

Southern Conference, Russia

OLGA I. OSTROVSKAYA

Olga I. Ostrovskaya is the administrative secretary of the West Russian Union Conference. In 1992, she graduated from the Belgorod State University (Belgorod, Russia) majoring in mathematics and informatics. From 2003 to 2019, Ostrovskaya was employed as the office secretary and human resources director of the Southern Conference in the West Russian Union Conference.

The Southern Conference covers several Russian cities from Belgorod, which is near the Ukraine border, to Voronezh, in the southwestern part of Russia. The Southern Conference covers the following cities and regions: Belgorod, Bryansk, Kaluga, Kursk, Lipetsk, Oryol, Ryazan, Tambov, Tula, and Voronezh regions.

The statistics (June 30, 2018) are: Churches, 82; membership, 6,958; population: 12,785,805. The address is: 2nd Shoseynaya, 29; 308010 Belgorod; Russian Federation. *E-mail:* uo@nm.ru.¹

The Southern Conference (SC) stretches 750 kilometers (466 miles) from north to south and 950 kilometers (590 miles) from west to east.

The SC covers the territory of 322,500 square kilometers (124,518 square miles) with a population of 13,490,000 (average population density is 41 people per 1square kilometer (.39 square miles), of which 79 percent are urban dwellers and 21 percent are rural citizens.

As of January 1, 2018, there were 80 local churches and 54 companies in the Southern Conference, with a total of 7,009 members. The general population per member ratio is 1,925.

Origin of SDA Work in the Southern Conference Territory

Kursk

The first Adventists appeared in the city of Kursk as far back as 1910 and were registered as those belonging to Central Russian Missionary Field.

Up to the early 1980s, small companies and some isolated members were mainly located outside the city of Kursk (in the Kursk region). For instance, one of the largest companies (more than 20 members) was located in the Zolotukhinskiy district. The members were periodically visited by ACSDA (All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists) employees, but the hard times of repressions, arrests, persecutions, and threats had a destructive effect. By the year 1979 there were only five adult members in the Kursk region, and only one sister, a 75-year-old Kseniya Eremeeva, lived in the city of Kursk.

In July 1979 Lev Chubarov and his family, consisting of six members, moved into Kursk to conduct evangelistic ministry. Thus, a small Adventist company appeared.

After purchasing a private house, other members regularly came to Chubarovs on Sabbath to participate in a worship service. From 1979 to 1984 there were several baptisms organized by this company. Meanwhile, some other Adventist families moved into Kursk from other cities, and the company grew to 20 members. They also found a way to purchase a church building and applied for official registration of their congregation by authorities in Kursk.²

Tambov

In 1911 Seventh-day Adventism reached a remote and very poor village of Surki located in the Kirsanovskiy district of the Tambov governorate. Three men—Nikita and Yegor Zadokhin and Roman Shcheglov—began to preach the Adventist message they had accepted in St. Petersburg. In few years a group of Adventists grew exponentially from the efforts of these pioneers. Inhabitants of neighboring villages also indicated interests in the Adventist message. After seven years the church had more than sixty members. Of these, thirty lived in Surki, while the rest lived in other villages. The congregation had their own chapel and cemetery in Surki.

In 1914 the Zadokhin brothers were imprisoned. It was only in 1917, after the October Revolution, that they were released again. Nikita Zadokhin continued serving the church as a lay member, and his brother Yegor became a famous minister.

In 1917 Balash, a young and active graduate from an Adventist college, arrived at the city of Tambov and became the first Adventist preacher in that city. He found friends among the Molokans and eventually rented a room in the house of the Travin family, who later became the first Adventists in Tambov. Others who accepted the message early on were the Pautkin and Susarev families. This was the beginning of the Adventist presence in Tambov.³

Belgorod

Several years later, pioneering commenced in the Belgorod region. In 1920 G. A. Grigoriev visited the village of Rakitnoe. After conducting an evangelistic series there he organized an Adventist company of about thirty. Eventually he came to the village of Tomarovka, where he met Adventist believers, members of the Belyaev family. Together they visited the villages of Pushkarnoe, Streletskoe, and Dragunka. In 1926 E. V. Zadokhin was sent to Belgorod as a pastor.

There was one, Nikolay Gubin, who lived in the village of Dragunka. Prior to his military service, Gubin used to attend Baptist worship services. While serving in the army, he met an Adventist with whom he studied the Bible. After returning home, Gubin and his family members began observing the Sabbath. After some time Adventists from the village of Rakitnoe joined this group. The group was then visited by G. A. Grigoriev, Ya. V. Krauss, and E. V. Zadokhin. In 1930 there were about 35 people who gathered for worship in the village of Dragunka. In 1933,

during the famine, the community began to fall apart. Some members migrated to other cities and many died from famine. It was only Gubin's family that continued to live in Dragunka.

Later on, Gubin moved to Kharkov (at that time the capital of Ukraine) and found other Adventists. Among them were N. P. Osmachko and V. I. Bondarenko and two women, A. T. Gonchar and A. S. Vasyukevich. In 1964 a retired pastor, P. A. Matsanov, settled in the city of Belgorod, where he lived until his death in 1989. In 1997 the office of the Southern Conference was moved to Belgorod. Among others, P. Ya. Dmitrienko, I. N. Ostrovskiy, V. A. Kozakov, and T. V. Chipchar served as administrators.

Tula

The presence of Adventists in the city of Tula was first mentioned in the report of E. V. Zadokhin, who served as a missionary in Tula in 1923.⁴ In the Tula municipal archives there is a certificate issued by the regional commissioner for Religious Affairs, Mr. Krapivin, that confirms the existence of the Tula Religious Congregation of Seventh-day Adventists from 1923.⁵ A year later there were already 11 church members in Tula. In 1925 Zadokhin was replaced by L. V. Zhukov. He was, however, arrested the next year.

In 1927 the worship services in Tula were conducted in two chapels, but later on, one of the chapels was closed by the local authorities. In 1928 P. S. Kulakov was transferred from Leningrad to serve in Tula. In July 1933 he was replaced by A. B. Schmidt, who came from Moscow.

After World War II the chapel in Tula was closed. Nevertheless, the Lord continued to bring new people to His church. In the 1950s the Adventist church in Tula consisted mostly of older women, with only five or six young people. Support was given by Baydala's family (in particular, by his daughter Cherezova), from the town of Lipki. In winter church members gathered at their homes, and they traveled to Moscow to attend the Lord's Supper. In turn, young people from Moscow visited Tula. In 1957 S. S. Dubnyak moved from Moscow to serve in Tula. Later on, the pastoral duties were performed by Ya. P. Dmitrienko.

In the postwar years the town of Novomoskovsk in the Tula region became a haven for many families of repressed ministers. In 1964 P. M. Obmantsev moved to serve in Tula. At the beginning of the 1970s the family of R. N. Volkoslavskiy settled in Tula, and three years after, N. N. Libenko settled down at Revyakino, a railway station not far from Tula.

In 1975 the Tula church began to solicit for the help of the Council for Religious Affairs for establishment of the Russian Council of Seventh-day Adventists and the position of the senior preacher for the Russian Federation. After obtaining the consent of the authorities, the Tula church invited M. P. Kulakov, who headed the church ministry in Central Asia, to start his service in Tula.

Tula became a sort of spiritual center for the entire Soviet Union. The church in Tula was visited by prominent Adventist preachers and General Conference leaders.

In 1988 the Educational and Spiritual Adventist Center was opened in the small town of Zaokskiy, Tula region. Moreover, the pastoral ministry in Tula was carried out by preachers such as M. P. Kulakov and his sons Michael and Peter; N. N. Libenko, R. N. Volkoslavskiy, V. S. Zaitsev, E. V. Zaitsev, D. O. Yunak, A. P. Kruzhkov, Ya. P. Kulakov, P. K. Zubkov, V. I. Kostev, I. N. Ostrovskiy, N. M. Ignatov; brothers P. V. and M. V. Lymarev.

In 1990 the Adventist Radio and Television Center, headed by P. M. Kulakov (subsequently replaced by D. D. Reband), was opened in Tula. That same year the Tula Adventist Gymnasium was opened, with M. V. Grishutkina as headmaster. In 1990–1994 the headquarters of the Russian Union Conference, and in 1994–1996 the office of the Southern Conference, was located in Tula.⁶

In other regions and cities of the Southern Conference there were only some isolated church members in the prewar period and the first decades after World War II. The organized churches appeared long after, from the 1970s to the 1990s, largely because of evangelistic programs.

Organizational History of the Southern Conference

From 1901 onward, the territory of the present-day Southern Conference was part of the Central Russian Missionary Field (renamed Central Russian Conference in 1919). In 1981 the territory of the present-day Southern Conference became part of the Central Conference.

With the organization of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Division (USSR Division) in 1990⁷ the Central Conference as part of the West Russian Union Conference merged into the division. The Southern Conference received its independent status and name only in 1994.⁸

In 2002 the executive committee of the West Russian Union Conference addressed a proposal to the Euro-Asia Division to reorganize the Southern Conference. As a result of subsequent recommendations, three areas (Ryazan, Kaluga, and Tula regions) were separated from the Southern Conference in order to organize the Priokskaya Mission (Conference).

On January 21, 2003, the delegates at the fourth constituency meeting of the Southern Conference voted for organizing the Priokskaya Mission (then Conference) consisting of Ryazan, Tula, and Kaluga regions, and the Southern Conference (thus diminished), comprising Tambov, Oryol, Lipetsk, Voronezh, Bryansk, Kursk, and Belgorod regions.

The Priokskaya Conference (PC) existed until 2014 when the brethren recognized it was a failed project. The status quo was restored, and from 2014 the PC, at the initiative of the West Russian Union Conference, was again absorbed by the Southern Conference.

List of Presidents

Southern Conference

V. I. Kostev, 1994–1996; I. N. Ostrovskiy, 1996–2011; A. N. Roshchupkin, 2011–2014; A. V. Khanchevskiy, 2014– .

Priokskaya Conference

M. V. Lymarev, 2003–2011; A. A. Gladkov, 2011–2014.

SOURCES

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Lebsack, G. I. *Velikoye Adventistskoye dvizheniye i Adventisty Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii* Rostov-na-Donu: Altair, 2006.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2016.

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West Russian Union Conference Executive Committee and Southern Conference Executive Committee minutes, 2001–2014. West Russian Union Conference Archives.

Yunak, Dmitry O. *Istoriya Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii (1886–2000). Chto slyshali, ne skroem ot detei (v dvukh tomakh)*. Volume 2. Zaokskiy: Istochnik Zhizni, 2002.

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NOTES

1. "Southern Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2019), 82.
2. S. N. Kovtun (pastor of the church in Kursk), interview by author, Kursk, January 10, 2019.
3. M. V. Cherkasov (pastor of the church in Tambov), interview by author, Tambov, January 15, 2018.
4. Dmitry O. Yunak, *Oblako svidetelei. Rukovoditeli Tserkvi ASD v Rossii ot organizatsii ejo pervoi obshchiny do zakrytiya Vsesoyuznogo Soyuzha ASD* (self-published, 2013).
5. The information about sending E. V. Zadokhin to Tula was gotten from archive documents (ACSDA reports) that had not been numbered.

6. Dmitry O. Yunak, *Istoriya Tserkvi Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii (1886–2000). Chto slyshali, ne skroem ot detei (v dvukh tomakh)*, volume 2 (Zaokskiy: Istochnik Zhizni, 2002), 738–749.
 7. See “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Division,” *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1991), 341.
 8. *Ibid.*, 679, 680.
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