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Handbill - Delhi's first major effort.

Photo courtesy of Gordon Christo.

Delhi Metro Region

LABAN RAO MATTUKOYYA, AND GORDON E. CHRISTO

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Delhi Metro Region is part of the Northern India Union in the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists. It was organized in 2003, and its headquarters are in New Delhi, the capital city of India.

Territory: Eleven districts of Delhi state: New Delhi, Central Delhi, East Delhi, North Delhi, North East Delhi, North West Delhi, Shahdara, South Delhi, South East Delhi, South West Delhi, West Delhi.

Statistics as of June 30, 2021: churches, 11; companies, 24; membership, 3355;⁴ population, 31,181,376.²

Earliest Adventists in Delhi

The first Adventists to set foot in Delhi were S. N. Haskell and P. T. Magan, who visited Delhi on their round-the-world tour as a survey journey on behalf of Adventist missionary work in 1890.³ In 1908 there is a report of Rachel Johnson, a former student of Union College, who worked as a colporteur missionary to Delhi. She along with a lady worker studying *zenana* work, helped in selling books in Hindi and Urdu, and obtained subscriptions for the Oriental Watchman paper. They also shared Bible messages with the locals.⁴ In the 1920s Dr. Jessie George worked at the Victoria Zenana Hospital (Now Kasturba Hospital) in Daryaganj.⁵

Beginning Regular Work

N. B. Singh, a missionary from Fiji, was sent by the Australasian Union to start official work in Delhi in the Sabzi Mandi area.⁶ At the beginning of 1923, Delhi had a Sabbath School with six members,⁷ and within a few months he had a congregation ready to organize into a church.⁸ Two years later N. B. Singh was recalled to Fiji, and Pastor Jahan Singh was sent to Delhi in 1925 to carry on the work.⁹

Pastor Shrewsbury and family were also transferred to Delhi from Hapur.¹⁰ Quite likely he looked after the English interests while N. B. Singh and Jahan cared for the vernacular members.

Dr. H. C. Menkel, who headed the Simla Sanitarium, operated an extension of the sanitarium in Delhi during the winter months. He had semiofficial status as the assistant physician to the viceroy and treated top government officials and Indian princes at Delhi. He shifted facilities between Simla and Delhi at government expense.¹¹ Soon after the city of New Delhi was inaugurated in 1931, the sanitarium opened its doors at Prithviraj Rd. in 1932. Since Adventists had no hall for public meetings, church services were held in a small chapel in the sanitarium.¹²

By 1940 there were three churches/companies in Delhi. The union headquarters group met at the union offices in the Regal Buildings of Connaught Place. T. K. Ludgate pastored in Delhi for several years and had two vernacular congregations. Around 1939 a Hindi church had started meeting in Daryaganj first in the home of G. D. Bates.¹³ The church rented the premises at 99 Daryaganj and held it till eventually it was handed back to the owner in 1986, at which time the Daryaganj church merged with the Hindi congregation at 11 Hailey Road that had been started by Pastor Lall Das in 1984.

Meanwhile H. C. Menkel had retired in 1943, and the work of the sanitarium had shut down during the war years. As the independence of India neared, the church renewed its interest in medical and church work in the

capital city. Results of this interest became visible in the 1950s.

Accelerated Activity After Independence

In 1950 Pastor W. G. Jenson was the pastor of the English church that met at 76 Queensway, and Dal Chand was the pastor of the vernacular church.¹⁴ In January of that year 1950, H. M. S. Richards conducted a Voice of Prophecy rally meeting in Delhi at the Town Hall on Parliament Street. More than three hundred fifty people squeezed into the hall that normally seated 250. People came from all over Delhi and nearby towns. Officials and caretakers of the New Delhi Town Hall declared that the rally was one of the best-attended lectures or meetings that had ever been held in the municipal hall.¹⁵

The first major evangelistic crusade was held in New Delhi in 1953. In September 1952 Steve Vitrano had arrived in response to a call for an evangelist to initiate such an effort. He was assisted by the L. E. Allens, S. M. Moseses, the Dal Chands, the Torkelsons, and Mr. Nihal Singh. The Bucks from Vincent Hill assisted during the first three weeks. The Davidsons from Simla gave valuable assistance. After the Bucks returned to Mussoorie, the Holfords joined the staff for the remainder of the effort.¹⁶ In the absence of better alternatives, the tent was pitched on church premises at 23 Curzon Road (where today the Himalaya House is located on Kasturba Gandhi Marg). Five hundred people fitted into the tent, and as a result of the effort, membership increased and tithe tripled!¹⁷ This event was a major milestone for the Adventist Church in New Delhi.

In 1955 nine acres of land was purchased on the road from the diplomatic enclave to the international airport in Palaam.¹⁸ This was intended for a hospital that would resume the work that Dr. Menkel had done in the capital. The General Conference granted a thirteenth Sabbath School Offering overflow for the project in 1957.¹⁹ Approximately five more acres were acquired for this hospital, but eventually the project had to be abandoned as the government requisitioned the land for another project, not even compensating the church as much as it had bought the land for.²⁰ During negotiations, the government and even the prime minister indicated that New Delhi did not need another hospital, which had several modern research facilities built with foreign aid. They encouraged the church in the direction of rural hospitals; so, with permission of the General Conference, the funds received went to build new hospitals in Jullunder and Hapur.²¹

Also in 1955, the church finally purchased property in Delhi for offices and a chapel at 27 Barakhamba Road (next to the Statesman House in Connaught Place—today Rajiv Chowk). The Curzon Road property was then completely vacated.²² The newly constructed chapel and evangelistic center that could comfortably seat a hundred people was inaugurated on February 16, 1957. T. R. Torkelson, the union president gave the message, and the church pastor W. G. Jenson coordinated the service and conducted the choir.²³

The increasing number of workers in the capital city and the growing membership of the Delhi church made a school important. Mrs. Mercy (Christo) Sen, who had been educated at Vincent Hill School and who had taught at Hapur, started the Delhi church school with twenty-five students at 99 Daryaganj. The official opening

ceremony was conducted on August 5, 1957.²⁴

The Hailey Road property was purchased in 1960.²⁵ At one point the government was refusing to grant permission to develop the plots in Lutyen–designed as New Delhi. As development costs were escalating, and the value of the property was similarly shooting up, it was eventually decided to sell both properties in New Delhi and use the funds to build elsewhere. However, eventually permission was obtained to develop the union office and residences in Hailey Road Delhi. The hospital project was shifted to Jullunder. The income from sale of Barakhamba Road funded the building at Hailey Road and provided new buildings for Roorkee school.²⁶ In addition, funds were voted for help to the Northeast Union for their Calcutta office and to the South India Union for their hospital project in Kerala.²⁷ The chapel and Adventist center from 27 Barakhamba Road was shifted to the present location, 11 Hailey Road, in 1967.²⁸

Hidayat Khan, the only lady Bible worker in 1962, had started a chain of branch Sabbath Schools along the outer ring road of Delhi–Vinay Nagar East and Vinay Nagar West on the south side of the road, Nizamuddin on the east side, and Timarpur East, Timarpur West, and Model Town on the north, which were small towns along the Ring Road, Karol Bagh, Scindia House, Nizamuddin, and Okhla. People attending these Branch Sabbath Schools sang Hindi songs, read the Bible, repeated memory verses, and learned to pray before meals. She then reported that soon there will be some baptisms. As a result, a few children were sent to our church school in Delhi and some to the Roorkee school.²⁹

At the turn of the millennium there were two churches in Delhi, one was Hindi and the other was the English church at 11 Hailey Road. There were also two companies, a Burmese congregation at Janakpuri and a Hindi congregation at Uttam Nagar that were both started by Pastor Maywald Jesudas in 2002. During the same time, Reach International helped in starting a tailoring center for the church members at Asalatpur, Janakpuri. Furthermore, Pastor Maywald started visiting a Tamil family in Nizamuddin and another family in Aya Nagar, where a property was bought in 2000 hoping to start churches. Around the same time, Mrs. Dorothy Watts came forward to fund twenty volunteer pastors in Delhi and offered to fund the purchase of properties for the churches.

Organizational History

At the time of the formation of the Southern Asia Division, the territory of Delhi was with the United Provinces Mission. In 1928, when the territory was divided into Central and North Agra Missions, Delhi was part of the North Agra Mission. In 1936 both were reunited into the United Provinces Mission Field. In 1947 the territory was again divided into North and Central United Provinces, and Delhi was with the North UP Mission. In 1955 these were again combined into the Upper Ganges Section, which had its headquarters in Hapur, Uttar Pradesh, 80 km from Delhi.³⁰

The work that resulted in growth was mainly done by Pastor Robinson Daniel, who conducted effort meetings in different parts of the city, Pastor Maywald Jesudas, who pioneered in church planting, and Pastor Eric Kujur, who took special interest by visiting the congregations regularly, which served the purpose of nurture and retention. During this time the young adults of Delhi, students and professionals organized themselves into DAY (Delhi Adventist Youth), a fellowship that grew and attracted more and more youth to the church. The church provides pastoral and instructional support for the group who spend almost the entire Sabbath day in church. Lunch is provided by the church. The large group of youth support the church with their tithes, offerings, and other resources.

In response to this growth, the Northern India Union separated the Delhi territory from the Upper Ganges Section and organized it into the Delhi Metro Region in 2003.³¹

Present Work

Presently Delhi Metro Region has eleven organized churches and sixteen companies in six languages (English, Hindi, Burmese, Mizo, Nepali, Marathi), with twenty-six volunteers, seven contract workers, six regular workers, and three ordained ministers, with a membership of 3,355 as of June 30, 2021.

Although life in the national capital is fast-paced and challenging, the gospel is being preached in all eleven districts of Delhi, with the help of dedicated workers and committed lay members. With God's leading Delhi Metro Region desires to establish new churches and congregations in the future.

Delhi English Church Pastors

Steven P. Vitrano (1953-1955); W. Gordon Jenson (1956-1958); George R. Jenson (1959-1964); John G. Corban (1965 and 1966); Linwood R. Burns (1966-1968); Wesley Frank Olfert (1969-1971); Ronald N. Baird (1971-1974); Shishpal Chand (1975-1978); Robinson Daniel (1978-1984); K. P. Singh (1984-1986); Rajah Fernandes (1986-1988); Ashley Isaiah (1988-1991); Robin Ram (1992-1998); Maywald Jesudas (2000-2003); Erick Kujur (2003-2006); John K. Daniel (2007-2010); Laban Rao Mattukoyya (2010-Present).

Region Directors

Eric Kujur (2003-2005); Cornelius Murmu (2005 and 2006); R. R. Bharti (2006-2011); Satish Sharma (2011-2016); Ronald Marjee (2016-2019); Franklin Francis (2019-Present).

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