

North East Jamaica Conference

ADLAI BLYTHE

Adlai Blythe, M.B.A. in general management (University of Technology) and B.A. in theology (B.Th.) (Northern Caribbean University). Blythe serves as the president of the North East Jamaica Conference in the Jamaica Union Conference. He is a passionate evangelist and also serves as Personal Ministries and Sabbath School director for the conference.

The executive committee of West Indies Union Conference voted to divide two of its existing conferences, East and North Jamaica to form a new field, North East Jamaica. East Jamaica Conference yielded the parish of Portland, and North Jamaica Conference, the parish of Saint Mary. These two parishes formed the North East Jamaica field. This reorganization was done in an effort to facilitate the growth and development of the church in the north eastern region and to strengthen and enable more effective and easier administration of the local churches.¹

On August 1, 2006, in the centennial year of West Indies Union, North East Jamaica field came into existence in Dover, Saint Mary. The consecration took place August 18-19, 2006. Persons officiating in the activities included Pastor Derek Bignal, executive secretary of the West Indies Union, Dr. Herbert Thompson, president of Northern Caribbean University, and Dr. Patrick Allen, president of West Indies Union Conference.² The intermittent torrential showers accompanied by lightning and thunder did not dampen the spirits of the more than two thousand church leaders, members and well-wishers, from the sister fields, institutions, and community who crammed the huge tents to give their support.

The new field leader, Pastor Arlington Woodburn, declared that while appreciating modern trends and utilizing intellectual and technological acumen, Biblical principles guided by the counsels of the Spirit of Prophecy would be adopted in fulfilling the mandate of the new field. He stated that the old tried, tested and proven methods of the bible have always come back to give sanctity and balance to man's trials and frustrations.³

In a population of 194,284, the North East Jamaica field began with a membership of just over 18,000, 103 churches and companies, 16 pastoral districts, three schools, a staff of 79 full-time, and three part-time workers, and thirteen colporteurs.⁴ The head office was the pastor's vestry at the Dover Seventh-day Adventist Church. Field leader, Pastor Arlington Woodburn; secretary/treasurer, elder Fitzroy Davis; accountant, Judith Lumsden; and a sixth form student from the Titchfield High School manned the office during the first month of operations. A few weeks later, sister Carol Woodburn took on the responsibility as full-time office administrator.⁵

Mission and Vision

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North East Jamaica field is to call all people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, to proclaim the everlasting gospel embraced by the three angels' messages and to prepare the world for Christ's soon return. The vision is: Every member living in readiness for the second coming of Christ.

The Initial Year

Three basic emphases guided the strategy of the new field. Evangelism - each church was given a specific number of persons to be enlisted in bible study in order to achieve the soul goal of the church. Secondly, stewardship- each church was to review the stewardship chart every Sabbath, in order to track its progress. Thirdly, church building – each willing member was invited to participate in a “commitment by sacrifice” offering whereby he/she committed to giving a specific amount for a ten-month period.

Pastor Carlyle Bayne, personal ministries and Sabbath school director of Inter-American Division, and his West Indies Union Conference counterpart, Pastor Joseph Smith were the instructors in an evangelism field support seminar at Camp Don, Robins Bay, between January 26-28, 2007.⁶ Pastor Joseph Smith conducted “The Bible speaks Evangelistic Campaign” in Annotto Bay, Saint Mary, in January 2007. He was ably assisted by Pastors Adlai Blythe and Jorge Baez, pastors of the Dover and Islington Districts respectively. The campaign yielded 112 precious souls and saw numerous weddings, blessing of babies, and health and family life counseling taking place. Another tent campaign conducted by Pastor Thomas White in Long Bay, Portland, yielded 102 souls.⁷ There were several other campaigns conducted across the field during this first year.⁸ By the end of the year, a total of 905 new members were added to the church through baptisms.

The West Indies Union departmental directors, supported by local coordinators within the field, conducted seminars, workshops, camps, retreats, and institutes in keeping with the calendar of events of the union.

Schools

The Portland High School was visited by the accreditation team lead by sister Iris Henry and the school was given four years accreditation with an interim visit set for 2010.⁹

Despite some real challenges, the Port Maria High School kept up their building improvement program and continues to work towards a modern state of the art science and computer laboratories and library. The Northern Caribbean University president, Dr. Herbert Thompson, paid a courtesy visit to the school in February and took a critical look at its facilities. He gave commendations for the efforts being made to upgrade the school plant and expressed his vision for a partnership between Northern Caribbean University extension program and the school.¹⁰

The Buff Bay Academy still continued to struggle to keep afloat financially, but the Buff Bay church has committed itself to assist where possible, to restore it to financial viability.

Other Activities While carrying out the function of sustaining the work of the church in the North East field, the administrators remained conscious of the mandate to set up new offices and establish a headquarters. Construction started and continued in earnest and on May 7, 2007, the office staff moved out of the Dover Church vestry and began occupying the new office complex which was still under construction.¹¹

Realizing that the economic success of the constituency could only be sustained if the members, who are mostly farmers and agribusiness professionals, were empowered, the leaders of the field called a meeting of the members who are farmers, and established an agribusiness association called "The Adventist Farmers and Agribusiness Association" The directors and committee members were drawn from professionals in the field of agriculture who worked with the Ministry of Agriculture or have successfully operated farms and agribusinesses.¹²

The initial year was a tremendous success thanks to praying members and leadership of the field. The hardworking pastors, laymen, the executive committee members, and the West Indies Union administrators, all teamed together under God's guidance to enable the construction of an office building, a solid evangelistic program, an increase of 28 percent in tithes and offering, and an improved school system moving from strength to strength.

The Growth Continues 2007–2008

The North East Jamaica field continued to respond to the rally cry "Positioning, Repositioning and Progressing on the Wings of Prayer" as it sought to partner with its sister fields in Jamaica to fulfill the vision of seeing "Every member growing in Christian maturity and witnessing to the gospel of Christ." The members within the constituency were encouraged to give credence to the reason for their existence, which is "to prepare a people for the second advent through the proclamation of the gospel."

Evangelism

Led by Pastor Derek Bignal, executive secretary the West Indies Union, at the Port Maria Church, and sister Princess Lawes the union Bible school coordinator, at the Annotto Bay Church, the field plunged into a series of evangelistic campaigns throughout the year. Other major evangelistic campaigns for the year included those by Pastors Kanhai Lumsden and Dobson Campbell who each baptized over 100 persons. Several pastors also baptized over fifty souls in their campaigns. These included Pastors Ian Grant, Garfield Manderson, Jorge Baez, Adlai Blythe, Jason Moore, Roland Vassell, Thomas White, and Donald Mwamwifu.

The lay preachers also made invaluable contributions to the growth of the church during the year. One noteworthy lay preacher was elder Doreen Morrison, whose exploits on the field saw over 200 persons being baptized. The North East Jamaica field saw a total of more than 1000 souls surrendering their lives to God during the year. Among the converts was a pastor of the First Born Church, Pastor Winston Brown.¹³

Stewardship

While the new field braced itself for the effects of the global crisis on the national economy and the effects of hurricanes and major storms on the mainly agrarian economy within its constituency, heartfelt thanks were poured out to God for His faithfulness to His promise and the faithfulness of the members who continued to support the field with more than 12 percent increase in tithes and offering for the year. Almost all of the churches achieved their basic goal for the ingathering campaign and many surpassed their super goal!¹⁴

Education

During the 2007-2008 school year, the schools excelled in the CSEC examinations with more than 70 percent of the students passing between five and twelve subjects including good passes in English language, mathematics, biology, chemistry, and physics. At the Portland High School, 80 percent of those who sat the chemistry examinations, and 85 percent of those sitting the biology examinations did so successfully. The success of the school caught the attention of the Ministry of Education, and they purchased spaces in the school for more than 150 students.¹⁵ God worked through His committed and dedicated teachers and for that we are grateful.

After twenty years of dedicated service to the Portland High School, principal Ferron Phillips opted for a five year leave of absence. Pastor Augustus McLeod, assistant to the leader of the field, praised principal Phillips for his service to the school, and welcomed the new principal Doreen J. Morrison.¹⁶

Youth

Led by Pastor Charles Blythe, youth director at the West Indies Union Conference, and ably assisted by Pastor Michael Henry, the youth throughout all the churches in the North East Jamaica field demonstrated dedicated and committed service and went beyond the borders of the conference to compete in the Jamaica Union Bible Bowl Competition where they were placed second. They also participated in the Jamaica Union Youth Jamboree and outperformed some of the more seasoned and experienced conferences, placing third in the overall camporee activities.¹⁷

Family Life

Pastor Derek Bignal guided this department throughout the year and was especially prominent in the field as he conducted the singles camp at Camp Don, Robins Bay. This camp ended on a very high note with a grand baptism by the beach.¹⁸

Community Services

As an evangelistic tool, the community services department through the Saint Mary Federation led by brother Valentine Martin, and the Portland Federation led by brother Easton Dixon distributed food, clothing, and medical supplies to community members and members of the churches. Assistance was also given with the construction of, and repairs to dwelling houses. Much support was given to the department by Pastors Joseph Smith, Desmond Robinson, and Wentworth Henry from the West Indies Union Conference.¹⁹

Health

Pastor Milton Gregory of the West Indies Union gave valuable support and enabled the establishment of a vibrant clinic supervised by nurse educator, Mrs. Jasmine Gissiawan. This clinic was set-up in Hart Hill, Portland. In addition, Dr. Lincoln Wright offered his medical facility at the Port Maria Medical Centre for the services of the field.²⁰

Women and Children Ministry

Thanks to the leadership of Mrs. Carol Woodburn, the local coordinator for the field, and her counterparts at the West Indies Union, sister June Parchment and Mrs. Sandra Gayle a number of conventions and retreats were held during the year.²¹

Ebenezer 2008-2009

Having outlined the objectives and strategies of the field in the formative years, the pace in terms of growth and consolidation was laid at the annual camp meeting held in December 2008 under the theme: "The Core of Adventism."²² Marriages and baptisms resulted from the meetings and there was also a communion service. Presenters at the Camp Meeting included the West Indies Union president and executive secretary who led out in the Bible Olympics which was one of the features of the meetings.²³ The members having been energized went back to their churches in the spirit of "Pentecost and More 2009," and established two new companies; the Rodney Hall Company in Portland and the Top Leinster Company in Saint Mary. A number of branch Sabbath schools and small groups were also established during the year, resulting in over 1000 souls being added to the church.²⁴

The “Follow the Bible” initiative of the Inter American Division got the full support of the constituency. The membership was totally involved in all the activities including participating in writing the bible by hand.²⁵ Several members kept their copy of the hand written word as a souvenir.

As a part of the consolidation process, several unification and nurturing workshops were held across the field. These include parish conventions, ministry retreats, camps, youth congressoree, children choir festival, elders’ certification, family ministries certification, treasurers’ workshop, colporteurs institute, and teachers retreat.

Healthy Lifestyle

Under the leadership of Dr. Milton Gregory and his team including Dr. Braithwaite’s Five in Five Health Ministry, the health directors of the churches were brought together for a health ministry summit at Camp Don, Robins Bay, where they were taught numerous lessons of benefit to the churches, and the community in general. This summit led to the formation of the North East Wellness Agency (NEWA).²⁶

The Church in the Community

Following Jesus’ method of evangelism, the North East Jamaica Field embarked on several community services projects. The projects were divided into two broad categories namely income generation and disaster relief.²⁷ Through the income generating projects, the farmers within the constituency were organized into groups so that could better access markets for their produce based on quantities. They were also given lessons in business management, and best practices to improve productivity. The ladies were taught to make bedding, mats, cushions, and curtains and given a chance to exhibit their products at expos organized by the field.

The disaster relief aspect of the community outreach projects took the form of training workshops for residents in vulnerable communities such as Manchioneal, Durham Gap, and Skibo in Portland, and Richmond, Port Maria, and Oracabessa in Saint Mary which are exposed to flooding and landslides. These communities were taught how to conduct Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment, using their capacities to mitigate against their vulnerabilities. Partnership was made with the Jamaica Red Cross and the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) to conduct these workshops.

On August 30, 2009, under the distinguished patronage of the president of the West Indies Union Conference, Pastor Derek Bignal, the North East Jamaica field showcased the possibility of economic viability through self-reliance. A major expo was held on the site of the field offices highlighting produce from the members’ farms, household items made by the ladies, baked products, preservatives, juices and natural shakes, and many more items. Also highlighted was research in using waste to produce wealth by the company “Trash to Treasure” led by elder Noel Terrier. Pastor Bignal lauded the efforts of the thriving field to find ways and means to empower its members and sustain itself.²⁸ The new treasurer and stewardship director of the field, elder Michael

Thompson, also commented that this is part of the overall stewardship program of the North East Jamaica field.²⁹

Another significant event that took place during the year 2009, was the visit of the new Governor General of Jamaica, Sir Patrick Allen, to both parishes within the constituency. Having just demitted office as the president of the Jamaica Union Conference, and having been integral in the formation of the North East Jamaica field, Sir Patrick expressed his appreciation for the work of the leaders, and members of the field and for the steady progress made to date.³⁰

The progress made by the field did not go unnoticed by the West Indies Union and the Inter- American Division. A recommendation was made for the North East Jamaica field to be considered for elevation to mission status and instructions were given to prepare the necessary reports to aid the recommendation.³¹ Sister Carmelita Findlay, treasurer at the West Indies Union Conference, was very instrumental and provided much needed assistance in preparing the financial reports. The requested documentation was submitted to the West Indies Union Conference for consideration at its year end meetings in 2009. In 2010, the decision was taken by the Inter-American Division to organize the North East Jamaica field not into a mission but a conference.

In 2007, the membership was 24, 060 and in 2009 this increased to 25 621. As of December 2009, there were 18 pastoral districts, 21 pastors, five colporteurs, five schools, and 51 teachers

The North East Jamaica Conference has come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord. Ebenezer! Hitherto hath the Lord led this great field.

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