

# Joseph, Maurice Ambrose (1910–2010)

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JEROME JOSEPH, AND MARILYN BELL-JOSEPH

Jerome Joseph

Marilyn Bell-Joseph

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Maurice Joseph was a pastor, educator, and pioneer of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Caribbean.

## Early Life

Maurice Ambrose Joseph was born on May 1, 1910, in La Taste, Saint Patrick's, Grenada, to Hamilton and Anora "Rose" (Sylvester) Joseph. He was the second of seven children. However, he was predeceased by his parents and six siblings. Pastor Joseph's initial years were spent in Grenada, before the family migrated to Siparia, Trinidad. In 1929, while living in Siparia, he was introduced to Adventism by Patrick Phipps at the age of 19 and became a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA).<sup>1</sup>

## Education and Marriage

In 1943, Maurice enrolled at the Caribbean Training College (CTC), later Caribbean Union College (CUC), now University of the Southern Caribbean (USC), from which he obtained his first diploma. He was also elected class president. In 1968, Maurice received a certificate in Public Relations from Andrews University Extension School. Subsequently, he was awarded diplomas in theology and philosophy from Saint Andrews Collegiate Church, London. Through correspondence studies, he obtained diplomas in psychology and herbal medicine. His wisdom and intellectual sharpness were heightened by his lifelong pursuit of knowledge and a unique relationship with God.

Maurice Joseph married Sheila Straker of Barbados in Barbados on December 19, 1948.<sup>2</sup> Sheila was a faithful partner in ministry whose contributions were invaluable. They were adoringly devoted to each other and truly exemplified the essence of marriage. From that union, three children were born: Myrtle, Jerome, and Florence. Pastor Joseph later became the adoptive father of Vickie Joseph and the foster parent of Joseph Ragoonanan. He was the father-in-law of Pastor Cyril Horrell, Marilyn Bell-Joseph, and Dr. Garfield Danclar. At the time of his demise, he was the grandfather of several, and also a great-grandfather. Both Sheila and Myrtle preceded him in death.

## Ministry

Pastor Joseph was involved in pioneering work in several regions of the Caribbean. His career path encompassed education and religion, although defining lines were somewhat indistinguishable. While still a student at CTC, he was called to teach in Guyana, an experience that was quite challenging and involved working in malaria-infested regions of the country. He also taught in Saint Lucia. In Dominica, where he opened the first SDA elementary school, he sometimes had to walk for several hours in dense forests and drenching rain to reach church members. He was the first principal of the Seventh-day Adventist Intermediate School in Bridgetown, Barbados. His employment as head teacher spanned SDA primary schools in Trinidad, Barbados, and Antigua.

Maurice Joseph officially entered the gospel ministry in 1952 and was ordained two years later.<sup>3</sup> As a minister of the SDA Church, he pastored numerous congregations in Saint Lucia, Anguilla, Saint Martin, Dominica, Montserrat, and Trinidad and Tobago. When he went to Tobago, he focused on evangelism and establishing new churches, in spite of the fact that, initially, he was the only SDA pastor for the existing 13 churches throughout the island. His evangelistic efforts continued in Trinidad, where he encouraged the youth in the Sangre Grande district to conduct crusades and other outreach programs. The replication of evangelistic drives wherever he served led to numerous baptisms.

His dedication to his vocation knew no bounds, and throughout his lifetime (even in retirement), he served selflessly and with great sacrifice. He was an Executive Committee member of the East Caribbean Conference of SDA and later of the South Caribbean Conference.

Pastor Joseph was appointed SDA chaplain of the University of the West Indies, Saint Augustine Campus, and the Mausica Teachers' College from 1973 to 1979, during which tenure he authored and produced the highly respected periodic pamphlet for university students "The Chaplain Answers Questions." A call to his alma mater, CUC, confirmed his appointment, subsequently, as dean of men and church pastor.

In addition to his professional duties, he was involved in community service. He was an unofficial member of the Board of Health, Montserrat (1959/60), and a member of the Management and General Committees for the Community Center in Scarborough, Tobago (1963–1966), and the Cultural and Mental Health Association, Tobago (1962–1966). Other achievements of Pastor Joseph included becoming a fellow of the Emerson College Research Council, Canada; being listed in the *Dictionary of International Biography* (1975); and being honored in 2004 by the CUC Alumni Association in recognition of dedication, service, and continuous support for CUC.<sup>4</sup>

Pastor Joseph loved to visit church members. It did not matter to him how big the district was; he knew where each one lived and went to their homes. But he never visited alone. He would always take an elder or his wife. Sometimes he would take his son. At times, he took his entire family with him. Church members saw him as both pastor and friend. This enhanced his ministry and facilitated church management.<sup>5</sup> One of his interns, Dr. Roy Adams, former associate editor of the *Adventist Review*, in referencing Joseph's administrative skills in a delicate church board matter, asserts: "It was vintage JoJo—kind, empathetic, courteous; but also candid, tough,

no-nonsense.” He continued: “Jojo was a scholar and a thinker. . . . He was not afraid to tackle tough issues. . . . There was a poise about him, a calmness about his demeanor. He exuded confidence.<sup>6</sup>

A true philanthropist, he loved to help people. He assisted many students and gave freely to his alma mater CUC (also later to USC) and various other projects and causes. He would sometimes write checks from his overdraft facility to help people. In other words, he borrowed from the bank to help those who were in need. He unstintingly supported church programs and projects, even leaving part of the proceeds of his estate to church ministry.

## Later Life

After his retirement, Pastor Joseph remained active, even into his late 90s, adopting several churches in which he was involved in advising, teaching, and preaching. His inspiration transcended time and generations, as evidenced by responses to the sermon he preached during the transition from CUC to USC in 2006 when he was 95 years old, delivered without notes and employing references in Greek. The last year of his life was spent in New York, United States of America, where at 99 years of age, he still maintained an active interest and involvement in programs of the neighboring church.

Following a brief struggle with cancer, Pastor Maurice Ambrose Joseph passed away in New York at midday on Thursday, August 5, 2010, at the age of 100 years, and was laid to rest in Trinidad on Wednesday, August 18, 2010. His was a gentle and peaceful death, reminiscent of the text, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.”<sup>7</sup> The Lord was wonderfully gracious in the way he brought his servant unto Himself, a servant who will always be loved by those who knew him.

## Legacy

Apart from the physical and tangible legacies left by Pastor M. A. Joseph in the form of church and school edifices, his legacy lives on in the testimonies of souls saved, the accomplishments of interns and students at all levels, and the inspiration passed on to all constituencies. His family, colleagues, and church members throughout the Caribbean and in the United States remember him fondly as a visionary; leader, kind but firm; companion; mentor; caring, compassionate counselor; and truly a gentleman. Faculty, staff, and students who interacted with M. A. Joseph while he served as dean of men and head of the College Church at CUC testify to the principles he espoused and lived by—principles of, inter alia, integrity, commitment, dedication, generosity, humor, fairness, justice, mercy, and humility, attributes he encouraged in others.

According to Dr. Curtis Fox, marriage and family therapist, on reflecting on Joseph’s passing, “Pastor Joe was . . . a servant of God and a friend to man. My own life was touched by his kindness, love, and support in ministry. His keen mind, and his calm nature were remarkable. He led a full life for God’s glory.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Pastor Maurice

Ambrose Joseph had a profound impact on the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its mission, particularly in the areas of education and ministry, as well as on the wider society, in community service and nation-building. Even now, his influence permeates the lives of those who were privileged to know him.

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## NOTES

1. Maurice A. Joseph, "Then and Now," special issue, *Caribbean Union Conference Ministerial Association Review*, 2004, 6.
2. Ibid.
3. "Pastor Maurice Joseph, M.H., FECRC," *100 Plus Distinguished Alumni of Caribbean Union College*, February 2005, 23.
4. Ibid.
5. Jerome Joseph, personal knowledge from interactions with Pastor Joseph's pastoral ministry from 1962 to 1976.
6. Roy Adams, "Memories of my Internship with Pastor M. A. Joseph," special issue, *Caribbean Union Conference Ministerial Association Review*, 2004, 3.
7. Ps. 116:15 (KJV).
8. Curtis Fox, personal knowledge from working in the South Caribbean Conference from 1985 to 1992.

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