

South Leeward Conference

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The South Leeward Conference, which was organized in 2019, comprises the Seventh-day Adventist churches in the islands of Antigua, Barbuda, Montserrat, Saint Kitts, and Nevis.

The five islands of the South Leeward Conference are three separate states with Antigua and Barbuda being one independent nation and Saint Kitts and Nevis another. Montserrat is a British dependency. According to the statistical report of the conference as of June 30, 2019, the membership of the conference was 11,770 with Antigua and Barbuda constituting 71.5 percent with a membership of 8,421; Saint Kitts and Nevis constituting 21.9 percent with a membership of 2,578; and Montserrat, 6.6 percent with a membership of 771.¹

Prior to March 2011, the five islands were a part of the territory of the North Caribbean Conference. The North Caribbean Conference then consisted of 13 islands, of which Antigua was the biggest in terms of both area and church membership. Since the headquarters of the conference was located in Saint Croix—a United States territory, direct access to the headquarters was restricted because of visa requirements for entry into United States territory. Additionally, with the headquarters located in Saint Croix, all the departmental directors and the administration of the conference spent most of their time outside the territory with the single largest membership. Over time, some influential lay members began agitating for Antigua to be considered for mission status. In 2004, the Antigua Coordinating Council wrote to Pastor Jensen Trotman, then president of the Caribbean Union, to formally request that consideration be given for Antigua to be made a mission.² The Caribbean Union concluded that, given the dynamics of island sizes and population, it was not reasonable to put Antigua on its own because any further subdivision of the North Caribbean Conference would be difficult since the other East Caribbean English speaking territories would be too small to go on their own.

Over time, the Caribbean Union took an action to realign the territory of the North Caribbean Conference and form the South Leeward Mission. The union committee action required that North Caribbean Conference get approval from its constituency. At the constituency session of 2009, the constituency approved the union's recommendation to form South Leeward Mission, comprising of the islands of Antigua, Barbuda, Saint Kitts, Nevis, and Montserrat.³ The rest of the territory was to remain as North Caribbean Conference. It was now up to the union committee to determine the exact date of the inauguration of the new field. At its year-end meeting of 2010, the Union Committee voted to establish March 6, 2011, as the time for the inauguration, and at the said meeting, it appointed Pastor Desmond F. James as president and Carson L. Greene as secretary-treasurer. These

officers began functioning on January 1, 2011.⁴

In preparation for the new field, the North Caribbean Conference purchased a property on American Road and refurbished it for the purpose of the new mission's headquarters. The purchase was completed in late 2010, which meant that only the months of January and February were available for work on the renovations. By God's grace, the work was done, and the building was ready for the March 6 opening.

The dedication and opening of the office building took place on March 6, 2011. On hand for the opening were the Inter-American Division (IAD) president, Elder Israel Leito, and the administration of the North Caribbean Conference—Pastor Silton Browne (president), Pastor Henry Peters (secretary), and Sister Sanida McKenzie (treasurer)—as well as the governor-general of Antigua and Barbuda. After the dedication and opening exercises, the constituency meeting was convened at the Saint John's Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In addition to Pastors Desmond James and Carson Greene, who were already chosen by the union to function as president and secretary-treasurer respectively, the following persons were selected to function as department directors: Desmond James (Religious Liberty), Pastor Wayne Knowles (Personal Ministries, Community Services, and Sabbath School), Pastor Kendol Doyle (Youth Ministries), Sister Sonia Smith (Health Ministries), and Dr. Eulalie Semper (Education and Children's Ministries).⁵

On March 7, 2011, the Executive Committee met and called Pastor Charles Heskey to serve as Ministerial and Family Life director.⁶ On April 5, the committee elected Pastor Mark Braithwaite to serve as Communication and Stewardship Ministries director.⁷

One of the mandates given by the constituency at the session was for the administration to move the young mission to conference status. The administration, therefore, began the process of growth and stability. This process involved church growth and evangelism with a strong emphasis on conservation, leadership development, and financial sustainability. By the Caribbean Union Session of 2016, a third administrator was added so that the mission now had Pastor Desmond James as president, Dr. Carson Greene as secretary, and Sister Krista Moore as treasurer. In August 2017, Pastor Desmond James was elected president of the North Caribbean Conference, and Dr. Carson Greene was asked to act as interim president while serving as secretary until the year-end meeting. At the November meeting of the Union Committee of 2017, Dr. Carson Greene was elected as president, and Dr. Wayne Knowles, as secretary.

As per the strategic objectives adopted by the executive committee of the mission, a formal request was forwarded to the union administration to begin the process of transitioning the mission to conference status.⁸ The Caribbean Union acted on the request of the mission's executive committee, and on April 9, 2018, the union administration visited the local administration of the mission for an interview. After the union's administrators were satisfied that the mission had demonstrated sufficient readiness, it took action at the midyear meeting to pass on to the division the request for consideration of a change of status. On October 29, 2018, the division's survey/special committee communicated via video conference. Present were Dr. Ellie Henry (president of IAD),

Dr. Leonard Johnson (secretary of IAD), Dr. Filberto Verduzco (treasurer of IAD), Dr. Kern Tobias (president of the Caribbean Union), Pastor Johnson Frederick (secretary of the Caribbean Union), Elder Bertie Henry (treasurer of the Caribbean Union), Dr. Carson Greene (president of the South Leeward Mission), and Morrice Tyrell (lay representative of the South Leeward Mission). After the interview, the committee deliberated in the absence of the two representatives of the South Leeward Mission and then determined that the South Leeward Mission was ready for change of status and would thus recommend the same to the executive committee of the Inter-American Division.

On November 12, 2018, the Inter-American Division, at its year-end meeting held in Haiti, voted to accept the recommendation from the divisions' survey committee to change the status of the South Leeward Mission to South Leeward Conference.⁹ At the union's Executive Committee meeting held November 28 and 29, 2018, in Trinidad, the division's decision was adopted, and the date of May 1–3, 2019, was established as the date for the inaugural constituency meeting.¹⁰

On Wednesday, May 1, 2019, the inaugural session of the South Leeward Conference convened at the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Parham, Antigua, at 4:00 p.m. The division president and secretary—Dr. Elie Henry and Dr. Leonard Johnson—the administration from the Caribbean Union—Dr. Kern Tobias, Pastor Johnson Frederick, and Pastor Bertie Henry—and 205 delegates and visitors gathered for the opening ceremony. The governor-general of Antigua and Barbuda, Sir Rodney Williams, was present for the opening exercises. At approximately 6:30 p.m. the official change of status took place, and South Leeward Mission became South Leeward Conference. The next day, the constituency elected the following officers and directors: Dr. Carson Greene—President, Religious Liberty director; Dr. Wayne Knowles—Secretary, Communication director; Krista Moore—Treasurer; Dr. Mark Braithwaite—Ministerial Association secretary, Family Ministries, and Men's Ministries director; Pastor Orville Joseph—Sabbath School, Stewardship, and Special Needs Ministries director; Pastor Kay White—Personal Ministries director; Pastor Carl Hastings—Youth Ministries director.¹¹

On May 3, 2019, the Executive Committee met and made the following appointments: Education director—Dr. Eulalie Semper; Auditor—Rachael Knowles; Publishing Ministries director—Carl Hastings; Assistant to the President for Evangelism—Pastor Sherwin White; Hispanic Coordinator—Pastor Miguel Vanderhorst; Spouses in Ministry Coordinator—Sister Michelle Greene.¹²

Following the Constituency Meeting of May 1–3, 2019, an island convention was held on May 4 in Antigua at the Gilbert's Camp Grounds. The newly elected officers and directors were installed before an audience of more than 3,000 members. Dr. Elie Henry, the Inter-American Division president, delivered the midday message.

On May 27, 2019, the Executive Committee met to complete the departmental assignment. At this meeting, the following assignments were made: Women's Ministries/ADRA—Pastor Kay White; Children's, Youth, and Health Ministries—Dr. Eulalie Semper; Prayer Ministries—Dr. Carson Greene; Spirit of Prophecy—Pastor Orville Joseph.

The South Leeward Conference's mission is "to prepare the people of the South Leeward Conference for the second coming of Christ by means of quality gospel proclamation, discipleship, training, and service."⁴ The leadership of this young field will seek to keep this focus in view and to rely on God for the fulfillment of this mission.

SOURCES

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South Leeward Mission Strategic Plan, 2018–2021. South Leeward Conference archives, St. John's, Antigua.

NOTES

1. South Leeward Conference statistics, June 2019, South Leeward Conference archives, St. John's, Antigua.
2. Minutes of the Antigua Coordinating Council, October 26, 2004.
3. See minutes of the North Caribbean Council Session, August 2009.
4. Minutes of the Caribbean Union Executive Committee, November 2010.
5. Minutes of the South Leeward Mission Session, March 6, 2011, "Departmental Directors."
6. Minutes of the South Leeward Mission Executive Committee Meeting, March 7, 2011, "Call—Charles Heskey," 3.
7. Minutes of the South Leeward Mission Executive Committee Meeting, April 4–5, 2011, Election of Director: Mark Braithwaite."
8. Minutes of the South Leeward Mission Executive Committee, September 25–26, 2017, "Conference status Guidelines," 603. See also "Conference Status Update," April 4, 2018, 668.
9. See Minutes of the Inter-American Division Executive Committee, November 2018.
10. See Minutes of the Caribbean Union Executive Committee, November 28–29, 2018.
11. Minutes of the South Leeward Conference Session Minutes, May 1–3, 2019, "Election."
12. Minutes of the South Leeward Conference Executive Committee, May 3, 2019, "Assignment of Directors," 788.
13. Minutes of the South Leeward Conference Executive Committee, May 27–28, 2019, "Departmental Assignments," 845.
14. See South Leeward Mission's Strategic Plan 2018–2021.

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