Mauritius Conference

BREEJAN BURRUN

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Mauritius Conference (including Rodrigues Island) is a subsidiary of the Indian-Ocean Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Current Territory and Statistics

Mauritius Island's territory extends more than 720 square miles (1,865 square kilometers) in an area lying about 550 miles (880 kilometers) east of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. The population of Mauritius in 2013 stood at 1.3 million, 51.9 percent of whom are Hindus, 31.4 percent Christians, 15.3 Muslims, and 1.4 percent belonging to other religions, including Buddhists.[1] In 2020, the Mauritius Conference of Seventh-day Adventists had 35 churches and 5,235 baptized members.[2]

Rodrigues Island is situated about 350 miles (550 kilometers) east of Mauritius with Port Mathurin as its capital. It has an area of 42 square miles (100 kilometers) and a population estimated at 41,600, mostly of African origin.

The Origins of Adventist work in Mauritius

The introduction of the Adventist faith in Mauritius is attributed to Elijah Moikeenah (1878-?) and Rosina Le Même (1876-1919), both of Mauritian nationality and Christian faith. Moikeenah was born in an Anglican family, while Rosina Le Même came from a Presbyterian home. Both converted to the Adventist faith while sojourning abroad–Rosina Le Même in Lausanne, Switzerland, where Pastor H. H. Dexter baptized her in December 1911, and Moikeenah in Australia during the first half of 1912. Both were eager to return to their homeland to share their newfound faith. Moïkeenah preceded Rosina Le Même, who extended her stay in Europe. Clairemonde Salzmann writes, "while Rosie was still in Europe he (Moikeenah) took advantage of every visit in the country to share the Good News with his friends, lending them books and magazines and attending to their queries.[3]

Moikeenah played a pioneering role in spreading Adventism in Mauritius. He learned about his new faith during one of his many travels between Mauritius and Australia. Breejan Burrun tells the story of his conversion as follows:

Elijah Moikeenah was a sailor by profession in the employ of 'Charles Jacob & Sons Company.' This company traded in sugar and tea with various countries including India, South Africa, Australia and Great Britain. It was during one of his travels to Australia in 1912 that he became acquainted with the Adventist message. He received a copy of the Australian edition of the magazine *Les Signes des Temps* [*The Signs of Times*] while his ship had cast anchor at Victoria's docks in Melbourne. Won to the cause of Adventism at the end of his reading, he was baptized at the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Melbourne, now the North Fitzroy Adventist Church.[4]

In the meantime, Rosina Le Même, returning from Europe in 1912, enlisted the support of Moikeenah to further spread the Adventist message in the country. Soon they felt the need to request a pastor from abroad to organize an Adventist church on the island as 24 people were now preparing for baptism. The first missionary to Mauritius was of French nationality, Pastor Paul Badaut, who arrived there in 1914. Later, his wife and daughter followed from Marseilles on board the ship Oxus on April 2, 1914, and reached Mauritius a month later on Sabbath, May 2. On September 12, Baduat baptized the first 24 Mauritians into the Adventist faith.[5] Six years later in 1920, the island had 130 baptized members. In 1921 Marius Raspal, also of France, succeeded Paul Badaut. He actively led in opening new churches and building new chapels.

The Mauritius Mission played a role in taking the Adventist message to Madagascar, Seychelles, and Rodrigues islands. A young man by the name of Tuyau, who had attended several SDA meetings in Mauritius, shared his faith with Andre Rasamoelina, an inspector of Protestant schools. Rasamoelina contacted Paul Badaut in Mauritius, and later Bible studies with Marius Raspal resulted in the opening of the first Sabbath school in Madagascar on October 2, 1926, and a baptism of four candidates, including Rasamoelina in 1927.[6] In 1925, E. Michel of Mauritius went to settle in Port Mathurin, the principal town of Rodriques Island. As a result of his witnessing efforts, in 1929 A. J. Girou, president of the Mauritian Mission, visited Rodriques Island to baptize seven converts.[7] Mauritius Mission's outreach to the Seychelles occurred in 1930 when Daniel Ignace, an evangelist from Mauritius, went there. Despite difficulties, Ignace's labors produced results in 21 converts who were baptized near Victoria, a capital of Mahé. Thereafter a church of 23 members organized with D. Ignace as elder.[8]

The Organizational History of Mauritius Conference

The Mauritius Mission region was a part of the Latin Union Conference until December 31, 1928. During the following seven years, it operated as a detached field administered by the Southern European Division. On January 1, 1936, during the organization of the Indian Ocean Union Mission, the Mauritius mission became a part of the new union.[9] A report of the 1938 Annual Assembly in Mauritius notes:

The business meetings revealed a number of very encouraging facts concerning the onward march of the gospel in Mauritius. The tithes and offerings for 1937 amounted to Rs. 19,460.47, instead of Rs. 18,141 74 for 1936.

Brother Davis, the treasurer, stated in his report that from 1930 to 1937 the Mauritius Mission received a total of Rs. 155,654 81 in tithes and offerings. Thirty souls were added to the church last year by baptism, which brought the total number of members at the end of 1937 to 544.[10]

Beginning in 1950, a medical dispensary operated on the island for several years, but it no longer exists. In 1958, when the Mauritius Mission was organized, it had fifteen churches and a few companies with a total church membership of approximately 1,300 believers. A centrally located Seventh-day Adventist high school provided educational opportunities for the youth.[11] As a demonstration of the progress of the Adventist work in Mauritius, the first Seventh-day Adventist church was dedicated on Sabbath, June 16, 1962, in Vacoas, a small agricultural village on the island of Mauritius that is surrounded by large fields of cabbages and cauliflower.[12] The continuing growth of the work in Mauritius did not make the church forget its beginnings. On February 11, 1963, the government of Mauritius registered the Rosie Le Même Adventist Home for senior citizens and the needy, to memorialize the contribution of Adventism's pioneering in Mauritius.

In 1984, the Mauritius Mission upgraded into the Mauritius Conference. As a result of the growing popularity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the island, in 1989 Salisbury Street in Rosehill, Mauritius, was renamed Pasteur Paul Badaut Street in honor of the first Adventist missionary minister on the island.[13] The Mauritian Adventist Church celebrated its centenary anniversary in September 2014. The church membership now stands at 5,127 members according to the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook.*[14]

The following figures show the steady Adventist membership growth in Mauritius:

1928: 6 churches with 201 members

1935: 10 churches with 529 members

1947: 11 churches with 829 members

1962: 14 churches with 1,282 members

1974: 16 churches with 1,554 members

1992: 25 churches with 2,915 members

2006: 30 churches with 3,939 members

2010: 33 churches with 4568 members

2015: 34 churches with 4813 members

2017: 35 churches with 5,099 members

2019: 35 churches with 5,127 members (including the territory of Rodrigues Island).[15]

Conference Institutions

Mauritius Conference operates one educational institution, Phoenix Adventist Secondary School (established as a day school in 1949) and the Rosie Le Même Adventist Home, a retirement facility for senior adults. By 1959, Dr. Henri Evard, a missionary from Switzerland, was both mission director and president of the Phoenix Adventist School.[16] In later years, Phoenix became the birthplace of a small theological school for the training of French-speaking staff in the Indian Ocean Union Mission.[17]

Future Outlook

Mauritius Conference has remarkable mission potential. The conference plans to review and contextualize its mission strategy in line with the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church's strategic plan. The conference leadership is eager to encourage its members to be Christ's disciples who love and worship the Creator, and who invite others to join them in fulfilling His commission of Matthew 28:18-20. Church leadership hopes to raise a generation of Mauritian disciples that have a depth of spirituality, love for the Lord, and are strengthened by prayer and Bible study. It aims at teaching and organizing for total member involvement for nurture and outreach. Small groups will be a practical means to achieve this. A new paradigm in church planting is being developed for reaching the large non-Christian population with the gospel of salvation and hope. Unity among its members and mentoring future leaders are vital priorities, too.

List of Presidents (1914-2019)

Mauritius Mission

Paul Badaut (1914-1920); Marius Raspal (1921-1926); Edisford Colthurst (1924-1930); Aimé Jacques Girou (1929-1935); Fernand Augsburger (1932-1937); Werner Ruf (1937-1939); Ernest Veuthey (1939-1946); Charles Monnier (1946-1951); Henri Evard (1951-1952); David Riemens (January-March 1952); Jean Belloy (June 1952-1953); Robert Buyck (1953-1957); Henri Evard (1957-1962); Michel Grisier (1962-1963); Hans Salzmann (1963-1966); Samuel W. Appave (1966-1974); Johann van Bignoot (1974-1979); Samuel W. Appave (1979-1980); Mikel Beesoo (1980-1984).

Mauritius Conference (1984-2019)

Mikel Beesoo (1984-1987); Daniel Guého (1987-1993); Claude Couty (1994-1999); Danforth R, Francis (1999-2002); Samuel Ravonjiarivelo (2002-2005); Daniel Latchman (2005-2008); Aniel Barbe (2008-2010); Jean-Claude Alger (2010-2013); Patrice Allet (2013- 2019); Ellsworth Baxen (2019-present).

Office Address

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Mailing: P. O. Box 18; Rose Hill; Mauritius

System Codes: EntityID: 13472; OrgMastID; AZIM11; AdmFieldID: MRSC.

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NOTES

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2. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2020), 298.
3. Clairemonde Salzmann, "Perles des Mascareignes" (Rose-Hill, Mauritius, Cube Printing Ltd., 2014).
4. Breejan Burrun, *1914-2014: 100 Years of the Adventist Church in Mauritius* (Rose-Hill: Cube Printing, Ltd.).
5. Robert Gerber, "The Advent Message in Mauritius Island," *Missionary Leader Department*, June 1923, 3.
6. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Madagascar."
7. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Mauritius."
8. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v "Seychelles."
9. "News Notes," *Quarterly Review*, April 1936, 16.

10. Nelly Ruf, “Annual Assembly in Mauritius,” *Quarterly Review*, September 1938, 2.

11. R. S. Watts, “Mauritius--the Island of the Swan,” *Southern African Division Outlook*, April 5, 1958, 3.

12. Pat Brû, “Dedication of Church in Vacoas, Mauritius,” *Quarterly Review*, June 1963, 5.

13. Breejan Burrun, “Street Named for Adventist Pioneer,” *ARH*, July 13, 1989, 19.

14. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 298.

15. Ibid., 292.

16. W. A. Wild, “From Far-Away Mauritius,” *Quarterly Review*, December 1959, 3.

17. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. “Phoenix Adventist Secondary School.”

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