



East Denmark Conference office (1947-1967) at Svanej 10, Copenhagen, NV.
Photo courtesy of the HASDA Archives, Denmark.

East Denmark Conference (1931–1992)

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The East Denmark Conference was a former unit of church organization under the West Nordic Union Conference in the Northern European Division,¹ covering the territory of East Denmark and the Faroe Islands. This article will deal with the 1931–1992 period, although the former Denmark Conference in the Scandinavian Union Conference for a short time (1916–1920) also was divided into an East Denmark Conference and a West Denmark Conference, before it again was united into the one conference. In 1931 the East Denmark Conference was formed with 21 churches and 1,424 members in a population of 1,570,040.² At the end of the period (1992) there were 22 churches and 1,651 members in a population of 2,346,744.³

Origin of Seventh-day Adventist Work

The beginnings of the Seventh-day Adventist work in Denmark is described in detail in the Danish Union of Churches article. The East Denmark Conference grew out of the need to divide the Denmark Conference into two new conferences for the purposes of mission.

Organization and Mission

At a meeting of the Scandinavian Union Conference held in Skodsborg March 18-22, 1931, the union was divided to form the East Nordic and the West Nordic union conferences. The latter included the countries of Denmark and Norway. "For the West Nordic Union . . . lay also a proposal, that Denmark be divided into two conferences.⁴ A session of the Denmark Conference was then held in Haandvaerkerforeningens Festsal in Vejle on June 16–20 the same year, and the recommendation from the Scandinavian Union session was presented to the delegates.⁵ The division president, L. H. Christian, spoke to the proposal and gave his reasons in support: "The experience in our denomination has also been this, that it has always proved successful for the progress of the work, the well-being of the churches, and the proclamation of the gospel, when conferences were not too big—and you will find that the average membership in our conferences and mission worldwide is about 800, and this conference has a membership of 2,731." He went on to explain that a small conference would give the president more time to lead out in soul-winning activities and give more workers opportunity to develop and improve their skills. He would then refer to the time of 1916–1920, when the country was divided into two conferences, and how the statistics showed in favor of the smaller conferences.⁶ After some discussion a vote was taken, and the vote went in favor of the proposal. The decision was made effective on July 1, 1931, and the East Denmark Conference took over the offices of the Denmark Conference at Suomisvej 5, Copenhagen V.

The president of the South Norway Conference, Tobias Tobiasen,⁷ was elected the first president of the East Denmark Conference (EDC), and the secretary-treasurer, Robert F. Jensen, of the former Denmark Conference, continued with the same responsibilities in the new conference.⁸ The 1930s were difficult years, with widespread unemployment and scarce financial resources. As Tobiasen described it in his New Year's message to the church members in 1935:

The present conditions have caused nervousness among many people that trying times are ahead of us. . . . To these worrying souls we come with a message about refuge. While we with a sure knowledge must confirm that their dark forebodings are not misleading or delusive, we show them the way to peace and trusting confidence under the protection of the Son of heaven.⁹

Public evangelism was the main avenue of soul winning, together with literature ministry. "The efforts have brought an average result of well over 24 per series of meetings. It is also encouraging to learn that six souls are won by colporteur work and that the book *The Great Controversy* to a large extent has been a major contributor to this."¹⁰

The annual meetings for the conference would gather many people. Friday evening the congregation would fill the Ebenezer church at Suomisvej, where the offices of the conference were located, but on Sabbath the meetings had to move to Grundtvigs Hus in Studiestraede in the center of Copenhagen, to accommodate the attendants.¹¹ It was also a time of sacrifice. The Big Week, which was used for selling books, where the profit would benefit foreign missions, was emphasized in the church magazine year after year, with the additional note that all workers were expected to sacrifice a week's salary to add to the mission fund and that members and colporteurs were encouraged to do the same.¹² This procedure would be repeated in the Week of Sacrifice later in the year.

It was in 1934 that the first issue of the youth paper *Advent Ungdom* was published in Denmark to guide and serve the interests of young people. In 1937 the Junior Missionary Volunteer (JMV) program was introduced, when the first JMV Handbook was published. H. Muderspach, the youth director of the West Denmark Conference, took a lead in introducing this new program. In 1938 the first JMV pins for the friend class were distributed in Aalborg, Aarhus, and Vejlelfjordskolen.¹³ The next year the East Denmark Conference followed with their first group of juniors in Copenhagen. At the annual meeting the children participated in the Sabbath afternoon meeting to present what they had learned to an enthusiastic congregation numbering more than a thousand.¹⁴ With the JMV program the foundation was laid for a successful Pathfinder work that would play an important role in the work for children and teenagers in Denmark.

In 1939 the effect of World War II was felt in many places in Europe. Missionaries had to return to their home countries. The new conference president, Axel Varmer, in his message to the church on October 12, 1939, writes from Copenhagen, "Fortunately, our brothers and sisters from abroad succeeded to escape home before the Great War broke out. How many of them are in their home countries, only God knows. However, neither elimination of borders nor political upheavals can stop the work of God."¹⁵ He continued to give a report, present detailed plans for evangelism, thank the people for their faithfulness in tithes and offerings, which were increasing, and encourage them to continued loyalty to God. The emphasis on public evangelism continued during the war years, and every preacher would be assigned a territory of evangelism. The president would hold his public efforts alongside the workers in the field. And both men and women were chosen to preach the gospel.¹⁶ "The preaching of the gospel is the most noble work in the universe."¹⁷ Bible instructors assisted experienced preachers by visitation and giving Bible studies.¹⁸

Public evangelistic meetings had been conducted regularly in Copenhagen for years, and the membership had grown. The only church home for the Adventists in the capital had so far been Ebenezer at Suomisvej 5, with the conference offices and other offices as well as the church hall. Members in other parts of the city met in rented halls.

On August 7, 1943, another church building, Advent-Kirken, Svanevej 10, Noerrebro, was dedicated. It had a seating capacity of 250 and was built next to a villa with two large apartments. Soon after, new schoolrooms were also built to accommodate the church school, which would move from Ebenezer.¹⁹ This new center became a vibrant place for church and school life, and at times also housed other activities of the church.

In 1945 the annual meetings for the conference had moved to Borups Hoejskole and Odd Fellow Palaet with the opening meetings still being held in Ebenezer.²⁰ The reports revealed progress on all fronts: number of efforts, increase in membership and more employees, rising of tithes and offerings. New places of worship have been acquired during the war years. A new law in Denmark was passed that doubled the grants from the government to private schools, which prompted the leadership to encourage the churches to consider starting more church schools.²¹

February 1, 1947, marked an important landmark in the history of the church. A Bible correspondence school (BCS) was opened, with L. Munderspach as the first director. The school would serve the whole nation and have its office in the Ebenezer building in the EDC. To begin with, 100,000 enrollment cards were printed, but the intention was over time to cover all homes in Denmark. The reason given for the limited number of cards was a shortage of paper. "It is difficult to get paper currently, but as soon as we get more paper, we shall print more pamphlets and cards, etc."²² By October 150,000 cards had been distributed, and 1,226 students had enrolled in the Bible course.²³ The school came to be one of the major instruments in reaching out to people and leading them to Christ. In 1949 every member was encouraged to enroll five new students to the school, and when the campaign for getting new students was combined with the Harvest Ingathering campaign, the increase of new students took off.²⁴

With more activities going on in the Ebenezer building at Suomisvej 5, another challenge arose. Dansk Bogforlag needed more space for its increasing number of books. It was partly solved when the church school moved to Svanevej and the conference and the publishing house exchanged offices (1943–1947). Eventually, on June 1, 1947, the East Denmark Conference moved its offices to the apartment on Svanevej 10.²⁵

Another important development of the organization in 1947 was that the Faroe Islands were separated from the Iceland Conference and assigned to the East Denmark Conference. During World War II there had scarcely been any connection between Iceland and Scandinavia. Therefore, after the war the Northern European Division therefore decided after the war, that it would serve the church better to link Iceland directly to the division and let the Faroe Islands stay in the West Nordic Union Conference and thus let the Faroe Islands be part of the EDC.²⁶

In the 1950s the work for the children and youth was given added attention. A new youth camp, Aunsborglejren, at Vejlebjerg, next to the school, had been opened in 1949.²⁷ It would serve the whole country, and for more than 25 years became the center for many children, Pathfinder, youth, and family camps. In 1953 it was reported that 525 children from the two conferences had attended summer camps at two major camps at Aunsborglejren as well as some minor tent camps elsewhere. One memorable event was the camp at Aunsborglejren for Sunday school children, with 260 children from non-Adventist homes. The work for the Sunday school children had long-term effects, as some of them later became students at the junior college and a few were baptized.²⁸

In addition to the public evangelistic meetings that every minister and conference president were engaged in yearly, Thorvald Kristensen, the newly elected president, emphasized the different aspects of home mission, including Bible studies given by laypeople, distribution of invitation cards for the BCS followed up by visitation, Dorcas work among the poor and needy, literature evangelism with such books and magazines as *Tidernes Tegn*, and the yearly campaigns (including Harvest Ingathering, Big Weeks, etc.). "There is a tremendous need for well-educated laypeople, who can carry the main responsibility in the churches and organize the mission work."²⁹

In the early 1950s the tape recorder came into use at the evangelistic meetings. Recorded Christian songs were played as people were entering the church or meeting hall. The union president, Alf Lohne, took this a step further and prepared a series of meetings called "Bibelen giver håb" (The Bible Gives Hope) that could be recorded and combined with slides. The home missionary and youth director in the East Denmark Conference, Helge Andersen, put the series together for Denmark around 1960 and had sets prepared that could be used by pastors and laypeople alike. Later the meetings were recorded on cassette tapes and became a very effective tool in the hands of laypeople as they shared the Adventist teachings with their neighbors and friends.³⁰

The East Denmark Conference was fortunate to have two of the major church institutions in its territory. Although they were counted as union institutions, there were some direct benefits to the conference that impacted the local church life. Skodsborg Badesanatorium³¹ was a 257-bed medical institution operated at Skodsborg, a suburb of Copenhagen. In connection with the sanatorium was a training school for physiotherapists. Many Adventists found employment there, and the institution became a meeting place for young people from the Nordic countries. A strong and vibrant church grew up on the compound of the sanatorium. Also, Nutana,³² formerly Copenhagen Food Company, became a popular place of employment, especially when it moved its operations to Bjaeverskov, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) out of Copenhagen, and became foremost among the producers of health food in Denmark. Church members settled around the food factory and had their membership in the nearby churches.

It became more urgent to have a permanent campsite in the conference for the children and youth as well as a site for other activities. In the summer of 1963 the new Ungdomsgaard (youth camp) in Kikhavn had been built and was dedicated.³³ It was also in the 1960s and 1970s that many of the congregations got their own church buildings. With short intervals you could read in the church paper that a new house of worship had been dedicated.

For years the church in the Faroe Islands had depended on using the Danish hymnal and a few song sheets with hymns in their own language. But with a growing nationality among the population and fewer of the children and

youth understanding Danish there was a strong desire to have their hymnbook in Faroese. A local initiative and financial support from the conference made it possible to publish an Adventist hymnal in Faroese in 1964.³⁴

In the 1960s several new initiatives were introduced to reach the public. Many had their origin in other parts of the world but were received with great enthusiasm. The Five-Day Plan to Stop Smoking was first run in 1964 by Dr. A. Christensen and Pastor P. Mollerup, and many others were to follow.³⁵ The welfare work got new life, and many people were helped in the near community as well as abroad.³⁶ The telephone devotional was introduced in Copenhagen in 1968.³⁷ Bibelgaveplanen (The Bible Gift Plan), by some called "a plan from heaven," became a very effective way of reaching people and sharing personal Bible studies with people in their homes. Hundreds of Bibles were distributed, and many church members received training and participated in the program.³⁸ Bible exhibitions were held, where old and modern Bibles were put on display to create an interest for upcoming evangelistic meetings.³⁹ A vegetarian restaurant, Skodsborg Helse Restaurant,⁴⁰ opened in the center of Copenhagen. The Northern European Division initiated a program with slides from archaeological excavations and other sites in the Bible lands and provided pictures as well as scripts. To make it more authentic, many of the pastors were encouraged to travel to the Middle East themselves and get their own pictures. Sabbath seminars were introduced to give more in depth teaching on Bible doctrines.

In the 1970s a number of evangelists from abroad were invited to come to the East Denmark Conference to conduct campaigns and inspire and train the local pastors in evangelism. Among them R. Kvinge, union evangelist from Norway, held meetings on the island of Bornholm in summer of 1974, and was probably the most successful. Others from the United States and Australia were struggling, just as were the Danish pastors. As Henning Jacobsen, the conference president, said: "We probably have to admit that even the experts from outside are having a hard time in the de-Christianized Denmark."⁴¹ In the Faroe Islands the Christian climate was a little warmer. The population was generally Christian and belonged to one or other of the Christian communities. In 1977 R. Kvinge held a Field School of Evangelism in the capital, Tórshavn, with students attending from Newbold College.⁴²

The institution "Aftenhvile" at Naerum, which had served the church as an old people's home for many years, had become too worn and no longer met the demands of a modern care facility. In 1976 a new nursing home called "Soendervang" was built in Faxe with adjoining small apartments for elderly people.⁴³ This was much appreciated by the old generation of Adventists, and for some years the annual camp meetings were moved to a sports hall close to the nursing home. The moving of the old people from Naerum made it possible to make use of "Aftenhvile" for a conference office and thereby solve other challenges at the same time.⁴⁴ The Bible correspondence school was able to move back from Svanevej to Suomisvej. In addition, there was room for six apartments for mission workers next to the new conference office. Later some of these apartments were made available for ADRA as office space.

In November 1980 the Seventh-day Adventist Church celebrated 100 years in Denmark in the City Hall in Copenhagen, with 1200 in attendance.⁴⁵ The chair of the Citizens' Representation opened the meeting, and the main speaker was the provost of Loma Linda University, V. Norskov Olsen, who had served as a pastor in the East Denmark Conference.

Evangelistic meetings in Copenhagen and Lyngby in 1981 combined with a Field School of Evangelism by the division evangelist, Raymond Stanley, created a group of interested people, that was followed up by meetings held by the conference president and coworkers, with good response. The principal of the Correspondence School, G.D. Asholm, was encouraged to conduct a series of meetings in the newly renovated church building at Svanevej. The opening meeting had to be repeated 9 times over the weekend to accommodate the interest that was shown.⁴⁶

The first broadcasting licenses for non-commercial local radios in Denmark were issued in 1983. Several of the Christian churches applied for a license, and the Naestved SDA Church was one of those that were successful. For many years they produced and broadcasted a variety of cultural, religious and health programs and offered Adventist books and other literature to their local community.⁴⁷

In the Faroe Islands the TV was opened for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1981 after much opposition. A concert from the church was broadcast.⁴⁸ In 1985 the first Sabbath worship service was broadcast from the church as well as three devotionals. With a Faroese Adventist pastor in Tórshavn, Jens Danielsen, new opportunities opened for the church. It was decided by the conference administration to produce the Ingathering magazine in Faroese to strengthen an ingathering campaign that was already going well.⁴⁹

In the mid-1980s a new set of seminar materials, the Revelation Seminar, was translated into Danish from an American model. Intensive training of pastors and laypeople took place, and 10 pilot programs were launched in the conference.⁵⁰ Many of them proved successful. It was a new and effective tool for evangelism. The seminars were held in classrooms, churches, and public halls, as well as private homes. The conference health director also conducted a seminar and resulted in five people accepting Christ. These five were to become the nucleus for a new church plant. New enthusiasm for lay evangelism was created. Mission rallies were conducted throughout the conference in which closer cooperation between the different church departments was encouraged.⁵¹

Among the conference leadership and many members in the four churches in Greater Copenhagen there was a great desire to reach the people in the capital with the Advent message. In 1988 Mark Finley and his wife conducted seminars and meetings in Stockholm, Sweden. In 1989 they came to Copenhagen and held a Field School of Evangelism for young interns and pastors from Denmark and Norway. Sequence evangelism was Mark Finley's approach, with a seven-week series of health seminars, including a cooking school, Daniel seminars, Revelation seminars, meetings on Bible archaeology, and more. The contacts from these seminars and meetings, conducted by various pastors, including Mark Finley and the union president, Rolf Kvinge, were then invited to a series of

evangelistic meetings together with other contacts of church members. Thousands of handbills were distributed or sent by post. The evangelistic meetings by Mark Finlay were held in two different locations, the Adventist church at Svanevej and the Ishøj Center.⁵² The meetings were well attended, but mostly by faithful church members and their personal contacts, as well as those who came as a result of the advertising. A good number of people accepted Christ and were baptized, which led to a net gain in members for the conference and the country was positive.⁵³

From time to time leadership had discussed whether to unite the two Danish conferences to save on administration and finance. At a general meeting for the East Denmark Conference held in Naerum in 1990 it was discussed and voted: "Suggestion 5: We ask the West Denmark Conference at their next general meeting (possibly the West Denmark Executive Committee) to choose three members that can work together with the Structure Committee from East Denmark (appointed in June 1990) on the practical consequences of a possible future joining of the Danish conferences."⁵⁴ The Structure Committee was to meet, but other circumstances hastened a final decision for joining the two conferences. A financial crisis in the Nutana Food Factory led to the bankruptcy of Nordisk Filantropisk Selskab (Nordic Philanthropic Association), which left the West Nordic Union Conference (WNUC) with enormous financial challenges.⁵⁵ At an extraordinary general meeting in January 1992 at Himmerlandsgaarden, Denmark, the leadership of the WNU was replaced with an interim leadership that would prepare the dissolution of the WNU and the formation of the Danish Union of Churches Conference (DUChC) as well as the Norwegian Union Conference (NUC).⁵⁶ The Structure Committee for Denmark met in Aarhus on March 31, 1992, and made its suggestions for the practical restructuring of the church in Denmark.⁵⁷ At an extraordinary general meeting at Vejle fjordskolen 1-5. In July 1992 the proposals were in principle accepted, and a new leadership for the DUChC was elected.⁵⁸ The dissolution of the WNU and the joining of the two conferences into one union of churches was made effective on October 1, 1992.⁵⁹

Summary and Conclusion

The East Denmark Conference was part of the West Nordic Union Conference for 60 years. In the beginning it grew in membership every year and expanded its operations reaching its peak in 1966, with 2,291 members and 27 churches.⁶⁰ With increasing prosperity and the progress of secularism it became more difficult to reach the general population with the Word of God. It also proved increasingly difficult to keep the young people in the church in spite of many initiatives. The new structure with one union of churches would show if this in the end would make a difference for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Denmark. The need as always would be to focus on the mission of the church.

Executive Officers

Presidents: T. Tobiasen (1931–1938); Axel Varmer (1938–1946); S. A. Broberg (1946–1951); H. Munderspach (1951–1954); Thv. Kristensen (1954–1961); Jens Madsen (1961–1967); A. Brandt (1967–1970); Henning Jacobsen (1970–1978); K. Stott (1978–1986); Niels Chr. Rasmussen (1986–1992).⁶¹

Secretary-Treasurers: R. F. Jensen (1931–1932); Paul Knudsen (1932–1934); Alf Berg (1934–1940); H. L. Henriksen (1941–1948); B. Albertsen (1948–1972); Johs. Pedersen (1972–1975); Erling Berg (1976–1979); Johs. Pedersen (1979–1984); Doris Joergensen (1984–1986); Ph. Philipsen (1989–1992).

Secretary: Sven H. Jensen (1986–1989)

Treasurer: Doris Joergensen (1986–1988)⁶²

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NOTES

1. Later Northern Europe-West Africa Division and Trans-European Division.?
2. “East Denmark Conference,” *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1932), 204.?
3. “East Denmark Conference,” *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1991), 332.?
4. “Den Skandinaviske Unions 30-aars Jubilæum og Deling” (The 30-Years Jubilee of the Scandinavian Union and Its Division), *Missionsefterretninger*, June 1931, 42.?
5. “Rapport over S.D.A. Konferensens 50. Aarsmøde” (Report From the SDA Danish Conference’s 50. Annual Meeting), *Konferensforhandlinger 1931* (Session Discussions 1931), Third Meeting, 8.?
6. *Ibid.*, 4.?
7. Tobias Tobiasen (1876–1963) was born in Kristiansand, Norway, and was known as a great evangelist. “His Reputation as a Preacher and Speaker Runs All Over Scandinavia.” HASDA File: T. Tobiasen. Accessed November 5, 2019.?
8. In 1916–1920, when the East Denmark Conference had a short period of existence, the Scandinavian Union Conference president and the secretary-treasurer were at the same time president and secretary-treasurer for the local conference, until the position of secretary-treasurer was divided and given to two other persons.?
9. T. Tobiasen, “Oestdansk Konferens” (East Denmark Conference), *Missionsefterretninger*, January 1935, 5.?
10. *Ibid.*?
11. T. Tobiasen, in *Missionsefterretninger*, August 1935, 7.?
12. T. Tobiasen, in *Missionsefterretninger*, March 1936, 3.?
13. H. Muderspach, “Tre Ungdomsforeninger er blevet ‘Venner’” (Three Youth Societies have become ‘Friends’), *Advent Ungdom*, July 1938, 7.?
14. M. Bakke, “Juniorforeningen i Koebenhavn” (The Junior Society in Copenhagen), *Advent Ungdom*, July 1939, 11.?
15. Axel Varmer, “Nogle Ord om Arbejdet i Oestdanske Konferens” (Some Words About the Work in the East Denmark Conference), *Missionsefterretninger*, November 1939, 2.?
16. Axel Varmer, “Oestdansk Konferens” (East Denmark Conference), *Missionsefterretninger*, October, 1940, 1.?
17. *Ibid.*, 2.?
18. Axel Varmer, “Missionsarbejdermøde for Oestdansk Konferens” (Workers’ Meeting for the East Denmark Conference), *Missionsefterretninger*, January 1942, 5.?
19. Axel Varmer, “Advent-Kirken,” *Missionsefterretninger*, nr. 10, 1943, 4, 5.?
20. *Missionsefterretninger*, July 1945, 1.?
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