

Gujarat Conference

GORDON E. CHRISTO

Gordon E. Christo, Ph.D. in Old Testament and Adventist Studies (Andrews University). Christo is retired and working on contract as assistant editor of the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* and assistant editor of the *Seventh-day Adventist International Biblical-Theological Dictionary*. He is currently setting up a heritage center for Southern Asia Division. Some of his research on Adventist history can be seen at <https://sudheritage.blogspot.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/SUDHeritage/>.

Gujarat Conference is a part of Western India Union Section in the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists. It was organized in 1994 and its headquarters is in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India.

Territory: The state of Gujarat, excluding the districts of Amreli, Bhavnagar, Jamnagar, Junagadh, Navsari, Porbandar, Rajkot, Surendranagar, and Valsad.

Statistics (June 30, 2020): Churches, 42; membership, 23,267; population, 60,395,126.¹

Beginnings of the Work

Before there was any resident pastor in Gujarat, printed tracts were spreading the message.² In 1916 a young man from Gujarat attended an evangelistic series in Bombay and received Bible studies. He returned to his home and shared what he had learned with his friends, who were mostly high school and college students. During his visit to Gurejat, G. W. Pettit, an Adventist preacher and missionary, found a group of about forty young men in Surat who were interested in the biblical truths, and he conducted a service one evening. The men requested a second service and kept asking questions till midnight. While in Gujarat, Pettit took the opportunity to visit Ahmedabad, Baroda and Cambay (Khambhat).³

In 1918 Pettit reported the baptism of three persons in the Tapti River in Surat.⁴ In 1919 R. A. Thrift, an Adventist preacher and missionary in the Bombay Mission, reported that sixty families in Surat had by letter requested to join the Adventist Church in Surat.⁵ Nevertheless when the first church was organized in Surat on December 20, 1921 it was with five members,⁶ and the report written a couple of months later stated that there were six members.⁷ The statistical report of 1923 reports that the church membership was eight though the average attendance was seven.⁸

J. P. Christian was the first regular colporteur in Ahmedabad.⁹ Christian worked in Ahmedabad and Kathaiwar (Saurashtra) in 1933, not only selling literature but visiting homes to study and distribute tracts and magazines.¹⁰ He continued to sell literature in Ahmedabad past the age of eighty.¹¹ T. K. Ludgate was the first resident mission worker. Ludgate had earlier worked in Surat and had met with Mahatma Gandhi. Ludgate had the

advantage of being conversant with the language of local people.¹² M. D. Moses, Western India Union president, purchased land for the church in Ahmedabad.¹³ When the church was organized in 1971, it was the second Adventist church in Gujarat.¹⁴ The Adventist Centre with a worship room, children's Sabbath school room, two apartments, and offices was opened on June 16, 1979.¹⁵

On April 8, 1930 a boarding school was opened in Udhna. Because funds were not immediately available, the first building was made of bamboo and mud.¹⁶ From January 29 to February 6, 1932 the first meeting of Adventist workers in Gujarat was held in Udhna. J. S. James from the Western India Union, J. B. Carter, T. K. Ludgate and O. W. Lange led out in the meetings. Women's meetings were also conducted.¹⁷ From 1931-1933 the school campus in Udhna served as the headquarters of the Gujarat Section, which, at that time, was a mission station with one church.¹⁸

From April 10-12, 1969 the first general meeting of Adventist workers and members in Gujarat was held in Surat. Attendees came from Dhoraji, Baroda, and Ahmedabad to listen to R. S. Lowry and other leaders from the Southern Asia Division and Western India Union.¹⁹

Organizational History

From the time the Southern Asia Division was formed in 1919-1920, Gujarat was part of the Bombay Mission. When the Western India Union was formed in 1927, the Gujarat Mission was listed as an "unorganized mission" with R. A. Smithwick as minister.²⁰ When the Western India Union was organized in 1929 the work in Gujarat was listed as "Gujarat Section" with T. K. Ludgate as the only pastor.²¹ From 1938 Gujarat Section became a mission field under the leadership of superintendents H. Christensen, N. C. Wilson, F. E. Spiess, and J. Johannes successively. From 1946, it was known as the "Gujarat Mission Station." In 1952 the "SDA Church Bombay State" was organized and included much of Gujarat. The new administrative unit was attached to the Northwest India Union, but the next year it was removed from the Northwest India Union and made a Detached Section with Saurashtra, Kutch and Daman and Diu added to it. In 1956 Western India was again removed from the Northwest India Union.

The territory of Gujarat while listed in the Northwest India Union territory does not appear under any of the constituent units in the Adventist yearbooks in the succeeding years. Yet, starting from 1988, Gujarat Region is listed in the Adventist yearbook as being organized in 1972 though there is no record of such an event or organization in the Northwest India Union meeting minutes nor in the previous Adventist yearbooks. However, in 1972 the newly organized Central India Union in its first constituency session did take an action to appoint Gilbert Jacob as "Gujarat District Leader."²² At that time there were ten churches with 1,237 members in Gujarat. In 1981 J. V. Prasada Rao was similarly appointed "Gujarat Director."²³ The first reference to a Gujarat Region in the Central India Union minutes is in 1984. Starting in 1988 the Adventist yearbooks list a Gujarat Region with the Central India Union officers being also the officers of the Gujarat Region.

The organization of the Gujarat Section was approved by the Southern Asia Division in September 1994,²⁴ and the inaugural function was held in Surat on December 17, 1994. At that time it was noted that there were twelve churches in the nineteen districts of the state of Gujarat. The city of Surat alone had four churches and 16 companies.²⁵

The process for organization into Gujarat Conference began in 1996 and the survey commission was appointed by the Southern Asia Division in September of that year.²⁶ The Limbayat church was selected as the conference memorial church.²⁷ The inaugural function was held in Surat in December 1996.²⁸ Pastor G. E. Sharon was elected the first conference president. Pankaj Parmar was elected secretary treasurer.²⁹

Later Developments

Following the developments of the Adventist work in Rajkot and the surrounding areas, Global Mission adopted Saurashtra and its surrounding villages as a new mission center. The Saurashtra territory was removed from the Gujarat Conference and was formed into the Saurashtra Region in April 2004.³⁰

In 2007 the districts of Navasari, Dangs, and Valsad in the state of Gujarat, and the union territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli, which had eight churches and 457 members, were removed from Gujarat Conference to form the South Gujarat Region.³¹

Executive Officers

President: G. E. Sharon (1996-2000); Pankaj Parmar (2000-2018); Satish Bhosale (2018-).

Secretary/Secretary-Treasurer: Pankaj Parmar (1996-2000); Dyva Asirvadani (2000-2006); Robin Abraham (2006-2007); Ramesh Rathod (2007-2009); Robin Abraham (2009-2010); Ujwal Kandane (2010-2014); Amruth Waghmare (2015); Satish Bhosale (2016-2017); Rakesh Chavan (2018-).

Treasurer: Robby Abraham (2011); Sunil Nalli (2012-).

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NOTES

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