

# Giddings, Philip

## (1865–1946)

### GLENN O. PHILLIPS

Glenn O. Phillips, Ph.D. (Howard University, Washington, D.C.), although retired, is actively writing, researching, lecturing, and publishing. He was a professor at Morgan State University, Howard University, and the University of the Southern Caribbean. He has authored and published numerous articles, book reviews, and books, including "The African Diaspora Experience," "Singing in a Strange Land: The History of the Hanson Place Church," "African American Leaders of Maryland," and "The Caribbean Basin Initiative."

Philip Giddings was one of the earliest of the pioneering Caribbean Adventist missionaries and was among the earliest Caribbean students to study nursing at the Battle Creek Sanitarium and graduate from Battle Creek College.

Philip Giddings was born in Buxton Village, East Coast, Demerara, British Guiana (now Guyana) in northern South America in October 1865.<sup>1</sup> Young Philip was an outstanding student and, on

completing his studies, was offered a teaching position in which he excelled for many years. He was later appointed to be the postmaster and telegraph operator at this busy southern Caribbean seaport. He gave up these positions to become a Seventh-day Adventist after reading numerous Adventist books shipped to him by the International Tract and Missionary Society, which convinced him to join the Advent faith. On leaving his positions, he traveled to the United States of America to study nursing at The Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan with the hope of returning to assist in providing health care to his countrymen.

After his graduation in 1895, he accompanied an Adventist physician back to his homeland with the intent of establishing and operating a health clinic. Unfortunately, the government refused to give permission to have the clinic operate in the British colony. Instead, he launched into a pastoral career, holding evangelistic meetings, and quickly won many converts. Elder Giddings served as the assistant pastor, becoming the first Caribbean pastor of the Georgetown Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, he inspired many other young men to work for the Adventist Church in the colporteur program and, later, as pastors around the Caribbean and



Philip Giddings

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

beyond.

On May 13, 1902, Philip married Louise Peters of Antigua, the pioneering teacher of the first Seventh-day Adventist School in Trinidad and a trained nurse from the Battle Creek Sanitarium. He served as an evangelist and pastor in various parts of Guyana, including Georgetown and New Amsterdam. After his ordination to the ministry in 1903, he moved in the early months of 1904 with his wife to pioneer the Advent message in Dominica,<sup>3</sup> where French was the official language. Elder Giddings obtained permission to conduct meetings and held open-air preaching meetings almost nightly for over six months. Mrs. Giddings conducted weekly women's Bible studies classes and, in time, operated health classes in which she instructed students in the study of physiology, hygiene, and calisthenics.

The Giddingses were very supportive of the drive to establish the first boarding school in Jamaica in 1907 to serve the region and raised money to help support that school. The Giddingses next brought Adventist teachings to Martinique and Guadeloupe.<sup>4</sup> His labor in both of these island communities proved to be very difficult, but he pressed on and spent nine years in these islands. While the Giddingses were allowed to witness about their faith, conducting numerous church services and holding cottage meetings that attracted wide interest, they soon made a discovery. They found that local sensitivities created barriers that allowed them to have many followers but few converts in the many years they spent there, from 1915 to 1924.<sup>5</sup>

The Giddingses were the only Protestant missionaries very actively witnessing in these French Caribbean islands throughout this time, traveling extensively around these islands. Another Adventist visitor in the islands, A. H. Linzau, observed, "When he [Pastor Giddings] commenced his work in Fort-de-France on the island of Martinique, he started in a little dark room situated in a poor quarter, but later he moved to a place near the theater." Linzau also observed, "Every village has seen him and the mud of every part of the island has stuck to his sole." Nevertheless, few would be baptized after many years of work. Elder Giddings also encountered occasional mob violence, but this never deterred him. He attributed much of the resistance that he experienced to the prevalent belief in the occult in these islands. Finally, on the night of April 13, 1924, Elder Giddings baptized the first two converts.

One of them was Mrs. Francis Dady, who had, for years, been one of his most faithful supporters. Not long after this event, the Giddings family withdrew from these French colonial islands on account of the lack of sustained membership growth. The Giddingses were next asked to assist in the growth of Adventism in Haiti.<sup>6</sup> Their experience in Martinique and Guadeloupe prepared them for this new field. Working in Port-au-Prince, the Giddingses helped with the recently established Universite Adventiste d' Haiti that opened in 1921.

The Giddingses worked in Haiti for over 10 years before failing health forced Elder Giddings to return to Guyana in the late 1930s. However, as his health improved, Elder Giddings served as associate pastor of the Georgetown Seventh-day Adventist Church and continued for 7 years. He attended his last Sabbath service on March 2, 1946, and offered his last public prayer and passed to his rest two days later, on March 4, 1946,<sup>7</sup> leaving his wife, son,

two daughters, four grandchildren, and three sisters.

He had labored for over 50 years serving his church as a pioneering Caribbean missionary, entering countries that had never heard about Adventism before, facing great danger as an evangelist, and pastoring large and small congregations as well as planting schools and supporting early Adventist Christian educational institutions. His hundreds of converts included many who became pastors and other church leaders. Among them was Pastor R. T. E. Colthurst, who, at Elder Giddings's death, was president of the French Guiana Mission. His son, also named Philip Giddings, with his wife, Violet, also became an Adventist missionary serving in Ivory Coast and Liberia from 1945 to 1954.<sup>8</sup>

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## NOTES

1. C. B. Sutton, "Philip Giddings obituary," *Inter-American Division Messenger*, July 1946, 4.
2. Ibid.
3. George F. Enoch, *The Advent Message in the Sunny Caribbean* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: Watchman Publishing, 1907), 25.
4. Wesley Amundsen, *The Advent Message in Inter-America* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1947), 137.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

7. Sutton, "Philip Giddings obituary," 4.

8. DeWitt S. Williams, *Precious Memories of Missionaries of Color* ([Fort Oglethorpe, Ga.]: Teach Services, 2015), 367.

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