

Dharmapuri Section

PONNAIAH FRANKLIN, AND THAMODARAN MOHAN

Ponnaiah Franklin

is a son of a Seventh-day Adventist pastor. He had his higher secondary education in E. D. Thomas Memorial High school in Kudikadu, Thanjavur. He obtained his degree in accounting from Spicer College. After working in various schools as an accountant and treasurer, he is now treasurer of the Dharmapuri Section.

Thamodaran Mohan

was born in Nagercoil, Kanyakumari district in Tamilnadu. After his high school education in a government school in Nagercoil, he went on to Spicer College where he completed his studies in theology. At present, he is working as president of the Dharmapuri Section.

Formerly part of North Tamil Conference, Dharmapuri Section is overseen by Southeast India Union Section in the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists. It was organized in 2011 and reorganized in 2019. Its headquarters are in Nedumaran Nagar; Dharmapuri district, Tamil Nadu, India.

Territory: The districts of Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri are in the state of Tamil Nadu.

Statistics (June 30, 2020): Churches, 24; membership, 5,191; population, 3,778,850.

Early Work

The first Seventh-day Adventists in Dharmapuri were probably the owners of a medical store who learned the Adventist message through the Voice of Prophecy Bible Course. N. Rethanasamy of Salem visited their home in 1952 and observed that they had removed all their Hindu pictures and images from their home and replaced them with Voice of Prophecy certificates and Christian pictures.¹ Later that year C. John of Salem and N. Y. Chelliah conducted a series of evangelistic meetings in Krishnagiri and enrolled 130 students for the Voice of Prophecy Bible Correspondence School.² In January 1967 Literature Evangelist J. Baliah, of Krishnagiri, reported the baptism of ten of his contacts.³

In 1975 P. R. Israel, Lay Activities and Youth director for North Tamil Section conducted an effort meeting and baptized fifteen persons at Dharmapuri.⁴ That year the church rented a building and began a school in Dharmapuri. On Sabbaths the school administrators and staff met in a classroom for worship. Soon parents and youth were attracted to our church, and some were baptized and the church began to grow.⁵ Unfortunately, the school shut down. Teachers were transferred and only a handful of local members remained.

A decisive moment arrived when Pastor L. G. Lazarus chose to retire in Vellachandai, a small village an hour from Dharmapuri. To his surprise he discovered that Philip Jegadesan, an Adventist literature evangelist also lived in that village. The two visited the members in Dharmapuri who had remained faithful and began giving

Bible studies. Mr. Amirtharaj and Mr. Wilson accepted and were baptized.⁶ Later Pastor Haldurai joined Lazarus and Jegadesan, and the team revived the church in Dharmapuri. Philip Jegadesan was instrumental in several new members joining the church, and he also took the Adventist message to the neighboring places such as Gopinathampatti, Harur, Mallapuram, and Rayakottai. Pastor Haldurai was appointed as the pastor of the growing church.⁷ Within a few years, companies began to mushroom all across Dharmapuri district.

Also in 1989 the Southern Asia Division Office (SUD) was relocated from Poona to Hosur. The office brought sixty-seven families and singles and gave birth to the first Adventist Church in Hosur. That year a school was also established to provide formal education for the workers' children, which in turn brought in more Adventist workers. This led to the formation of new church plants in the Hosur area.⁸

Organization Into a Region

The Dharmapuri district was formerly a part of the North Tamil Conference. Between 2009 and 2010 challenges in the North Tamil Conference led the division and union leadership to recommend the formation of two new regions that had high institutional tithes but low membership and church growth. Thus Dharmapuri district and Krishnagiri district were bifurcated from the North Tamil Conference in 2011 and organized into the Dharmapuri Region. On August 12, 2011, Region Office was inaugurated in a rented building in Dharmapuri.⁹ The division headquarters located in Hosur area of Krishnagiri district are included in this region.¹⁰

Later Developments

After the formation into a region, the Adventist message spread more rapidly to Denkanikottai and nearby villages like Perigai, U. Puram, Pettamugilam, Alamarathupatti, Kelamangalam, and Gurupathy. In 2012 a team of thirteen students from Spicer College witnessed to the tribal people of the Pettamugilam hill area through health and Bible programs and videos.¹¹ In 2013 union president Pastor Daniel Devadhas and John Stephen Sunderaj from Jeeva Jothi in Denkanikottai conducted a mini evangelistic series at Marandahalli with health and Bible lectures.¹²

In 2014 Philip Jegadesan, a layman, donated five cents of land in Kamagiri, and Maranatha constructed the church that was inaugurated by Don Noble of Maranatha International. The church in Halesebam was also dedicated in 2014 by Pastor R. John, division president.¹³

In 2015 land was purchased for the S. Gurupathy Church¹⁴ and for the congregation that met in the Appavu Nagar branch of the Hosur school.¹⁵ In 2016 fourteen cents of land were purchased for the Vellichandai Church.¹⁶

In 2015 a Dharmapuri district-wide revival meeting was conducted at Palacode Church by Pastor Jeeva Ponnappa. A Good News Festival was celebrated in all the churches of Dharmapuri region on August 4 and 5, 2017, with guest speakers from the division and union offices. Over 2,000 members of Dharmapuri region

gathered for the special meetings, which culminated with 114 baptisms.¹⁷

Pastor Thambiraj conducted evangelism through small groups that resulted in three companies being established in Anthevanapalli, Alamarathupatti, and at the Children's Home at Denkanikottai. Union departmental directors conducted a one-week reaping series of evangelistic meetings in Mathur.

In 2018 Stanley Ponniah from the General Conference office conducted a series of meetings at Marachandram.¹⁸ He came back the following year and conducted meetings in Kelamangala.¹⁹

Gunaseeli Karunanithi and her husband, Pastor Karunanithi, conducted meetings in a new place called Rekadahalli.

Considerable evangelistic activity resulted in membership growth and in the establishment of a number of congregations. In 2019 the Region was upgraded to a Section.

Executive Officers

Dharmapuri Region

Directors: S. V. Alexander (2011 and 2012); T. Mohan (2012-2019).

Secretary-treasurer: Robinson Christopher (2011 and 2012); Franklin Ponnaiah (2012-2019).

Dharmapuri Section

President: T. Mohan (2019-Present).

Secretary-treasurer: Franklin Ponnaiah (2019-Present).

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NOTES

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2. N. Y. Chellaiah, "North Tamil Mission Evangelistic Efforts," *Eastern Tidings*, September 15, 1952, 7.
3. "LE Evangelism News," *Southern Asia Tidings*, November 1967, 4.
4. "South India," *Southern Asia Tidings*, December 1975, 10.
5. "History of Region" Dharmapuri Region Record Book, 5-9.
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16. Minutes of the Dharmapuri Region Board, March 7, 2016, # 2016 -15, 6.

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