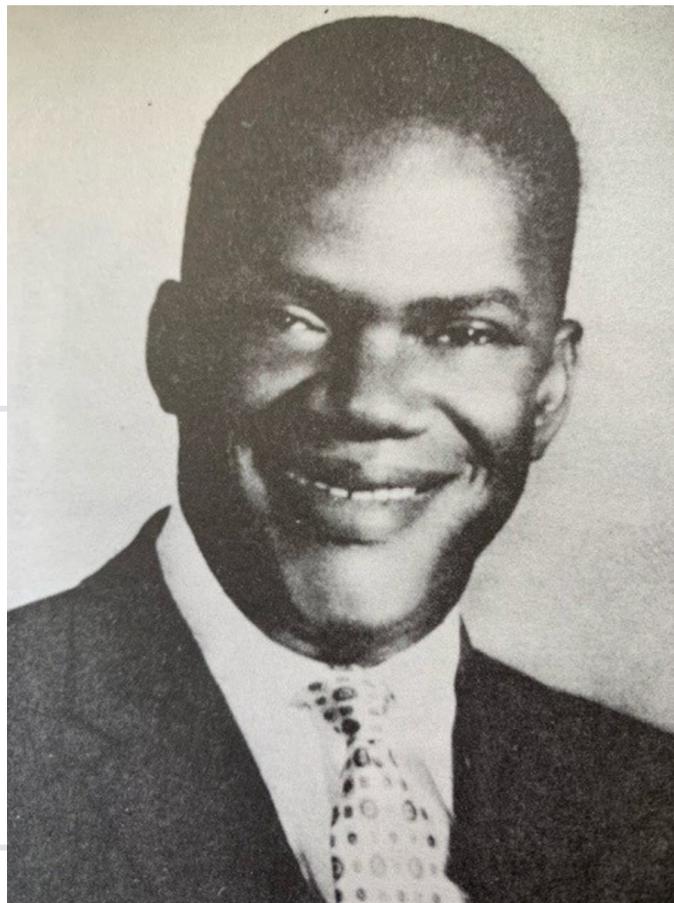


Walters, Hiram Sebastian "Tim" (1917–2001)

GLENN O. PHILLIPS, AND NORMA GOODLETT

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Norma Goodlett



Hiram "Tim" Walters

From H.R. Bennett, *Hiram Walters, Adventist Champion* (Mandeville, Jamaica: Eureka Press, 1997).

Panamanian-born Hiram Sebastian "Tim" Walters was a dynamic evangelist, pastor and church administrator whose very significant leadership skills transformed and invigorated the growth of the Adventist faith in Jamaica for over thirty years.

Walters first served as the youngest conference president in all of the Inter-American Division when he was elected conference president, serving from 1952 to 1961, of the West Jamaica Conference. He next led the Central Jamaica Conference between 1961 and 1968 before serving as the first union conference president of the West Indies Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventist serving 1968-1976.¹

Walters was one of the most dedicated and charismatic church leaders of his generation across the Inter-American Division. He was highly regarded by his peers, fellow church members, and the wider Jamaican community, as well as in many other parts of the Caribbean, on account of his remarkable vision and eagerness to bring about meaningful and positive changes in the lives of his fellow leaders and the laity. His various, insightful methods produced significant church growth across Jamaica. Colleague Elder D. W. McFarlane remarked in one of his biographies that "Pastor Walters was endowed with such a plethora of leadership skills that he would have been a great leader in any area of human activity."² For his impact on religious affairs across the Jamaican Society, the government of Jamaica awarded him the Order of Distinction, and he was conferred a

Doctor of Divinity by the Northern Caribbean University in recognition for services to the Church he loved dearly and the wider Jamaican community that he served for decades.

Early Life

Hiram Sebastian “Tim” Walters was the eighth child and first son of Samuel and Amy Walters born on July 15, 1917, in La Boca, Canal Zone, Panama. His parents became Adventist almost two years before his birth. His mother, a Bible worker, began calling him, Timothy after the New Testament missionary and her term of endearment remained with him for the rest of his life. During his decades of ministerial leadership, his colleagues affectionately referred to him as “Uncle Tim.”³

From his youth, Walters aspired to be a minister and his mother enabled him to achieve this reality. From a tender age, she enrolled him at a small Adventist school that she had co-founded and later sent him to the Las Cardas Adventist Academy in the Canal Zone in Panama.

When he was thirteen years old, his parents moved to Jamaica and the following year, during 1931, his mother sent him and his sister to study at the island’s Adventist school, West Indies College, in Mandeville. He quickly became one of the most active students involved in numerous student organizations, and after high school enrolled in the college’s theology department. During these years he served as president of the Boys Club, the United Student Movement and the Student Ministerial Association. He graduated in the class of 1940 and was elected the president of the graduation class.⁴

Career, Education, and Family

Young Walters was immediately invited to join the gospel ministry in Jamaica. In 1942, he married Lucille Anna Jones from Darliston, Westmoreland, Jamaica. She was also a recent graduate of his alma mater and she came from one of the leading Adventist families in the country. Her grand uncle, Mathew Robertson, was among the pioneering Seventh-day Adventists of Jamaica, joining around the turn of the twentieth century. Together, Tim and Lucile Walters served as a dynamic pastor-teacher couple working to promote the expansion of Adventism across Jamaica.

Walters was ordained in 1943. His and his wife’s outstanding services to Adventism in Jamaica quickly caught the attention of the church’s leaders, and they were encouraged to continue their education. They enrolled and began studying at Emmanuel Missionary College, (EMC, now Andrews University) in Berrien Springs, Michigan, but soon transferred to Oakwood College (now Oakwood University) in Huntsville, Alabama, after receiving an invitation from that institution’s president to attend. During his brief EMC experience, Walters became aware of the racial tensions that existed within the church family across the North America Division. He became well known for his willingness to speak in public on race relations in the Adventist Church when it was not

considered by most to be the popular approach to dealing with this sensitive subject. Walters's years at Oakwood College were very active ones. He studied as well as taught in the college's high school. He also became very active in establishing the school's Student Body Association and served as its first student president.⁵

However, just prior to graduation, the Walters returned to Jamaica in 1945 where Tim Walters was appointed the home missionary, educational, and the young people's secretary of the East Jamaican Mission.⁶ His initiatives quickly caught the imagination and aspirations of his colleagues, and in 1956 he was elected to his first of twelve presidential appointments, serving the Adventists believers in Jamaica. His novel administrative approach quickly received praise and high regard from his fellow workers. According to many of his co-workers, he began a new day of vision and support for dynamic evangelism across the conferences that he led as well as the West Indies Union Conference that included the Bahamas, the Cayman Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Walters was a very effective conference and union conference president for during his leadership years, he carefully guided the numerous outreach programs of the church across Jamaica and the rest of the union with the support of his co-leaders as well as the laity across the Caribbean. He faced many challenges and was able, on account of his very strong faith in God, to accomplish most of the goals he envisioned, including church membership growth, the increase in the establishment of various church schools, and numerous improvements in worker benefits.

Walters was also a very effective preacher, and his unique approach was closely studied by his fellow ministers and numerous workers. His approach was most closely studied by Harold R. Bennett who successfully completed a doctoral dissertation on Walters' evangelistic methods, practices, and approaches at Michigan State University in 1970.⁷

Walters's presidency of the West Indies Union Conference from 1968 to 1976⁸ was the pinnacle of his service to Adventism in Jamaica and across the union. He consolidated and expanded all areas of church work, including detailed administrative planning, in the areas of education, evangelism, and community outreach programs. He also served as the chairman of the board of trustees at West Indies College, and during his tenure the institution underwent significant expansions of its curricula, faculty, and building improvements. It also achieved senior college status during this time. Along the way, Walters was often outspoken on many matters and, therefore, was often misunderstood. However, he continued to receive the support of the union's administrative staff, his fellow ministers, other workers, and the laity.

Later Years

After his retirement from the presidency of the West Indies Union in 1976, Walters and his wife lived in Orlando, Florida, where he continued to the Church in Jamaica, despite the distance. He and his wife made frequent trips back to Jamaica. Lucille Walters, who had a distinguished career of her own at West Indies College (now North

Caribbean University), predeceased him after a brief illness. Although their residence was in Orlando, she died in Riverside, California.⁹

During retirement, Tim Walters continued to be acknowledged for his many contributions. One of the most significant acknowledgements and acts of recognition was made by the board of trustees at the West Indies College on August 4, 2001. Named in his honor, the College's new Hiram Sebastian Walters Resource Center, containing over 80,000 volumes and research facilities on the Mandeville, Jamaica, campus, was completed on September 23, 1991. The \$1.5 million Centre was officially opened by the Governor General of Jamaica, Sir Florizel Glasspole on June 7, 1992 before an audience of very appreciative thousands.¹⁰

Walters died on October 2, 2001, leaving thousands of fellow believers to recall his many successful ventures to move the many programs of Adventism across the Caribbean forward. A memorial service was held for him at Orlando Seventh-day Adventist church in Florida. His funeral service was held on the campus of the Northern Caribbean University, at the university's chapel on October 28, 2001. His interment was conducted immediately following at the Oaklawn Memorial Gardens, in Mandeville, Manchester, Jamaica.¹¹

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. "Service of Praise and Thanksgiving to God for the Life of Pastor Hiram Sebastian Walters, O.D., D.D. (Hon.) July 15, 1917- October 2, 2001," and "Life Sketch" at the funeral service held on October 28, 2001, at North Caribbean University Chapel, Mandeville, Jamaica.
2. H. R. Bennett, *Hiram Walters: Adventist Champion*, (Mandeville, Jamaica: Eureka Press, Ltd., 1997), 20, 61, 195.
3. *Ibid.*, 131.
4. *Ibid.*, 40.

5. Ibid., 52.
6. "Meet Our Workers," *The British West Indies Visitor*, October 1945, 1; "East Jamaica Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1949), 131; "West Indies Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1964), 157.
7. See Harold Repton Bennett, "A Rhetorical Analysis of the Preaching of Evangelist Hiram S. Walters, President of the West Indies Union Conference of SDA," (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1970).
8. "West Indies Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Association, 1970), 176-177.
9. Bertram Melbourne to Glenn Phillips, June 10, 2020.
10. See Hiram S. Walters Resource Center, "History," Northern Caribbean University, 2020, accessed August 5, 2020, <https://www.ncu.edu.jm/Library/About/History>.
11. "Service of Praise and Thanksgiving."

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