



Ministers serving in Dnieper Conference.

Photo courtesy of Ukrainian Union Conference.

## Dnieper Conference

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The Dnieper Conference was established in 1996 to oversee the work of the Seventh-day Adventists in the Cherkasy, Kirovograd, and Poltava regions.

## Territory and Statistics<sup>1</sup>

Period: 1996-present

Territory: Cherkasy, Kirovograd, and Poltava regions

Population: 3,623,191

Membership: 5,113

Churches: 104

## Origin of Seventh-day Adventist Work in the Territory

The Adventist movement in the Dnieper Conference is closely related to the development of Adventism in the central and southern territories of Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> Adventist missionary work in the Russian Empire started in Ukraine in the late 19th century. The work prospered and the Russian Mission was subdivided into numerous church units. During the time of Imperial Russia, the territory now covered by the Dnieper Conference belonged to the Kiev, Nikolayev, and Poltava governorates. The last known church units to cover the territory were the Black Sea Conference, Central Dnieper Conference, and Lower Dnieper Mission.

## Cherkassy

In 1907, in the Cherkassy region, several Adventist congregations and companies were already established through the efforts of foreign evangelists in the villages of Kischentsy (or, according to some archive documents, Kishenki), Dzendzelevka, Khristinovka, Rusalovka, Redkodub, Verkhnyachka, and others. There are oral traditions that in 1905 a German evangelist preached in the city of Uman. Soon a local evangelist, Afanasiy Gontar, continued this missionary work and baptized ten people from Uman and the surrounding villages.<sup>3</sup> In 1908, an Adventist minister, Yu. Skorobreshchuk from the village of Verkhnyachka, introduced the *Stundists* of the village of Rebedaylovka to Adventist teaching.<sup>4</sup>

In Redkodub, Lisyanskiy district, the seeds of Adventism were planted by ethnic Germans O. Wildgrube and J. Böttcher. Their influence was so great that in 1905 an Adventist church of 26 members was officially established in that village.<sup>5</sup> Due to the efforts of the members of that church, several congregations and companies were established in Kharchenkovo, Frankivka, Semenivka, Kamenny Brod, Pogiblyak, and Chaplinka. In the village of Kislin, Mankivskiy district, the local church grew due to the work of a local minister, Ippolit Pilkevich.<sup>6</sup> The village of Dzendzelivka, in the same district, also had an Adventist church planted at the beginning of the 20th century. M. Tsibulskiy, a future elder of the local church who followed the Tolstoyan movement in 1898, became an Adventist in 1908. In 1915 the church in Dzendzelivka had 54 members, and their number grew to 85 a year later.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1920s church members in the village of Boguslav visited a group of Sabbatarians in Stebliv village, Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy district. As a result, five people were baptized. By 1930 there were 20 Adventists in Stebliv. Adventist churches were also planted in nearby villages like Tynivka, Pugachivka, Sobolivka, Topilna, and others.

From 1928 on, “the government began persecuting the Adventist Church”<sup>8</sup> and forced “militant atheism” on people’s minds. Many churches were forced to close. Printing of religious materials and literature became illegal. Almost all pastors, elders, and active church members were repressed.

During “the thaw period,” especially 1943-1945, when western anti-Hitler coalition allies demanded a change in how the Soviets treated Christians, the Adventist Church was allowed to emerge from the underground.<sup>9</sup> However, many things remained unchanged. For example, between 1941 and 1945 eight church members in the village of Redkodub were put in jail and the other two were executed by shooting for their refusal to take up arms.

In 1956, when the Cherkassy region was established as a separate administrative unit, the Stebliv Adventists had their membership transferred to the Baibuzy church. As a separate entity, the Stebliv church was established in 1978. The time between 1980 and 2000 was a favorable time for the Church in the whole of the burgeoning Dnieper Conference. Before the end of 1994, 13 new churches were officially registered in the Cherkassy region. The next 13 churches were established during the two following years. In 1996, when the Dnieper Conference was organized, there were 39 Adventist churches in the Cherkassy region.

The churches in the towns of Kanev, Smila, Kamienka, Zhashkov, Zolotonosha, Gorodishche, and Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy, in town settlements Drabov, Chernobay, and Katerinopol, and in the villages of Roskoshivka, Tynivka, Litvinets, Leplyavo, Sushki, and Ozerishche, were established in the period from 1995 to 1999.

An Adventist church in the town of Talne was established as far back as the 1920s. However, it stopped functioning in the years of hardships and persecution. Its revival began in 1986 with the help of Adventists from the village of Zaleskoye. The church members from the village of Krivets helped reestablish the church in the village of Mankivka. An Adventist company in the town of Buki emerged in 1990 after an Adventist choir concert. In 1991 members of Kamenny Brod church who lived in Lysyanka organized a church in their home town.

In 1993, Pastor V. Andreichuk moved with his family to the town of Zhashkov after an Adventist church was organized there. An American evangelist, Robert Schermerhorn, held evangelistic programs in the Dnieper Conference from 1994 to 2003.

## Poltava

The Adventist message came to Poltava region as early as 1908 with the arrival of evangelist I. Pilkevich!<sup>10</sup> An Orthodox church paper, *Poltavskiy Eparhialnyye Vedomosti*, stated that the first meeting of Adventist believers in Poltava took place on October 9, 1909, and the first baptismal ceremony was organized in 1910 and 15 people

were baptized.<sup>11</sup>

In 1911 Adventists “established a commune in the village of Biluhivka near Poltava. They had a daycare, a school, and a communal laundry. The church building, where members met for worship every Sabbath, was located in the center of the settlement. The commune used the early church principle of having everything common: cows, horses, and sheep belonged to everyone; clothes and personal property were divided equally. The commune functioned up to the 1930s.”<sup>12</sup>

In the 1930s, V. Moskovets served as a church elder in Poltava. He was arrested in 1937, charged with so-called “anti-Soviet propaganda,”<sup>13</sup> and later sentenced to be shot by NKVD *troika*.<sup>14</sup>

Between 1936 and 1937, the pastoral ministry in Poltava was performed by A. Likarenko. But he was very soon arrested and exiled to the Russian north. After returning home in 1946 he continued his ministry and worked on restoring the church in Poltava. In a short time, 28 people were baptized.<sup>15</sup>

In 1952 when a Bible worker, I. Stepanishev, headed the Poltava church, there were already 70 adult members. Minors were baptized secretly and their names were not included in the church records.<sup>16</sup> At the end of the 1950s the church members in Poltava acquired a private building titled in the name of a female member of the church. It was then renovated to become a prayer house. However, after all the repairs were finished the state confiscated the building without due course of law.

From 1965 to 1995, the Poltava church was led first by F. Bolebrukh and then by V. Nikityuk. During those years the church emerged from the underground and baptized more than 100 new members.

In 1991 the church members searched the city archives and found out that the house was still registered in the name of the same Adventist woman who had been long deceased by that time. During that period the Poltava church purchased an old *Fakei* cinema building. However, it was with great difficulty and involvement of the Supreme Counsel of Ukraine that the church secured approval for remodeling the cinema into a prayer house as compensation for the confiscation of the previous building. That same year, N. V. Tuk moved to Poltava. By that time there were 191 Adventists in the Poltava region: 133 in Poltava, 31 in Kremenchug, eight in Dykanka, eight in Karlivka, eight in Chernozavodskoye, five in Lutayka, and one in Lubny.

After many successful evangelistic efforts and by the time of establishing the Dnieper Conference (1996), there were 19 local churches in the Poltava region, namely in Poltava (four churches), Komsomolsk, Kotelva, Lohvitsa, Chervonozavodskoye, Mirgorod, Kobelyaki, Novyye Sanzhary, Kremenchug, Piryatin, Khorol, Grebinka, Lubny, Karlivka, Dykanka, and Zinkov.

## Kirovograd

The history of the SDA Church in the Kirovograd region dates back to 1917 when I. Pilkevich, an evangelist and a traveling pastor, moved from Odessa to Elizavetgrad (now Kropivnytskyi, the region's capital). Together with his

spouse, they established a congregation of six people who were baptized in the summer of 1918. In 1925 two small Adventist companies were established in the towns of Novomirgorod and Adzhamka.<sup>17</sup>

In the spring of 1922, 22 people were baptized in the city of Kropivnytskiy. Between 1924 and 1925 the local congregation was pastored by Alexander Reza, a former officer of the Russian army. The following five years the Kropivnytskiy church was led by V. Zhukov. His father, a former Molokan, was exiled to Stavropol where he started observing the Sabbath. After another exile to the Trans-Caucasus region he became an Adventist. His two sons, Luka and Vasiliy, like their brother Alexander, became Adventist pastors.

The statistical report as of January 1, 1928, stated that in Zinoviyevsk (now Kropivnytskiy) and in the surrounding villages of Zavadovka, Ornavtovo, Shtulovo, Karlivka, and Lozovarka there were only 39 Adventists.<sup>18</sup>

There is scarce information about the years 1930-1943 due to mass persecutions. According to archival documents, the authorities had ordered execution of Seventh-day Adventists before the German army invaded the region.<sup>19</sup> After the war the Adventist church in Kropivnytskiy had about 50 members. In 1961, however, their prayer house and assets were confiscated. Vitaly Prolinsky, the local pastor, and his family lost their home. The prayer house was urgently remodeled into a pharmacy, and the pastor's apartment was given to the pharmacist in charge.<sup>20</sup>

In the fall of 1964 Adventists were allowed to worship in a building which they shared with the local Baptist church. In 1967 the Kropivnytskiy church received permission to buy its own building. Things started changing in the early 1980s. Local pastors held evangelistic campaigns in Svetlovodsk, Novoukrainka, Novgorodka, Novomirgorod, Kompaneevka, Bobrinets, Dolinskiy, Znamenka, and Pomoshnaya. A second congregation was organized in the city of Kropivnytskiy.

In 2000-2001 two more Adventist churches were established in the city of Kropivnytskiy. In 2017 there were 20 churches and two companies, with a total of 800 members in the Kirovograd region, including Kropivnytskiy, Znamenka, Novoarkhangel'sk, Alexandria, Svetlovodsk, Kompaneevka, Novomirgorod, Novoukrainka, Bobrinets, Haivoron, Dolinskoye, Aleksandrovka, Smolino, Novgorodka, Pavlysh, Pokotilovo, Vlasovka, Gradyz'k, and Blagoveshchenskoye.<sup>21</sup>

## Organizational History

The Dnieper Conference was organized in 1996, when the Cherkasy and Poltava regions were cut off from the Central Ukrainian Conference. It was the year of the 110th anniversary of Adventism in Ukraine. Technically, the Dnieper Conference traces its history to the fourth session of the Central Conference (UUC) which at that time comprised Kiev, Sumy, Chernigov, Poltava, and Cherkassy regions. Since that time the Dnieper Conference held seven sessions (constituency meetings). Headquarters were located at Gogolya Street, Cherkasy.

The reason for dividing the Central Conference/UUC into two parts was a rapid growth of membership and difficulties in administering such a large territory. In 1994 the membership of the Central Conference was 8,219. In 1995 evangelist John Carter held a public evangelistic campaign in Kiev which resulted in establishing the Kiev Mission. During the two years from 1994 to 1996 the Central Conference conducted 155 evangelistic efforts and church membership grew to 13,927. At the suggestion of the Ukrainian Union, the local churches of the Poltava and Cherkassy regions voted to organize a new Dnieper Conference.

The fourth Central Conference Session of 1996 was also the first Dnieper Conference constituency meeting. Initially, the Dnieper Conference included 58 churches with a total membership of 4,348. The new conference planned to evangelize cities and administrative district centers where there was no Adventist presence. It was decided that the Dnieper Conference headquarters would be established in the city of Cherkassy. The conference officers were elected: A. I. Samoilenko (president), N. V. Tuk (secretary), and V. I. Antonyuk (treasurer).<sup>22</sup>

The second session of the Dnieper Conference was held August 4-7, 1999. In the preceding three years the Dnieper Conference had established 24 new churches and purchased 16 buildings for remodeling into prayer houses. Initially, out of 46 administrative districts, only 12 had an Adventist presence. In the three-year period new churches and companies emerged in 32 more districts. At the time of the session, the Dnieper Conference numbered 5,620 members and there were 37 prayer houses. The conference had conducted 70 evangelistic programs and seminars and distributed 77,620 books. Literature evangelists had canvassed in 450 cities, towns, and villages. The Sabbath School department reported the organization of 231 adult, 34 youth, and 49 children's Sabbath School classes. A total of 96 home churches had been organized by 1999. Church departments had been focused on the fulfillment of Adventist mission. The Dnieper Conference had established four Bible study centers to train young people to become church elders and other church leaders. There was a motion to extend the Dnieper Conference boundaries by including the Kirovograd region in the Dnieper Conference (it had been part of the large Southern Ukrainian Conference.) As a result, nine churches with several hundred members became part of the Dnieper Conference.

In 1997 the Dnieper Conference purchased a dilapidated building that had formerly housed a kindergarten in the city of Cherkassy. It was remodeled into a church center that had two worship rooms seating 400 and 100, the conference headquarters, an Adventist Book Center, a baptistry, a kitchen, storage facilities for local churches and the conference, and a guest area accommodating 50 people. It is amazing that today this building is serving its original educational purpose. In addition to hosting three churches and an Adventist Book Center, the building is home to "Oasis" Educational Center which includes a daycare and elementary and middle schools.

Membership was 4,680 in 1998. Initial officers were A. I. Samoilenko (secretary), N. V. Tuk (treasurer), V. I. Antonyuk, D. I. Bogatyrchuk, G. A. Lyubarsky, V. I. Nikityuk, S. V. Nosov, and V. S. Sulzhenko.<sup>23</sup>

At the time of the session the Dnieper Conference had 42 churches in small towns and villages and 40 city churches. It was suggested that the Dnieper Conference administration should continue to extend the Adventist presence in the conference area. The delegates reelected A. I. Samoilenko as president, V. I. Antonyuk as treasurer, and S. V. Nosov as secretary.<sup>24</sup>

In 2000, the headquarters was moved to Pushkin Street 90, Cherkasy.<sup>25</sup>

The third session was held September 18-21, 2002. Over the preceding three years, 2,258 new members had joined the Church and the conference had held dozens of evangelistic programs.

At the end of the reporting period, the Dnieper Conference had 117 churches with 7,158 members. Thirty churches were established and reorganized from 1999 to 2002. A total of 26 buildings had been purchased for remodeling into prayer houses, of which six buildings were dedicated. In 2002 the Dnieper Conference possessed 63 completed or unfinished buildings. There was one Seventh-day Adventist for every 618 non-Adventists living in the Dnieper Conference territory.

In 2001 the Dnieper Conference became part of the ESD *300x300x300 Program* (300 church leaders, 300 new churches and 300 church buildings) and sent 12 young people to Zaosky Theological Seminary to get ministerial training through distance learning. Under the *300x300x300 Program*, the conference held 12 outreach efforts and organized new churches and companies in 12 towns and villages. Literature evangelists, as well as the workers of other departments and services, successfully continued bringing the good news to the people of the Dnieper Conference.

The session prioritized reaching out to new territories, increasing Adventist literature distribution, and making important changes in denominational structure in order to reduce the loss of membership. The new Dnieper Conference officers were S. V. Nosov (president), A. V. Nikityuk (secretary), and G. N. Beskrovnyy (treasurer).<sup>26</sup> Membership grew to 7,162 in 2004, but has been decreasing since.<sup>27</sup>

The fourth session took place September 27-28, 2005. The conference analyzed the membership status. It was stated that the inflow of new members had noticeably declined. This fact was mainly accounted for by the dependence of growth on public evangelism, general disappointment in the results of political and economic changes in the country, financial difficulties of people, and disappearance of prosperity ideologies. At the time of the session, the Dnieper Conference had 120 churches with 7,081 members. A total of 1,243 people had been baptized and 83 joined the Church by profession of faith. But due to migration and a significant number of people who had been disfellowshipped, the membership had decreased by 77. It could be partly explained by the lack of mentoring of baptismal candidates and their hasty baptism. At the time of the session, there was one Seventh-day Adventist for every 578 non-Adventists living in the Dnieper Conference territory. The conference continued to conduct various evangelistic efforts in order to identify the most effective ones. A total of 29 church buildings had been remodeled and 12 new ones dedicated. In the city of Cherkassy the reconstruction of the Spiritual Center had been completed. The delegates to the session elected S. V. Nosov as president, K. P. Tepfer,

secretary, and G. N. Beskrovnyy as treasurer.<sup>28</sup>

The fifth session was held June 29-30, 2009. The conference reached this new milestone with 6,965 members. A total of 1,231 people had joined the Church, but migration and disfellowshipping of members had decreased the total membership by 53, as compared to the previous session. On a positive note, thanks to its evangelistic efforts, the conference established several new churches. At the same time, church members and guests got a chance to watch evangelistic programs via satellite by using the equipment installed at their prayer houses. A new kind of “kayaking evangelism” had been introduced in the conference, with some 20 missionaries in their kayaks visiting every year in towns and villages located along rivers. For instance, they visited 51 locations and distributed 2,223 books and 2,500 copies of *Eternal Treasure* newspaper over two months in 2008.

According to the report of the Sabbath School department, there were 4,737 members and 530 guests in 374 adult classes, 59 youth classes, and 135 children’s classes. The number of members involved in the *1+1 Program* reached 282. A total of 349 members worked with books lent from missionary libraries and 184 Adventists participated in social and community programs. There were 149 small groups with 848 members. Some 55 lay members were involved in prison ministries. At the time of the session there was one Seventh-day Adventist for every 551 non-Adventists living in the Dnieper Conference territory.

In 2010 the Dnieper Conference officers were elected: K. P. Tepfer (president), A. V. Tsyganyuk (secretary), and G. N. Beskrovnyy (treasurer).<sup>29</sup>

The sixth session was held in March 2013. It marked the end of public evangelism which had a lot of advantages as well as some drawbacks. Unfortunately, many new converts who had been hastily baptized, soon left the Church. Throughout the reporting period 1,261 people had been baptized and 2,637 members had been lost. According to the church membership audit, there were 5,570 members in the Dnieper Conference in 2013. The total number of pastors decreased by 10.

Special attention was paid to spiritual development of children and youth from Adventist families. Christian kindergartens were opened in the cities of Cherkassy and Poltava. In Cherkassy the premises for accommodating a primary school had been prepared. The Dnieper Conference had run a two-year evangelistic ministries training course. Elders’ education was brought up to a new level. For the first time seminars for deacons were held.

Adventist Mission and conference departments had worked closely together and conducted many missionary and social programs. A regional branch of the *Nadezhda* TV channel started its ministry.

Some 90 out of 130 churches had their own prayer houses. All building and property ownership papers had been brought in line with the legal requirements in Ukraine.

The following were elected: K. P. Tepfer (president), N. A. Boyko (secretary), and G. N. Beskrovnyy (treasurer).<sup>30</sup>



The seventh session took place April 11-12, 2017. The conference administration informed the constituency about successful development of preschool centers and Adventist schools in the cities of Cherkassy, Poltava, Uman, and Kremenchug. A primary Adventist school was opened in Poltava and a middle school in Cherkassy.

During the four-year period the conference had conducted 141 miscellaneous programs, including social programs. Two "Café Churches" started functioning in Poltava. A total of 2,121,500 newspapers and 100,610 Adventist books had been distributed within the conference territory. The Adventist radio programs had been airing through ten different local radio channels.

A total of 495 people had been baptized, 37 people transferred membership from other regions, and 682 transferred membership to other territories. Inclusive of those disfellowshipped, deceased, or relocated, the total membership decreased by 432 and numbered 5,138. Thirty-five churches had been reorganized. There were 53 churches in the Cherkassy region, 41 churches in the Poltava region, and 24 churches in the Kirovograd region, for a total of 118 churches.

The *Eastern Angel*, a social program designed to help people who live in the war affected areas of Eastern Ukraine, was successfully functioning. The Poltava church organized a special ministry for the needs of Ukrainians who had fled from the combat area. Seven health food stores and two health offices were opened in the Dnieper Conference. During the four-year period several camp meetings for underprivileged children were held. Many churches were actively involved in media ministry.

There were 3,412 Sabbath School members and 877 guests in 307 adult, 54 youth, and 112 children's Sabbath School classes. Several massage rooms were organized. The Dnieper Conference started *The Bread of Life* program. The local churches held 41 *Anna Herman Commemorative Concerts* attended by more than 4,000 people. The conference had purchased tents for literature evangelists.

A total of 1,745,80 copies of *Eternal Treasure*, 146,000 copies of *My Healthy Family*, and 69,380 missionary books, as well as dozens of thousands of children's books had been distributed in the Dnieper Conference. A regional branch of the *Nadezhda* TV channel and four Adventist Book Centers were successfully serving the public.

The Dnieper Conference actively participated in the *500 Years of Reformation* celebrations in Ukraine. As part of this event, the conference held miscellaneous social, children, youth, and other programs.

The Dnieper Conference set several goals for the next four-year period: improvement and development of social ministries; development of daycare and school network; reinvigoration of the *Return Home* evangelistic program targeting those who left the church; further development of media ministry; small-scale evangelistic campaigns; personal evangelism; improvement of pastoral and elder's service in local churches.

The delegates to the session in 2018 elected N. A. Boyko (president), A. N. Drobakha (secretary), and V. N. Sugak (treasurer).<sup>31</sup>

## List of Presidents

Alexander I. Samoylenko (1998-2004); Stanislav V. Nosov (2005-2009); Konstantin P. Tepfer (2010-2017); Nikolai A. Boiko (2018-present).

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## NOTES

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2. R. Sitarchuk, *Adventisty Sed'mogo Dnia v ukrainskikh zemlyakh v sostave Rossiyskoy Imperii* (Poltava: Skytech Publishing House, 2008), 147.
3. Ibid., 150.
4. Ukrainian State Historical Archives, Fund 127, File 64.
5. R. Sitarchuk, *Adventisty Sed'mogo Dnia v ukrainskikh zemlyakh v sostave Rossiyskoy Imperii* (Poltava: Skytech Publishing House, 2008), 148.
6. Ibid., 169.
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8. V. G. Dzhulay, *Dom na kamne* (Kiev: Dzherelo Zhyttia, 2003), 21.
9. E. V. Zaitsev, *Istoriya Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii* (Zaokskiy: Istochnik Zhizni, 2008), 448-452.
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11. Ibid., 13.

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13. Available in personal archives.
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19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
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23. For information and statistics on the conference at its commencement, see "Dnieper Conference" and "Central Ukrainian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1998), 118-119.
24. Ibid.
25. "Dnieper Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2000), 118.
26. Ibid.
27. "Annual Charts and Statistics" for "Dnieper Conference (1996–Present)," Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, accessed July 2, 2019, [http://adventiststatistics.org/view\\_Summary.asp?FieldID=C12006](http://adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C12006).
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29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

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