

North Sumatra Mission

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Yoanes Sinaga is a second generation pastor now serving as an associate pastor at Jakarta International Seventh-day Adventist Church. He graduated with a Master of Divinity from Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, and is currently finishing his Ph.D. at the same seminary. He is married to Stenny Prawitasari, and blessed with a son.

North Sumatra Mission is part of the West Indonesia Union Mission in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists. It was organized in 1917 and reorganized in 1937. Its headquarters is in Pematang Siantar, Sumatra, Indonesia.

Territory: The regencies of Asahan, Batu Bara, Dairi, Deli Serdang, Karo, Kota Medan, Kota Tanjungbalai, Labuhanbatu, Labuhanbatu Selatan, Labuhanbatu Utara, Lake Toba, Langkat, Pakpak Barat, Pematangsiantar, Samosir, Serdang Bedagai, Simalungun, Tebingtinggi, and Toba Samosir.

Statistics (June 30, 2021): Churches, 200; membership, 11,523; population, 18,034,258⁸

Origin of Seventh-day Adventist work

North Sumatra Mission is part of the West Indonesia Union Mission. It is located in northern Indonesia, and its territories encompass two large provinces in the republic, Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam and North Sumatra. The first province is an Islamic region that identifies itself as "Terrace of Mecca." It is a place where Islam has become part of ethnic identity and the local government enforces sharia law. Adventist evangelism faces serious challenges in Aceh. On the other side, North Sumatra is a pluralistic province. Christianity flourishes there, particularly within the Batak ethnic groups. The most prominent and largest Christian church in North Sumatra is Huria Kristen Batak Protestant (HKBP), which comes from a Lutheran background. However, North Sumatra also has a large number of Muslims and Hindu-Buddhists as well. Animism still holds powerful influences in the villages, and the practice of spiritualism can be felt within the countryside.

A new chapter in Adventist mission began when Ralph Waldo Munson arrived in Padang at 1900. He established his mission station by establishing an English school. As a self-sponsored missionary, the school helped finance his work. Munson translated and published Ellen White's "Christ Our Savior," titled "Isa maseh Djuru selamat kita." James Gould identified Munson as "the first American to publish in Sumatra."² In 1903 a company was established with 20 members.³ Immanuel Siregar was the first Sumatran Ralph Waldo Munson baptized in Padang. Siregar served as a missionary in Sumatra.⁴ In 1912, he opened a school in Batakland⁵ (as North Sumatra was then known), where he had a hundred students and other employees to assist him.⁶ Evangelistic

progress in Sumatra was slow and arduous; in 1910, it was reported that there are only six Sabbath keepers in Sumatra.⁷ By 1916 there were two main thrusts of evangelism in Sumatra, in Padang under the leadership of J. S. Yates and B. Judges, and in Batakland under Immanuel Siregar and Brother Shin.⁸

Organizational History

In 1916, Pastors W.P. Barto and D.S. Kime established an English school in Medan where they were able to share the Adventist message to their students.⁹ By 1917, North Sumatra was organized as a mission and its office is located in Medan.¹⁰ The workers began to expand their field to Central Tapanuli, Aceh, Aek Nauli, Pansur Batu, Tarutung, Balige, Porsea, Parsoburan, Samosir, Dairi, Karo, and even to Central Sumatra. The turning point of evangelistic work in North Sumatra took place about 1937. During the union committee meeting of the Netherlands East Indies Union, the president of North Sumatra Mission, Pastor K. Tilstra, presented “a petition that was signed by 100 heads of families, some of them head men in their village, calling for Seventh-day Adventists to come and teach them the message.”¹¹ Churches and membership started to grow in North Sumatra Mission. In 1936, there were only 3 churches and 68 members, but in 1938, there were 26 churches and 812 members.¹²

The work of mission in North Sumatra Mission has been conducted through three means. First, the establishment of English schools and educational schools as evangelistic entry points.¹³ The demand for schools was so high that in some places, Adventist schools could be open as long as there were 15 children.¹⁴ These schools possessed dual functions as a means of mission and a way to train and nurture the new believers and their children.

The second means of mission is through literature evangelism combined with public evangelism.¹⁵ This was exemplified when a shy Adventist woman distributed tracts to laborers in the port of North Sumatra. An illiterate man brought a tract home to Nias Island and asked his friends to read it to him. A colporteur visited, and after three years, seventy people were baptized.¹⁶

The third means of mission is through the combined efforts of pastors, gospel workers, and lay members. Rather than relying completely on ministers and gospel workers, each ordinary Adventist member shares the gospel wherever they go. People such as Yesaya Sembiring, R. Sinuhaji, A. Simbolon, Ngerti Barus, and Sarman Siahaan used their professions and talents for evangelism.¹⁷ Moreover, whenever an Adventist migrated to a new place, they work to build a church. When a church building is done, they often build a school for their children to receive an Adventist education.

North Sumatra Mission experienced significant setbacks during World War II, particularly when Pastor Twijnstra was captured by the Japanese in 1942. He perished in a Japanese camp, but his family survived through the difficult ordeal.¹⁸ The leadership of the mission passed to Karel Tambunan, who became the first native leader of North Sumatra Mission. Organizational coordination became increasingly difficult during the Japanese

occupation, and cohesive evangelistic effort was lost. Before the war, there were 39 churches and 963 members, but when the war ended, there were only 25 churches and 413 members. However, by 1948, there were 77 churches and 1658 members. In three years, North Sumatra Mission had recouped its missing members and experienced an unexpected church growth.¹⁹

North Sumatra Mission continues to grow both numerically and spiritually. It is fertile territory for evangelism and mission. Today North Sumatra Mission has 198 churches,²⁰ one hospital (Medan Adventist Hospital), one medical clinic, 83 schools (kindergarten to senior high), and one college (Perguruan Tinggi Advent Surya Nusantara).²¹ Its office is at Jln. Simbolon No. 6, Pematang Siantar, North Sumatra.²² North Sumatra Mission has the second highest membership in the West Indonesia Union Mission and the most organized churches. Moreover, North Sumatra Mission has the highest number of schools within the Southern Asia Pacific Division. These schools produce capable and influential leaders for the church.

The North Sumatra Mission is doing its best to spread the three angels' messages in its territories. However, unreached people groups such as the Islamic Aceh and Batak Mandailing remain a formidable challenge. Despite churches in these territories, evangelism is being done cautiously so as not to invoke a negative reaction from the local communities.

North Sumatra Mission embodies two historical lessons. First, the most effective method of mission is through the involvement of lay people, spreading the gospel wherever they go. Second, education and mission must go hand in hand. The great number of schools in North Sumatra Mission ensures a center of influence for the nearby community. Regardless of the fact that most of the schools are small, their presence provides a gospel entry for students and parents alike.

List of Presidents

P. Drinhaus (1917); K. Tilstra (1927); H. Twijnstra (1940); K. Tambunan (1943); G. A. Haas (1951); A.M. Barlet (1957); Niemen (1964); Damin Batubara (1962); S. Ritonga (1968); N. C. Hutauruk (1970); Damin Batubara (1962); V. Hutabarat (1972); Rolinus Tambunan (1977-1983); Tamba Tambunan (1983-1985); R. S. Situmeang (1985-1988); D. P. Panjaitan (1988-1990); S. H. Simbolon (1990-1995); S. Pinem (1996-2000); R. Pakpahan (2001-2011); D. Nainggolan (2011-2015); D. Lingga (2016-2018); B. Sitanggang (2019-present)

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NOTES

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