

# Sanders, Floyd

## Orval (1904–1993)

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### DOUGLAS MORGAN

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Floyd O. Sanders, pastor-evangelist and administrator, served as president of five conferences in the United States over a period of 30 years.

### Early Years (1904-1927)

Augustus Sanders (1880-1962), a farmer in southeastern Indiana, and his wife, Elsie Stanley Sanders (1882-1968), a church school teacher, raised their two sons, Floyd Orval (born September 19, 1904) and Wilbur Stanley (born September 9, 1908) in the Seventh-day Adventist faith. Both sons became ministers. The family farmed in Gibson County when Floyd was born but relocated to Sullivan, about 50 miles to the north, by the time Wilbur was born.<sup>1</sup>

Floyd graduated from New Lebanon High School in 1923, then enrolled at Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC) in Berrien Springs, Michigan, in 1924, following in the footsteps of his mother, a student at the college during its earliest years, a little over two decades before. He graduated from the ministerial course in 1927 and was leader of the Ministerial Seminar during his final year.<sup>2</sup>

On August 22, 1927, Floyd married Mary Elmyra Bowers (1906-2003), who was also from the Hoosier state. Mary had taken two years in the literary course at EMC with the goal of becoming a Bible worker.<sup>3</sup>

### Indiana Conference Pastor and President (1927-1943)



Floyd O. Sanders

Credit: *Central Union Reaper*, September 4, 1962.

The Indiana Conference issued Floyd a ministerial license in 1927 but assigned both him and Mary to teach church school in Lafayette for the next two years and engage in evangelism full-time during the summer. In 1929, they both applied to the Ministerial Internship Plan recently begun by the General Conference to pay the salaries of promising young workers whose opportunities to get a start in ministry might be limited by the state conferences' lack of resources. F. A. Wright, the Indiana Conference president, saw Floyd and Mary as an evangelistic team, and recommended that the internship plan fund a salary for both (albeit at a lesser rate for Mary). The committee administering the plan thought this would set a bad precedent and approved only Floyd's application.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to a letter of approval for Floyd's internship application, a second letter, also dated July 24, 1929, arrived informing the young couple that the General Conference Committee had approved a call from the Southern Asia Division for them to take up evangelistic work in India. However, the doctor who examined them reported that both had health conditions that could be dangerously exacerbated by the overseas assignment, so the Sanders' thought it best to continue their work in Indiana.<sup>5</sup>

After several months of evangelistic work as an intern, the conference called Sanders back to Lafayette in March 1930, to teach Bible classes to nurses in training and serve as a chaplain at Wabash Valley Sanitarium, as well as pastor the church in Lafayette. He continued there until 1931, and then throughout the rest of the 1930s ministered full-time in the Indiana Conference. Sanders was ordained to gospel ministry at the Conference camp meeting in July 1934. On March 5, 1937, Leon Lloyd Sanders, Floyd and Mary's only child, was born in Terre Haute, Indiana.<sup>6</sup>

Sanders was ministering in South Bend when, in August 1940, he was elected president of the Indiana Conference.<sup>7</sup> He would remain a conference president for the remaining 30 years of his denominational service. Not yet 36, he now was responsible for oversight of 78 churches with 4,271 members and a team of 64 ministers, teachers, colporteurs, and other workers.<sup>8</sup> He was also chair of the board governing Indiana Academy in Cicero. In that role he led fundraising for improvements such as a "dairy house" to provide pasteurized milk not only for the students and staff but for sale to the community and a new woodworking shop. The school's enrollment nearly doubled from 55 in 1940 to 118 in 1943.<sup>9</sup>

## Two Two-state Conferences (1943-1954)

In the summer of 1943, Sanders accepted a call to the presidency of the Carolina Conference, its territory covering both North and South Carolina and its headquarters located in Charlotte, North Carolina. While there, Sanders received in 1945 another call to the mission field outside North America, this one to serve as president of the Caribbean Union Mission, headquartered in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. At this point in his career, Sanders had the advantage of being still relatively young yet with a track record of successful leadership experience. However, he and Mary declined the call because of the same health concerns as with the call to India years

before, as well as a sense of commitment to the mission land of the American South.<sup>10</sup> The conference lost close to one-third of its 3,780 members when its predominantly-black congregations transferred to the new South Atlantic Conference that began operation in 1946. Strong growth over the next two years brought Carolina's membership to nearly 3,000 by the end of 1948.<sup>11</sup>

Sanders' next assignment took him to another two-state conference. In the summer of 1948 the family moved from Charlotte to Little Rock, Arkansas, headquarters of the Arkansas-Louisiana Conference.<sup>12</sup> Because Arkansas-Louisiana was part of the Southwestern Union, Sanders now sat on the boards of two colleges: Southwestern Junior College (SJC) in Keene, Texas, and Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska. The latter was designated as the "four-year" bachelor's degree-granting school for students in the Southwestern Union before the union had its own four-year college beginning in 1963. Sanders also chaired the board of Ozark Academy in Gentry, Arkansas.<sup>13</sup>

Arkansas-Louisiana showed a number of signs of growth during Sanders' presidency, and he seemed to enjoy his six years there. "During our stay in this field we have seen the membership grow from 2,700 to more than 3,300 in spite of constant loss from transfers out of the conference," he pointed out in 1954 as he said "farewell" to the constituency. Eight new churches and five new health and welfare centers had been organized and, in a wave of new construction, 30 new houses of worship and school buildings erected. At the same time, the conference's financial reserves were strengthened and now met the standard set by General Conference policy.

<sup>14</sup>

## Kansas and Nebraska (1954-1970)

Eight-year tenures in the Kansas Conference (1954-1962) and then the Nebraska Conference (1962-1970) comprised the second half of Sanders' 30-year run as a conference president.<sup>15</sup> Development of secondary schools stood out in his administration of both conferences. At Enterprise Academy in Kansas, a new administration building was completed in time for the semester beginning in January 1962, and construction of a new boys' dormitory was underway by the time Sanders accepted the call to Nebraska that summer.<sup>16</sup> At Platte Valley Academy in Nebraska, a new food service building opened in 1964 and a new administration building was completed in 1968.<sup>17</sup> When his presidency of the Nebraska Conference concluded in 1970, Sanders had served a remarkable 22 consecutive years on the Union College board.

## Final Years (1970-1993)

After retirement in 1970, the Sanders located in the Keene, Texas, area. Floyd devoted time to his avocation as an oil painter and, along with supporting local churches in a variety of ways, the couple sometimes traveled to shows where his paintings were sold.<sup>18</sup>

Elder Sanders passed away on April 27, 1993, in Cleburne, Texas, at the age of 88.<sup>19</sup> Mary moved to Thousand Oaks, California, in 1997 to live near their son, Leon. She died in California, on January 2, 2003, at age 96, and on January 8 was interred alongside her husband in Keene Memorial Park, Keene, Texas.<sup>20</sup>

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