

Koilpillai, Gentry Johnson (1930–2021)

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Gentry Johnson Koilpillai served as accountant, auditor, and treasurer in Southern Asia, eventually as the first national Southern Asia Division treasurer.

Family Life

Gentry Johnson Koilpillai (known as "Johnson") was born on October 8, 1930, the fourth child of the Adventist pioneer worker V. D. Koilpillai and his wife Rajammal Samuel.¹ He was born in Madras (Chennai) but spent his childhood like many pastor's children, moving from place to place. His father served in the headquarters of the North Tamil Mission, which moved from Kodaikanal to Ootacamund, and then to Madurai, and also in the Malayalam Mission.² His childhood was spent in Kodaikanal, Ootacamund, and Madurai, where his father served in the North Tamil Mission.

Johnson married Sarojini, the eldest daughter of Y. J. Thomas, another pioneer leader of Tamilnad, on December 13, 1954.³ They were blessed with two children: David and Rani. Johnson lost his father barely two years after he was married.⁴

Education



Gentry Johnson Koilpillai

Photo courtesy of Gordon Christo.

Johnson studied in two schools before he transferred to Lowry Memorial High School in Bangalore. He proceeded to Spicer College in 1949, where he became popular as a member of the College Male Quartet. He graduated in 1953 with a major in business administration and with two minors—education and religion.

In 1961, Johnson went to the United States. He enrolled at Howard University and graduated in 1968 with an M.A. in economics. He went on to complete a Diploma in Accountancy from La Salle University, Chicago, in 1970.

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Career

Johnson Koilpillai began his work for the Church in April 1953 as a typist and instructor in the Voice of Prophecy office in Bangalore. In November of that year, he moved to the business office of the South India Union where he worked as a cashier-accountant for three years. In 1957, Johnson Koilpillai was elected secretary-treasurer of the North Tamil Section, a position he held until he was granted a leave of absence to further his education.

While in the United States, Johnson worked as accountant-in-charge at the Liaison Office of the European Economic Community in Washington, D.C.⁷

Pursuing his desire to serve the Church in India, Johnson Koilpillai gave up his life in the United States in 1974 and returned to India. He was appointed auditor for the South India Union. Three years later he was elected as secretary of Services Association of Seventh-day Adventists (SERVSDA), a private limited company, the corporate body of the Southern Asia Division. He served as the company secretary from 1977 to 1985. During this time, he also served as pastor of the Vepery English Church in Chennai. He took a week of prayer in Kottarakara in 1980 at the conclusion of which five were baptized and more than 20 responded to a call to join a baptismal class.⁸ The following year, his commitment to the church and its mission was recognized as he was ordained to the Gospel ministry during the quinquennial session in 1981. He was presented by Southern Asia Division President Gerald J. Christo and ordained by General Conference representatives Robert H. Pierson and Ralph Thompson.⁹

On February 25, 1985 the Southern Asia Division Executive Committee took the action to appoint Johnson Koilpillai to serve as acting president of the Southern Asia Division while the division officers were away attending meetings at the General Conference headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A. in June and the General Conference Session in New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S.A. from June 27 to July 6, 1985. Koilpillai was elected Southern Asia Division treasurer at the General Conference session in New Orleans.¹⁰ He was the first national to serve in this position, and he was re-elected in 1990 for a second term,¹¹ serving until his retirement in 1992.

Later Service

In retirement, Johnson and Sarojini Koilpillai moved to Azerbaijan in 1994, where Johnson served as finance director for the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). While at work here, an armed man assaulted him. After recovering from this near-death experience, Johnson returned to his post in Azerbaijan. From there

he moved to work for ADRA Sudan and then ADRA South Sudan. In 2002, Johnson returned once more to India, where he served as a consultant for ADRA India and Thailand until 2008. His integrity won the love and respect of those he worked with as well as those he served.¹²

Johnson volunteered his time and talents in promoting the work of the Anantha Ashram Trust in Hosur. He was also actively involved in the Anantha Ashram Church, participating in home visitation, counselling, and community service. He contributed generously, helping many disadvantaged children with their education.¹³

Johnson Koilpillai passed away on August 16, 2021. He will be remembered as a fine example of a Christian who served as custodian of the Church's funds with unquestioned integrity and dignity. He respected and appreciated the work of his subordinates and extended whole-hearted support to his co-officers. Above all, his commitment to service of the Church and to the community was evident to all.

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