

McKinney, Silas Napoleon (1926–2016)

JOHN CAREY, SR.

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Beginning as a district pastor in South Andros, Bahamas, Pastor McKinney later served as secretary-treasurer of the Bahamas Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, mission president, conference president, secretary of the West Indies Union, and finally president of the union.

Early Life

The last of six children born to Julius Stafford and Mary Ann McKinney, Silas was born October 31, 1926, in the settlement of Landrail Point, Crooked Island, Bahamas. Having completed his basic education at the Landrail Point Primary School at the age of 16, he moved to Nassau to seek employment. Although his father trained him in the fishing business, he wanted more than what the fishing enterprise offered. After doing odd jobs for a while, he joined the army as a medical orderly in September 1943. Three years of military service was enough for him, so he left in 1946. With a burning desire to further his education, he attended evening classes with private tutors. This strong urge for educational advancement led him to West Indian Training College in December 1949. He completed four years of high school and two years of college to obtain an associate degree in theology. He and his cousin, Neville Scavella, were the first Bahamians to graduate with a degree from West Indies College in 1955.¹

Service to the Church

While attending West Indian Training College, he met Ruth Bailey of Jamaica whom he married on January 1, 1956, shortly after graduation. On January 10 he returned to the Bahamas with his wife and was immediately employed by Bahamas Mission of Seventh-day Adventists. He was assigned to the South Andros district with six small churches and a church school. While Pastor McKinney was fully engaged in evangelism and nurturing the members, his wife Ruth served as principal and teacher for the small church school. In spite of his busy schedule, he found time to fellowship with the saints and formed some lasting relationships²

In 1958 Pastor McKinney and his wife, along with their first child Rosalie, were transferred to Nassau. He was appointed secretary-treasurer of the Bahamas Mission. At the same time, he became the pastor of the Shirley Street Church (now Centreville Seventh-day Adventist Church). He was the first native son to serve as secretary-treasurer of the mission and pastor of the Shirley Street Church, the first Adventist church in the Bahamas.

In 1960, Pastor McKinney was ordained, and the Bahamas Mission awarded him a bursary to complete a bachelor's degree in theology at West Indies College. When he returned to Nassau in 1962, he was again appointed pastor of the Centreville Church. It was during this period that he became the first Bahamian pastor to conduct a major city-wide evangelistic campaign. Assisted by Pastor L. V. McMillan, Pastor McKinney launched the Johnson Park Crusade on Farrington Road, in 1963. After the first six weeks, he conducted nightly Bible classes before the sermons.³ This effort of the "Mac and Mac" team resulted in a baptism of 87 souls and the establishment of the Johnson Park Church, the fourth Adventist church to be organized on the island of New Providence.

Pastor McKinney was credited with another first when he was appointed president of the Bahamas Mission in 1964.⁴ While serving as acting president, he organized the first convention in the history of the Bahamas Mission on August 9, 1964.⁵ It was not long after his appointment as president of the mission that he was instrumental in preparing the mission for conference status. Accordingly, in 1968 he became the first president of the new Bahamas Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

His administrative skills were noticed by the West Indies Union Committee, so in 1975 Pastor McKinney was invited to serve as secretary of the union. He was the first and only Bahamian to serve in this position.

When he returned to the Bahamas in 1981, he accepted the Grand Bahama pastoral district. The first tent crusade he conducted in this new district yielded more than 100 converts. His dedication and hard work resulted in significant growth for the Adventist Church on the island. In addition to the growth in membership and an elementary school, Grand Bahama Academy was established with Ruth McKinney as the principal.⁶

During the adjustments in pastoral districts in 1986, Pastor McKinney was transferred to Nassau and assigned to the Grant's Town Church. Later that year, he was reelected president of the Bahamas Conference. Driven by the philosophy that "evangelism is the lifeblood of the church," Pastor McKinney continued to provide support and encouragement for the pastors to involve the churches in a strong evangelism program. This strategy resulted in a steady increase in church membership. By the end of 1989, 1,800 new members were added to the Adventist Church in the Bahamas.⁷

In 1990, Pastor McKinney became the first Bahamian to be elected president of West Indies Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists with headquarters in Mandeville, Jamaica.⁸ This union included the Bahamas, the Cayman Islands, Jamaica, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. As union president, Pastor McKinney was responsible for chairing the executive committee of the union, West Indies college board, and Andrews Memorial Hospital board. He also served as a member of the executive committee of the Inter-American Division. Pastor McKinney led the charge for better pay for the workers; and he was successful in getting the union committee and the various boards that he chaired to vote significant increases for the workers.

Because of failing health, he retired and returned home September 1, 1997. However, he continued to be a source of encouragement to those who visited him during his later years. He enjoyed engaging others in serious discussion on history and biblical themes. His favorite saying during these discussions was, "Iron sharpens iron."

Honored and Respected

Pastor McKinney was a "people person" who related well with workers as well as church members. In fact, he was honored and respected by people within and without the Seventh-day Adventist Church. On December 31, 1993, he was honored by Queen Elizabeth II with the Order of the British Empire (OBE). Also, Shaw University conferred on him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree, and Northern Caribbean University conferred on him an honorary Doctor of Public Service degree.

After serving the Seventh-day Adventist Church in various capacities for more than 41 years, Pastor Silas Napoleon McKinney died on July 16, 2016. The government of the Bahamas granted him a state funeral. This historic memorial and burial service was held in Nassau, Bahamas, July 31, 2016, and leading government and church officials attended the service.⁹

At his funeral service, government and church officials expressed their appreciation for his life of service to the church and the nation. In his remarks, the prime minister of the Bahamas, Rt. Hon. Perry G. Christie, said that Pastor Silas McKinney was a "pacesetter;" and he gave the pastor credit for starting a movement that resulted in the Adventist Church having two conferences and establishing the headquarters of a new union in The Bahamas.¹⁰

Pastor Israel Leito, president of the Adventist Church in Inter-America, observed that Pastor McKinney was "an exemplary leader in all aspects of church life." Also, in a letter to Mrs. McKinney, the Adventist world church president, Pastor Ted N.C. Wilson, remarked that "the world church has been enriched through Pastor McKinney's labors."¹¹

Pastor Everett Brown, president of the Adventist Church in Jamaica, reflecting on Pastor McKinney's life and work, said, "I wish to remember Elder McKinney as the leader whose ministry and leadership was characterized by his commitment to the mission of the Church in the West Indies Union and his passion for the overall welfare and development of all sectors of the workforce."¹²

Dr. Leonard Johnson, speaking as president of the Atlantic Caribbean Union observed that Pastor McKinney was "an effective chairman;" and "he surely knew how to keep a committee going without giving the appearance of rushing the discussions or denying wise contributions."¹³

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. E. H. Schneider, "News Notes – Bahamas Mission," *British West Indies Union Visitor*, February 1956, 3.

2. Ibid.

3. E. H. Schneider, "Nassau Effort Yields 87 Baptisms," *West Indies Union Visitor*, September-October 1963, 2.

4. "West Indies Union News Briefs," *West Indies Union Visitor*, July-August 1964, 5.

5. S. N. McKinney, "Convention in the Bahamas," *West Indies Union Visitor*, September-October 1964, 5.

6. Jeff K. Thompson, *The Rise of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Bahamas and the Cayman Islands* (George Town, Grand Cayman, 1992), 56.

7. Ibid., 63.

8. Ibid., 72.

9. <https://news.adventist.org/en/all.news/news/go/2016-08-01-the-bahamas-former--ad>. Accessed November 25, 2019.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

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