

Middle Russian Mission

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The Middle Russian Mission was one of the three church units into which the Russian Mission was divided in 1901. Since it covered vast territory, it was a temporary church unit, which disappeared as it continued to be subdivided. It was dissolved c. 1920.

Territory and Statistics

Territory: The Governorates of Kaluga, Moghilev, Moscow, Orel, Penza, Riazan, Smolensk, Tambov, Tula, Tver, Vladimir, Voronesh, Yaroslav (1917)¹

Membership (1915): 163²

Churches (1915): 7³

Origin of Seventh-day Adventist Work in the Territory

Colporteurs began working in several cities in the territory as early as the 1890s, as can be seen from the colporteur reports from *Zions-Wächter*.

The history of Seventh-day Adventist Church in northern Nikolaev Governorate (present day Kirovograd Region) dates back to 1917 when I. Pilkevich, an evangelist and traveling pastor, moved from Odessa to Elizavetgrad (now Kropivnytskyi). Together with his spouse he became actively involved in missionary work. As a result, six people were baptized in the summer of 1918.⁴

The Adventist message came to Poltava Region as early as 1908, with the arrival of evangelist I. Pilkevich⁵ An Orthodox church paper *Poltavskiye Eparkhialnye Vedomosti* stated that the first meeting of Adventist believers in Poltava took place on October 9, 1909, and the first baptismal ceremony was organized in 1910 where 15 people were baptized.⁶

In 1911 Adventists established a commune in the village of Biluhivka near Poltava. They had a daycare, a school and a communal laundry. The church building, where members met for worship every Sabbath, was located in the center of the settlement. The commune used the early church principle of having everything common: cows, horses and sheep belonged to everyone; clothes and personal property were divided equally. The commune

functioned up to the 1930s.⁷

In 1907 several Adventist congregations and companies were already established, by the efforts of foreign evangelists, in the southern part of Kiev Governorate (present day Cherkasy Region), including the villages of Kischentsy (or, according to some archive documents, Kishenki), Dzendzelevka, Khristinovka, Rusalovka, Redkodub, Verkhnyachka and others. There are testimonies that in 1905 a German evangelist was preaching in the city of Uman'. Very soon a local evangelist, Afanasiy Gontar', continued this missionary work and baptized 10 people from Uman' and the surrounding villages.⁸

In 1908 Adventist minister Yu. Skorobreshchuk, from the village of Verkhnyachka, introduced the Stundists of the village of Rebedaylovka to Adventist teaching.⁹

In the village of Redkodub, Lisyanskiy District, the seeds of Adventism were planted by ethnic Germans O. Wildgrube and J. Betcher. Their influence was so great that in 1905 an Adventist church of 26 members was officially established in that village.¹⁰ In 1910 the membership grew to 50. Thanks to the missionary spirit of Redkodub members, several congregations and companies were established in the villages of Kharchenkovo, Frankivka, Semenivka, Kamenny Brod, Pogiblyak, and Chaplinka. In the village of Kislin, Mankivskiy District, the local church grew due to the work of local minister Ippolit Pilkevich.¹¹ The village of Dzendzelivka in the same district also had an Adventist church planted at the beginning of the 20th century. A man named M. Tsibulskiy, a future elder of the local church, who followed the Tolstoyans movement in 1898, became an Adventist in 1908. In 1915 the church in Dzendzelivka had 54 members, and their number grew to 85 a year later!¹²

In 1902 Andrey Venslava and his wife settled in Kiev and organized a small Adventist congregation consisting of six members of German origin. They conducted their meetings in Podol (Konstantinovskaya Street) in the house of Gransberg, a boatman. David Göde, a German colonist, served as a pastor. In 1906 the Kiev church numbered 43 members, and in 1907 they had become 73.¹³

Organizational History

At the meeting of the European General Conference, July 23, 1901, at Friedensau, Germany, it was decided to subdivide the Russian Mission. This was done "on account of its size and the manner in which [members were] distributed" there. Two new entities were formed, the Northern and Southern Russian Missions. These became part of the German Union, formed at the same time.¹⁴ The new Russian church units became eventually three: The Northern and Middle Russian Missions, and the Southern Russian Conference.¹⁵ The Mission's territory was a large swath of Western Russia, between the southwestern part (the Southern Russian Conference) and the northwestern part (the North Russian Mission). It comprised the Governorates of Archangel, Chernigov, Kaluga, Kazan, Kharkov, Kiev, Kostroma, Kursk, Moghilev, Moscow, New Novgorod, Novgorod, Olonetz, Orel, Penza, Perm, Podolia, Poltava, Riazan, St. Petersburg, Simbirsk, Smolensk, Tambov, Tula, Tver, Vitebsk, Valdimir, Vologda, Voronej, Viatka, and Yaroslav.¹⁶ In addition to this, native Russian believers in the territory of the South

Russian Conference also belonged to the Middle Russian Mission.¹⁷ The Mission first appeared in official reports after the fourth quarter of the year. By then members were 200.¹⁸

While the believers in the Southern Russian Conference were German¹⁹ and of various ethnicities in the Northern Russian Mission,²⁰ the Middle Russian Mission was for native Russian believers.²¹ This probably explains why names of officials and participants are often lacking in its reports and articles²²—it was illegal or frowned upon to proselytize Russians.

At a meeting in Alexandrodar, Stavropol, in mid-October 1905, it was decided that all Adventist believers in the territory of the South Russian Conference—both Germans and Russians—be united into the same church unit. This meant that 200 Russian believers moved from the Middle Russian Mission to the South Russian Conference, now called the East Russian Conference.²³

A few years later the growing work in Russia called for the formation of a separate Russian Union. At a meeting in Riga, Latvia, in October 1907, Middle Russian Mission joined with two other fields to organize the union,²⁴ which within a year comprised all the Russian church units.²⁵ The changes took effect the following year.

The vast territory of the Middle Russian Mission was bound to become more fields as membership increased. This happened repeatedly over the following years. At the meeting of the North Russian Mission in Riga, October 1907, the Baltic Conference was organized and took over the Governorate of St. Petersburg from the Middle Russian Mission.²⁶ In the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* of 1908 the Governorate of Kharkov was listed as part of the Southern Russian Conference.²⁷ At the Russian Union meeting in Moscow, March 18–29, 1908, part of the Middle Russian Mission was cut off to form the Little Russian Mission.²⁸ The changes took effect at the start of the following year.²⁹ The Middle Russian Mission lost the Governorates of Chernigov, Kiev, Podolia, and Poltava.³⁰ At the European Division meeting in September 1909, it was decided to organize Siberia into the Siberian Union separate from the Russian Union. The Russian Union agreed to the plan at its annual session, March 3–8, 1910. The changes took effect the following year. The territory from the Middle Russian Mission became part of some of the new Siberian fields. The mission lost the Governorate of Simbirsk to the Volga Mission and those of Kazan, Perm, and Viatka to the Ural Mission.³¹

In 1911 and 1912 the mission gave territory to several church units.³² The White Sea Mission was organized in 1911 and took effect in 1912. It received the Governorates of Archangel, Kazan, Kostroma, New Novgorod, and Vologda.³³ At the Russian Union meeting at Riga in April 1912, part of the Baltic Conference was cut off and organized into the Neva Conference. Both units annexed territory from the Middle Russian Mission: The Governorates of Novgorod and Olonetz went over to the Neva Conference and that of Vitebsk to the Baltic Conference.³⁴ Most likely at the same meeting, the Little Russian Conference, which was then organized, received the Kursk Governorate.³⁵

What was true about the Middle Russian Mission was also true about the Russian Union. By 1913 it had become untenable to administrate the work in the immense empire as one union. At the European Division Council at

Budapest, commencing October 30, it was decided to divide the Russian Union into the East and West Russian Unions.³⁶ The Middle Russian Mission became part of the East Russian Union.³⁷

During World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the Russian Civil War, it became impossible to produce reports of the work of the church in the country.³⁸ When full reports started again in 1923, the Middle Russian Mission had been dissolved,³⁹ though the exact time is unknown. (Perhaps it was in 1920 when the Russian unions were reorganized.) In the same report of 1923, nearly all of its last known territory can be accounted for as belonging to other church units.⁴⁰ In 1920, the Northwest Russian Conference was organized. Part of its territory were the Governorates of Kaluga, Moghilev, Orel, Riazan, Smolensk, Tula, and Yarov.⁴¹ In the same year the Voronesh Mission was organized.⁴² The Governorate Tambow became part of the Saratov Conference⁴³ and the Governorates Moscow, Tver, and Vladimir part of the Central Russian Conference.⁴⁴

List of Presidents

No listing, 1904–1905; Otto Wildgrube, 1906–14; J. Lwoff, 1915–17; no listing, 1918–22.

SOURCES

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"Vierteljahrsbericht der deutschen Union-Konferenz vom 1. Oktober bis 31. Dezember." *Zions-Wächter*, January 28, 1902.

NOTES

1. "Middle Russian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1917), 119.
2. *Annual Statistical Report* (1915), 6.
3. *Annual Statistical Report* (1915), 6.
4. Alexander I. Samoylenko, "Dnieper Conference" manuscript, May 2017.
5. V.G. Dzhulay, *Dom na kamne* (Kiyv: NP, 2003), 12.
6. V.G. Dzhulay, *Dom na kamne*, 13.
7. Roman Sitarchuk, *Adventisty Sed'mogo Dnia v ukrainskikh zemlyakh v sostave Rossiyskoy Imperii* (Poltava: Skaytek, 2008), 168.
8. *Ibid.*, 150.
9. File 64, Fund 127, Ukrainian State Historical Archives, city.
10. Sitarchuk, *Adventisty*, 148.
11. *Ibid.*, 169.
12. *Ibid.*, 151.
13. Roman A. Prodanyuk "Kiev Conference" manuscript, April 2017.
14. Ludwig R. Conradi and O. A. Olsen, "German Camp-Meeting," *ARH*, September 3, 1901, 577.
15. The last reports of the work in "East Europe" are from the second quarter of 1901. See reports in *Zions-Wächter*, July 1901, 76–78. There are no reports from the third quarter. In the fourth quarter report the church units listed are three. "Vierteljahrsbericht der deutschen Union-Konferenz vom 1. Oktober bis 31. Dezember," *Zions-Wächter*, January 20, 1902, 23.
16. "Middle Russian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1906), 74–75.
17. L. R. Conradi, "The Meeting at Alexandrodar," *ARH*, March 8, 1906, 14.

18. "Vierteljahrsbericht der deutschen Union-Konferenz vom 1. Oktober bis 31. Dezember," *Zions-Wächter*, January 20, 1902, 23.
19. The oldest preserved *Yearbook* entry of the Conference gives the territory as the "German colonies of Southeastern Russia." "South Russian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1904), 62. Russian believers in the territory belonged to the Middle Russian Mission. See L. R. Conradi, "The Meeting at Alexandrodar," *ARH*, March 8, 1906, 14.
20. Joh. Sprohge, "Die erste Versammlung der Baltischen Vereinigung," *Zions-Wächter*, December 2, 1907, 400.
21. "Middle Russian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1904), 63.
22. As an example, see the first annual meeting report of the Mission. Such reports in *Zions-Wächter* are usually replete with names of individuals in the committees and offices. The first report from this field, however, does not mention any names and is signed simply "Sch—." Sch—, "Erste allg. Versammlung des mittlerrussischen Missionsfeldes," *Zions-Wächter*, December 19, 1904, 246–47.
23. L. R. Conradi, "The Meeting at Alexandrodar," *ARH*, March 8, 1906, 14.
24. H. Turowski, "Sitzung der Russischen Union," *Zions-Wächter*, December 16, 1907, 409–11.
25. All the Russian church units are listed under the union the year after. "Russian Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1908), 111–14.
26. Joh. Sprohge, "Die erste Versammlung der Baltischen Vereinigung," *Zions-Wächter*, December 2, 1907, 400–401. Sprohge mentions Ingria instead of St. Petersburg. But see "Baltic Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1912), 115.
27. "South Russian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1908), 112–13.
28. J. T. Böttcher, "Russia," *ARH*, May 13, 1909, 19.
29. "Little Russian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1910), 110.
30. "Little Russian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1910), 110.
31. On the organization of the Siberian Union and its fields, see Guy Dail, "The Russian Union Committee Meeting," *ARH*, June 1, 1911, 12.
32. In addition to the fields mentioned in the present article, Conradi's article about the Russian Union meeting at Riga in April 1912 states that "from the Middle Russian Field . . . the Arctic Mission was separated." Ludwig R. Conradi, "New Developments in Eastern Europe," *ARH*, July 4, 1912, 12. It is unclear to which church unit he refers.
33. "White Sea Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1913), 112.

34. Ludwig R. Conradi, "New Developments in Eastern Europe," *ARH*, July 4, 1912, 11–12; "Baltic Conference" and "Neva Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1913), 110–11.
35. "Little Russian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1913), 110.
36. Ludwig R. Conradi, "European Division Council in Budapest," *ARH*, December 18, 1913, 12.
37. "East Russian Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1914), 109–110.
38. For instance, in 1918–20 the *Yearbook* reprinted the 1917 Russian report since it had not received updated reports. "East Russian Union Conference," "Siberian Union Mission," and "West Russian Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1918), 119, 132, 133; same units, *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1919), 121, 126, 128; same units, *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1920), 144, 146, 148. In 1921 the Russian church units did not appear at all.
39. It is mentioned for the last time in the *Yearbook* of 1922, without any statistics. "East Russian Union," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1922), 102.
40. The only Governorate not yet located in territory descriptions is Penza. It does not appear until 1929, then part of the Volga-Kama Conference. That conference was a merger from the Central and Upper Volga Conferences, but information on those is not complete enough in the 1920s to determine in which and when Penza belonged. "Volga-Kama Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1929), 162–63.
41. "Northwest Russian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1923), 104.
42. "Woronesh Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1923), 107.
43. "Saratov Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1923), 108.
44. "Central Russian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1923), 103.

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