



Coastline of Salalah

Photo courtesy Melanie Wixwat.

Sultanate of Oman

SVEN HAGEN JENSEN

Sven Hagen Jensen, M.Div. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA) has worked for the church for over 50 years as a pastor, editor, departmental director, and church administrator in Denmark, Nigeria and the Middle East. Jensen enjoys reading, writing, nature and gardening. He is married to Ingelis and has two adult children and four grandchildren.

The Sultanate of Oman is an independent monarchy on the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula.

Overview of the Country

As a maritime nation, Oman holds a strategically important position at the mouth of the Persian Gulf.¹ It covers an area of 309,500 square kilometers (119,500 square miles) and in 2016 had an estimated population of 4.4 million.² The people are predominantly Arab, but other nationalities include Indians, Baluchis, and Africans. Forty-five percent of the population are expatriates, most of whom are workers from Southeast Asia and the Philippines. The religion is mainly the Ibadhi sect of Islam. An estimated 6.5 percent of the population are Christian, and in Muscat alone, the capital of Oman, several different Christian groups are active. These are mainly Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant.³ The Sultanate of Oman is a territory of the Gulf Field in the Middle East and North Africa Union, a mission attached to the General Conference.

Origins of Seventh-day Adventist Work

The first known presence of Seventh-day Adventists in Oman dates back to the late 1970s when Adventist nurses arrived to work in the healthcare system. With the arrival of Dr. and Mrs. Selvan and family from India in July 1985, serious steps were taken to locate other Seventh-day Adventists for the purpose of forming an Adventist group. Not being successful in the beginning, the Selvans attended the meetings of another congregation in the capital Muscat in order to have Christian fellowship. They continued the search for Adventists in Oman. Dr. Selvan obtained the address of the Middle East Press in Beirut, Lebanon, and got in contact with the manager, Moses Elmadjian. He directed Selvan to the headquarters of the Middle East Union in Nicosia, Cyprus. In 1988, Moses Elmadjian and the Publishing Director, Yousuf Farag, visited the Sultanate as the first official representatives from the Middle East Union. They used the opportunity to promote health and lifestyle books.

This led to closer ties with the Middle East Union administration. Upon the request of Dr. Selvan, David Dunn, leader of the Gulf Section (currently the Gulf Field), visited Muscat for a week in July 1990 and conducted nightly meetings in the Selvan residence. One of the Selvans' friends invited Mrs. Mercy Surendra, who also was a Seventh-day Adventist. Unbeknown to the Selvans, Mrs. Surendra and a few other Adventists had been meeting regularly in Al Hail west of Muscat. Dr. Selvan then proceeded to put small notices in various hospitals in Oman, and the response was encouraging. Soon other Seventh-day Adventists were located in Al Nadha, Khoula, Sultan Qaboos University, Sohar, Sur, Sinaw, Nizwa, Rustaq, Bani Bu Ali, and even in Salalah (more than 1,000 kilometers from Muscat). All of them were Adventists from other countries working in Oman. Weekly Sabbath meetings were held in Al Hail with a growing number of attendees.

Organization and Growth

On July 12, 1991, Sven H. Jensen from the Middle East Union visited Muscat and formally organized the Adventist group into a company. When the first step of organization was achieved, a request for full recognition as a church in the Sultanate of Oman was filed with the Protestant Church of Oman. It was initially denied, but

further discussion by the newly appointed pastor for The United Arab Emirates and Oman, Steve Brown, and a resubmission of the request resulted in full recognition on September 11, 1995. Two months later, on November 11, the company was formally organized into a church in the presence of Sven H. Jensen from the Middle East Union and Dennis Pollatos from the Gulf Section. The leader of the company, Surendra Bastiam Pillai, was elected the elder of the church.

The first known baptism in Oman was on May 13, 1995, when Edith Gestoso committed her life to Jesus Christ and joined the church. Since then more migrant workers and their young people have been baptized and added to the church.

As in many other countries in the Middle East, Saturday had been an ordinary day for work, business, and education. Some of the Adventist families found it difficult to get the Sabbath off and were sending their children to school on Sabbath. This affected not only church attendance but also had a negative impact on the spiritual lives of the members. When the weekend was officially changed from Thursday through Friday to Friday through Saturday on May 3, 2013, it was a day of rejoicing and thanksgiving for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Oman. This gave the church family, including school age children, the freedom to worship on Sabbath. The church group in Muscat has been meeting at various locations during its existence. At present (2019) it meets for Friday evening vespers in the Bible Society Hall in Darsait and for Sabbath morning Bible study and divine service at the Al Noor Church.

Though the majority of the members live in the capital Muscat, there have also been pockets of believers elsewhere in the Sultanate. Some have stayed for a long time while others have moved to new places or back to their home countries. Those staying on in the interior of Oman have been giving their gentle witness for Christ in their places of work. In Salalah a group of Seventh-day Adventists had been meeting regularly on Sabbath mornings since 1994 under the leadership of brothers Enoch and David Masih. The regular services stopped for a while when David Masih died in 1999, and some of the members went back to their home countries. When the Camanzo family arrived in Salalah in 2004 the meetings resumed. The church group is presently applying for a place of worship in the Christian Center and working for recognition with the Protestant Church in Oman.

In November 2017 the Seventh-day Adventist group in Sohar was recognized as a church, and the members have been worshipping there in the Protestant church facilities under the leadership of Richmond Quidpuan.

Membership Statistics

In 2019 the membership of Muscat SDA Church stands at 59 baptized members with a church attendance of about 110 each Sabbath. An estimated 150 Seventh-day Adventists live in Oman.

Pastors Serving the Church in Oman

Dennis Pollatos (1992-1995), Steve Brown (1995-2001), Victor Harewood (2002-2012), Michael Collins (2012-2013), Paulo de Oliveira (2013-2016), and Steven Manoukian (2016-2019).

SOURCES

"History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Sultanate of Oman." Unpublished paper for the Middle East North Africa Mission, Beirut, Lebanon, 2016.

"Middle East: OMAN." *The World Fact Book*. Accessed May 28, 2019.

<https://www.cia.gov/LIBRARY/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>

Muscat Seventh-day Adventist Church, Sultanate of Oman, 1990-2015. Unpublished booklet prepared for the 25-year jubilee celebration, Ras Al Khaimah, September 2015.

Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, Second Edition. Revised edition, 2 vols. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996. S.v. "Oman, Sultanate of."

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise stated, this article is based on the author's personal knowledge working in a church administrative unit from 1991-2001, being an eyewitness, knowing people, and being in correspondence with them.
2. "World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision." United Nation Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Population Division. The last census was taken in 2010 and gave a result of 2,773,479. "Final Results of Census in 2010." National Center for Statistics and Information.
3. "Middle East: OMAN," *The World Fact Book*, accessed May 28, 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/LIBRARY/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring, MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000