therefore, that Gadsby eventually decided to seize the single opportunity for educational advancement afforded him at the East Caribbean Training College, (now



Pastor Samuel Gadsby

From *Caribbean Union Gleanings*, Volume 59, Second Quarter, 1984, p. 7.

the University of the Southern Caribbean).<sup>2</sup>

While studying theology at the East Caribbean Training College, Gadsby worked his way through school. Undaunted by wages that were low even by the standards of the time, he endured hardship and deprivation, and persisted in a situation where others murmured, fretted, and eventually quit. Gadsby managed to excel. During his second year of college, he married Eldica Felix. A very unassuming, but diligent person, she was gifted with careful industry and made the family's clothes. A goat called "Meggie" provided the young family with milk.<sup>3</sup> Four children were born to Samuel and Eldica Gadsby: Kelvin, Melvin, Eileen and Glen. They also adopted one daughter, Gloria Tenia.

## Career

After graduating from Caribbean Union College, Gadsby entered denominational work as a pastor-evangelist in 1943. He was elected Sabbath School and lay activities director of the conference in January 1945. One year later, he was ordained as a minister. He held the departmental responsibility until 1948, and then served as a pastor in several areas, including Port of Spain and San Fernando.<sup>4</sup>

From 1957 to 1966, Gadsby was Sabbath School and lay activities director of the Caribbean Union Mission. His strong leadership resulted in a greater Ingathering thrust throughout the union. He was largely responsible for initiating the Cleveland crusade of 1966.<sup>5</sup> Gadsby's successful leadership in public evangelism left an enduring legacy.<sup>6</sup>

When Gadsby was elected president of the South Caribbean Conference in April 1966, he became the first Trinidad born president of the conference. During his presidency, which lasted from 1966 to 1975,<sup>7</sup> several large building projects were undertaken throughout the conference. Gadsby's efforts resulted in Seventh-day Adventist members obtaining Sabbath privileges in the public sector. In 1972, he was the recipient of the Public Service Medal of Merit (Silver) for outstanding and meritorious service to Trinidad and Tobago in the sphere of religion.

Gadsby served as a district pastor from September 1975 until his appointment as business manager of Caribbean Union College in 1978. From 1981 to 1986, he returned the union office in the familiar position of lay activities and Sabbath School director.<sup>8</sup>

## Later Life

Even after retirement, Gadsby was engaged in pastoral work in the east-west corridor, resulting in the growth of several congregations. Losing Eldica Felix, his first wife in 1983, he remarried the former Sylvia Gibbs and spent the declining years of his life living quietly in Tacarigua. Pastoring the churches of the Tunapuna district, Gadsby was instrumental in the construction of church buildings in both Curepe and Tunapuna, which were dedicated in

1990.

Samuel Lionel Gadsby died on January 20, 1997. The memorial service was held at the Stanmore Avenue SDA Church in Port of Spain, Trinidad. He was buried in the Port of Spain Cemetery on January 27, 1997<sup>9</sup>

## Contribution and Legacy

Gadsby was always a man on a mission, driven by a vision for the Church that was shared by only a few others. He was an unrelenting fighter for what he believed in and espoused cause after cause in the operation of the Church in which his only interest was the growth and advancement of the work. It is very true to say that in many ways and on many occasions he, with his friend Charles Manoram<sup>10</sup> either in tow or out in front, paved the way for others to achieve greater success. He led or assisted in the fight for conference and union status for both the local and regional church institutions in the southern Caribbean; championed the Church's receipt of the benefits of state-aid for five primary schools; influenced the state's decision to adopt the 40-hour work week as a direct result of the agitation for the right of Adventists in public service to have Sabbaths off; and for mobilized a Harvest Ingathering campaign that was without parallel anywhere in the Caribbean.

As a pastor, Gadsby's record was equally impressive. He contended adherents of the Shepherd's Rod heresy in Grenada in the 1950s, built the old Southern Academy, and, at one time, pastored almost a score of churches from Couva to Siparia. He tirelessly promoted lay activities and Sabbath School work across the Caribbean. Gadsby also developed a special pastoral relationship with several heads of government including Eric Williams in Trinidad and Tobago, Erick Gairy in Grenada, Forbes Burnham in Guyana, and Grantley Adams in Barbados, to name a few.

Gadsby's sterling example has made his children and grandchildren proud to bear his name and follow in his footsteps. Gadsby's son Melvin served as youth director of the conference from 1973 to 1978. A patriarch, an elder statesman, and a pastor extraordinaire, Gadsby left a rich legacy behind. A strong individualist, in many ways a loner, he nevertheless was a great team player with the capacity to make the difference between success and failure.<sup>11</sup>

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### SOURCES

Green, Ian. *Centenary of Adventism, Trinidad and Tobago, 1891-1991*. N. p.: n. p., 1991.

Murray, Eric. *A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad and Tobago* Port of Spain: College Press, 1982.

"Samuel Gadsby obituary." *Caribbean Union Gleanings*, First Quarter 1997.

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### NOTES

1. "Samuel Gadsby obituary," *Caribbean Union Gleanings*, First Quarter 1997, 11.
2. Ibid., 11, 12.
3. Ibid., 12.
4. Ian Green, *Centenary of Adventism, Trinidad and Tobago, 1891-1991* (n. p.: n. p., 1991), 29.
5. Ibid.
6. Baptisms that resulted from some of his evangelistic campaigns: 1,113 baptisms in 1966, 1,510 in 1967, 1,370 in 1968, and 1,316 in 1969 (Eric Murray, *A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad and Tobago* [Port of Spain: College Press, 1982], 130).
7. Ibid., 175.
8. Green, 29.
9. The funeral program, in the author's private collection.
10. "Samuel Gadsby obituary," 12.
11. Ibid.

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