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Weithers, William Wallace (1907–1993)

GLENN O. PHILLIPS

Glenn O. Phillips, Ph.D. (Howard University, Washington, D.C.), although retired, is actively writing, researching, lecturing, and publishing. He was a professor at Morgan State University, Howard University, and the University of the Southern Caribbean. He has authored and published numerous articles, book reviews, and books, including "The African Diaspora Experience," "Singing in a Strange Land: The History of the Hanson Place Church," "African American Leaders of Maryland," and "The Caribbean Basin Initiative."

William Wallace Weithers was a pioneering Caribbean colporteur, evangelist, pastor, and church administrator who served as a conference and union president. His active service spanned more than forty years, beginning in the early

1930's in places where there were very few or no Seventh-day Adventists in the population and where members of the established clergy were often hostile. He also worked in countries where he established some of the first SDA congregations and churches. He was one of the first Adventists to work in Dutch Guiana, South America. He later served as a pastor in large city congregations and, decades later, as president of the Guyana Conference (1972-1975). He served as president of the Caribbean Union Conference (1975-1978) until his retirement from active service.

William Wallace Weithers was the second child of William Wallace and Elizabeth Springer Weithers. He was born in Georgetown, British Guiana (Guyana) on May 15, 1907.² His early schooling was at the Georgetown Anglican Primary School, and from an early age he sang in the choir of the Georgetown Anglican Church. After completing primary school, he became an apprentice shoemaker during his late teenage years, and he came in contact with Seventh-day Adventist believers and literature in Georgetown. This Adventist exposure led him to attend a series of evangelistic meetings in the city conducted by the president of the British Guiana Mission, Elder A. A. Carcallen, who baptized him. Not long afterwards, he was encouraged to continue his formal education at the recently established East Caribbean Training School in Trinidad.

Weithers enrolled at the school on March 8, 1928, less than a year after it admitted its first students. He joined the school's student body who was involved in a work-study program that transformed the former cocoa farm into a campus with buildings containing dormitories, classrooms, and administrative offices. Weithers completed his course of study in February 1931³ and immediately returned to his homeland. Within a year he married Ismay Alicock of Georgetown on January 20, 1932, and to this union were born eight children, one daughter, Leola, and seven sons: Wallace, Merille, Arthur, Clive, Joseph, Kenneth, and Elvin.⁴ Within months of his marriage, he and his new bride were sent by the British Guiana Mission to continue the promising early beginnings and growth of Seventh-day Adventism in neighboring Dutch Guiana, specifically in its capital of Paramaribo.

At this time the British Guiana Mission was responsible for the spread of Adventism in the neighboring colonies of Dutch and French Guiana. On this pioneering assignment, where speaking the Dutch language was a necessity to reach most residents, he was joined by Ezekiel Beck, also of British Guiana, who knew how to speak Dutch. Together they sold books and conducted Bible studies, followed by an evangelistic crusade at Nickerie that resulted in 11 new converts.

After three years in Dutch Guiana, he returned to his homeland and spent the next 11 years as one of the district pastors of vast regions of this country, holding revivals and frequent evangelistic crusades. These led to numerous baptisms and the establishing of companies and churches.⁵ He encouraged and supported the building of churches with the direct assistance of the congregations.⁶

By 1941, Pastor Weithers was appointed the Guiana Conference's only field secretary, although he had not been ordained at that time.⁷ He continued his work as district pastor, often facing many challenging circumstances--ranging from covering great distances between his congregations, and traveling by bicycle, by foot, and by boat. His dedication to his work was exemplary. Soon after his ordination in 1947, he received a call to serve as the district pastor on the island of St. Lucia, located in the Leeward Islands Mission,⁸ where he continued to serve a growing number of churches and companies that existed across this colony.⁹

In the mid 1950s, Elder Weithers became the district pastor for the colony of Dominica, followed by a two-year pastoral assignment on the island of Antigua.¹⁰ In 1958 he began serving in his last pastoral assignment in Barbados that included the King Street Church in Bridgetown and six others congregations.¹¹ After a four-year tenure, Elder Weithers was appointed in 1962 as the home missionary and publishing secretary for the recently organized East Caribbean Conference of SDA. This territory stretched from the U.S. Virgin Islands across most of the Lesser Antilles and as far south as Grenada.¹² He had extensive experience working with most of the leaders in each of those countries.

His next responsibility came between 1970 and 1975 when he served as the Caribbean Union Conference's secretary for the departments of lay activities, radio/TV, and Sabbath School. The crowning experience of Elder Weithers' ministry came when he was elected president of the Guiana Mission in 1972 and worked to improve church-state relations with the government of his homeland and promote new methods of public evangelism between 1972 and 1975. By the mid-1970s, he was the most active senior church administrator in the Caribbean Union. He was elected president of the Caribbean Union Conference, serving between 1975 and 1978, when he retired from active service.¹³ Nevertheless, his obituary acknowledged, "...he continued to pastor for many years after."

Elder Weithers passed after a brief illness on April 4, 1993, in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, where he lived after his retirement, leaving his wife of 61 years and most of his children and their families. He was one of the longest serving pastors and administrators serving his church in various positions for more than 60 years. His funeral was held on April 13, 1993, at the Stanmore SDA Church, in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, and his burial was conducted at the nearby Mucurapo Cemetery.¹⁴

SOURCES

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"The Student Enrollment Record of Caribbean Training College, 1927-1947." Maracas Valley, Trinidad: Caribbean Training College, 1947.

"William Wallace Weithers, 1907-1993, In Memoriam." Obituary at his funeral at the Stanmore Avenue SDA Church, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, April 13, 1993. In author's private collection.

NOTES

1. Ian Green, "A Glance at Some of Our Ministers," in *The Centenary of Adventism in Trinidad and Tobago, 1891-1991* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: South Caribbean Conference of SDA Publication, 1991), 55; Eric John Murray, *A History of Seventh-day Adventists in Trinidad and Tobago, 1891-1981* (Maracas Valley, Trinidad: College Press, 1981), 178.?
2. "William Wallace Weithers, 1907-1993, In Memoriam," Obituary at his funeral at the Stanmore Avenue SDA Church, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, April 13, 1993.?
3. "The Student Enrollment Record of Caribbean Training College, 1927-1947," (Maracas Valley, Trinidad: Caribbean Training College, 1947), 3.?
4. Ibid.?
5. *Caribbean Union Gleanings*, March 1993, 11.?
6. *Inter-American Division Messenger*, August 1993.?
7. Ibid.?
8. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941), 148.?
9. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1947), 122.?
10. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1954), 133.?
11. Glenn O. Phillips, *Seventh-day Adventists in Barbados: Over a Century of Adventism, 1884-1991* (Bridgetown, Barbados: Caribbean Graphics and Letchworth Ltd, 1991), 128; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962), 125.?
12. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1970), 162.?
13. Eric John Murray?
14. Obituary.?

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