



1923 graduates of Stanborough Missionary College. Robert Joyce is in the back row, fifth from the left.

Photo courtesy of Stanborough Press archives.

Joyce, Robert Sydney (1903–1969)

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Pastor R. S. Joyce, a pioneer evangelist, served in the British Union Conference, the Central Union Conference, and the Lake Union Conference. Starting as a literature evangelist, Joyce would serve the church as a district pastor and a conference president.

Early Life and Career

Joyce was born in Belfast, Ireland, November 24, 1903, to Scottish-Irish parents Pastor Samuel Joyce and his wife.¹ His parents were among the first Seventh-day Adventists in Ireland and early Adventist workers in Britain.² Joyce had an older brother named Sammy and a sister, Rachel.³

During his summer holidays from secondary school Joyce worked as a colporteur in Ireland, Scotland, and England,⁴ a practice he continued after beginning ministerial studies at Stanborough College.⁵ At college he met and became engaged to Phyllis Hardinge, a music teacher.⁶

In 1923, Joyce graduated from the ministerial course and continued working as a colporteur until he received his first pastoral assignment in Wimbledon, London.⁷ In 1925 *The Missionary Worker* reported two short series of public meetings held in Wimbledon. The second largest meeting conducted in London, they resulted in 100 baptisms. Joyce was among those who assisted in making the meetings a success.⁸ That same year on October 1, the British Union executive committee asked the Western District of London to release Joyce and relocated him to North London.⁹ In 1927 Joyce moved to a pastoral assignment in Bristol.¹⁰ Thursday December 8, 1927, he married his fiancé, Phyllis Hardinge, at Watford Town Church.¹¹ In 1934, he and his wife moved to East Anglia.¹² Joyce carried out several evangelistic series that lead to the establishment of a church in Lowestoft and another in Yarmouth. At the time of its dedication the Yarmouth church had 66 members.¹³

Joyce established several other churches in large cities such as Bristol, Norwich, and London. In every case, he did not just leave their members with a church building, but also ensured that it was debt free when they dedicated the structures.¹⁴

South England Conference

On January 25, 1935, *The Missionary Worker* reported that the British Union executive committee had appointed Joyce as president of the South England Conference,¹⁵ a decision made based on a request from the conference itself.¹⁶ Two years later, its annual meeting in London reelected him.¹⁷ Evangelism, baptisms, and planting new churches continued to be his focus as president.

At the beginning of 1937 he challenged the members, writing in *The British Advent Messenger*,

The year is still very young. Let us realize here and now that we who have espoused this cause are debtors to all men and therefore determine to win at least one soul for Christ this year. Let us each find our place in this most precious work. The Spirit of prophecy says: "The Lord is soon coming. Talk it, pray it, believe it. Make it a part of your life." Yes, may I, and may you, make it a part "of our life this year."¹⁸

On June 11, 1937, he wrote in *The British Advent Messenger*,

We are carrying the last message of mercy to a perishing world, and God calls upon us to bring freshness and power to our work. We can do this only by the aid of the Holy Spirit. In our work, we must consider the relation

that each worker sustains to the other workers connected with the cause of God. We must not bar the mind against counsel. In our plans for the carrying forward of the work, our mind must blend with other minds. It is our duty to counsel with the brethren, and to heed their advice.¹⁹

Evangelism could only be carried out by working as a team, guided by the Holy Spirit. Joyce also emphasized the importance of taking advice and counsel from others. The evangelistic efforts in London quickly drew his attention, and they became one of the main priorities of his presidency. On October 15 of the same year, he declared,

Before the Lord returns mighty London must be evangelized. But there are few who realize how colossal this task is. The growth of London during the past, few years is without parallel. To-day one third of the population of this country lives within thirty miles of St. Paul's Cathedral. There are over ninety towns, each with its local government, within fifteen miles of Charing Cross. This is the greatest multitude that has ever gathered on so small a part of the earth's surface and offers such a scope for missionary service as the church of Christ has never known in its long history. With its touch on these millions of souls London is surely one of the neediest mission fields in the world. What masses of humanity! What a bracing challenge to evangelism! What a grand opportunity for a miraculous message that can revolutionize human lives! During the past year the work in the city has held for us the thrill of a great adventure for Christ. It has been a privilege to see the power of God demonstrated in many changed lives. To Him be the glory for every victory gained!²⁰

During his leadership, the conference experienced great gains in membership. At the same time, finances improved.²¹

North England Conference

Joyce was elected as president of the North England Conference at its annual business session July 20-23, 1939.²² There he continued his focus on evangelism. He also trained young men and women to work as evangelists. In the same way as he had focused on evangelism during his presidency of the South England Conference, reaching big cities continued to be of great importance. He encouraged the young evangelists to focus their attention on the large urban areas in the North England Conference.²³

Following a call from the North American Central Union Conference president, M. V. Campbell, Joyce resigned as president of the North England Conference and moved to take up the post of pastor at the Boulder, Colorado, church.²⁴ The North England Conference elected G. D. King as president at the British Union Conference session in Watford on August 1-10, 1946.²⁵

The United States of America

By September 12, 1947, Joyce was in the United States.²⁶ Shortly afterward, he received a call to Nebraska to serve as a pastor for the College View Church. During his time there, he managed to increase its tithe by \$45,000, double the Ingathering receipts, and increase the membership by 229.²⁷

At the Nebraska Conference Camp Meeting in August 1950, delegates elected Joyce as Nebraska Conference president.²⁸ He was re-elected in August 1952.²⁹ Joyce continued to be successful in his evangelistic efforts, and during his presidency the conference membership grew.³⁰

In Spring 1955, the Central Union Conference session elected Joyce president of the Colorado Conference.³¹ Re-elected at the Colorado Conference camp meeting July 31, 1958,³² he reported that the conference had passed the 7,000 member mark³³ and tithes and offerings had also increased. The circulation of the *Signs of the Times* had improved by 3,854, Ingathering had a gain of \$2,769.49, and the enrollment for the Bible correspondence school had risen by 247. In 1956 the Sabbath School offerings reached a first of \$100,000 for missions, passing the previous record by \$3,507.³⁴

The twenty-third biennial session of the Indiana Conference, Sunday May 19, 1963, elected Joyce its president.³⁵ Joyce assumed the responsibilities of the new position in June that same year.³⁶

Later Years and Legacy

Joyce was serving as president of the Indiana Conference when he passed away on April 10, 1969, in Loma Linda, California, following a period of ill health.³⁷ He was buried at Montecito Memorial Park in Loma Linda California.³⁸

Joyce's legacy was his commitment and dedication to the church and its evangelistic cause. He showed both by his words and his actions that he was fully committed to bringing people to Christ and growing the church through the building and planting of new congregations and training young people for evangelism.

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