



Bay Islands Conference headquarters, Honduras.  
Photo courtesy of Honduras Union Mission.

## Bay Islands Conference

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Bay Islands Conference is a part of Honduras Union Mission. Its headquarters are located in French Harbour, Roatán, Bay Islands, Honduras. Its mailing address is PO Box 150, Coxen Hole, Roatán, Bay Islands, Honduras! Its activities are governed by principles based on the model constitution of the Inter-American Division (IAD) of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

The Bay Islands Conference territory is an archipelago and one of the 18 departments of the Republic of Honduras. The total area of the Bay Islands is approximately 260 square kilometers. The islands with a land surface of 29 to 60 kilometers are located off the north coast of Honduras, almost forming the curve of an arc. This department is composed of three major islands, five minor islands, and 65 cays. The largest and most predominant of these islands in territory and population is Roatán. It is 29 kilometers (18 miles) east of Utila.<sup>2</sup>

The Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists recorded that the island field had

30 organized churches and four groups. At the beginning of 2019, there were 4,074 members, 122 active employees, and seven educational institutions. As of 2019, this conference had the largest number of educational centers in Honduras Union Mission.<sup>3</sup>

## Origins and Development of Bay Islands Conference

Studying the development of Adventism in Central America reveals that Belize (British Honduras), Panama, and San Andrés (Colombia) all have a common denominator: the Bay Islands. Adventism first arrived on these Honduran islands in 1886 through a woman named Elizabeth Gauterau, a native of Roatán. When Adventist work began in the Bay Islands, there was no organizational structure as a conference or mission, but there was a pastor, Frank Hutchins, who was sent from the United States at Elizabeth Gauterau's request. Although Hutchins arrived in Roatán in the 1890s, he soon made Guanaja (Bonacca or Low Cay) the place from where he would serve the church. From the remote island of Guanaja, great things happened for the development of Adventist work.

At the first Central American camp meeting in Coxen Hole, Roatán, on March 5-15, 1908, the first Central American Conference was organized. The island brethren did not act selfishly but were moved by missionary zeal and made a request to Pastor William Spencer, secretary of the General Conference, that the headquarters of this conference be located in Guatemala City as it was the most important city in Central America and had not yet been reached by the Adventist message.<sup>4</sup> By transferring the headquarters to Guatemala City, the Bay Islands would not be the official headquarters of the Adventist movement until years later.

In 1986, a meeting was held in the English church on Guanaja, where the main topic of discussion was to request the mission, union, and/or IAD that a mission for the Bay Islands be created.<sup>5</sup> The English-speaking brethren decided to form a special task force to go to Valle de Angeles, where the offices of Honduras Union Mission were located, to explain the difficult situation they faced on the islands: English Sabbath school material was not arriving on time, their churches had been neglected, and many churches went mostly without an English-speaking pastor.<sup>6</sup> Those people commissioned to be the voices of the brotherhood were Joseph Jackson, Joley Zapata, Stavely Elwin, Maud Wilmont, Allan Hyde, Ethan Bodden, Valjean Dixon, and Nadeen Thompson.<sup>7</sup> This commission was also to represent the Bay Islands field at all times. The commission found no support in the mother field, so they advanced to the next level. That same commission traveled to Costa Rica to meet the administrators of Central American Union Mission, which also failed to provide a satisfactory solution to their petition.<sup>8</sup> Determined to reach the highest levels, they attempted to meet with the president of the IAD, Pastor George W. Brown, who had a very close relationship with the island members. In the interview, Pastor Brown assured the islanders that a new field would be created to meet their needs.

In 1987, Pastor Pablo Perla, president of Honduras Mission, and Marlon Moody, secretary-treasurer of Honduras Mission, commissioned Pastor Alfredo Ordonez Withol to conduct a study for the creation of the Bay Islands Mission. After the administrators of the mother mission received the study and approved it at their meeting, the vote was passed to other levels. When the vote arrived at the IAD, Pastor George W. Brown placed it on the following session's agenda. It was voted to approve the restructuring of the Honduras Mission field to create the Bay Islands Mission, and the department of Gracias a Dios was added to this field for missionary purposes.<sup>9</sup>

With the votes taken, an official separation was only a matter of time. The mother field would now be known as Honduras Mission. The administrators of the mother mission thought it would be difficult for them to survive without financial contributions from the Bay Islands, since this represented 40% of the entire budget of the field. Treasurer Moody charted two budgets for the two fields, and, when the time for separation came, both fields received funds necessary to operate.<sup>10</sup>

On February 24, 1988, the Bay Islands Mission and the department of Gracias a Dios began to operate experimentally.<sup>11</sup> Finally, on July 12, 1988, the organizing ceremony was held.<sup>12</sup> The first appointed president was Pastor Victor Shepherd with Dolores Mann as secretary-treasurer.<sup>13</sup>

In 2004, when the experimental Atlantic Mission in La Ceiba was created, the department of Gracias a Dios was transferred from the Bay Islands Mission to this new territory. Thus, the Bay Islands Mission only served the insular sector.<sup>14</sup>

On January 9, 2009, the Bay Islands Mission Board voted to accept the Bay Islands Conference Constitution. On February 4, 2009, the first quadrennial session of the Bay Islands Conference was held with Pastor Israel Leito, president of the IAD, and Pastor Alfredo Argueta, president of Mid-Central American Union Mission, present. After explaining the procedures, committees were elected, and Pastor Perry Elwin was appointed president with Dolores Mann as secretary-treasurer.<sup>15</sup>

## Institutions of the Bay Islands Conference

*Guanaja Adventist Institute* is located in Guanaja, in front of the public health center. Motivated by the local brotherhood, Hutchins and his wife, Cora Ella, decided to start construction of a school. Since the Hutchins had many other responsibilities, hiring teachers was a necessity.<sup>16</sup> On July 4, 1894, the elementary school was inaugurated in Guanaja.<sup>17</sup> Eventually, the Hutchins requested of William Evans to form an industrial school on the main island in Porcales. This school was only in operation during Brother Evans's stay in Guanaja. However, in the IAD, this school marked the beginning of a school system that faces the task of training man in an integral way.<sup>18</sup> In 2019, the Adventist institute of Guanaja functioned as a K-12 (kindergarten through 12<sup>h</sup> grade) institution.<sup>19</sup>

*French Harbour Adventist Institute* is located in French Harbour, Roatán, in front of the Atlántida bank.<sup>20</sup> There are reports that, in 1903, Brother J. G. Smalley from Michigan worked as a teacher at an Adventist school in French Harbour, Roatán. For some reason, that school stopped operations.

Many decades passed with no school in Roatán until the early 1970s. Pastor Roberto E. Brown preached an inspiring message about Adventist Christian education. Captain Kern Hyde and his wife, Ruby Rose, told the young pastor that, if he could get teachers, they would build a school so that students would not have to leave the island at an early age. So, on July 25, 1972, the official agreement "#2721-E.P" was obtained to operate as an Adventist private mixed rural school.<sup>21</sup> In 1975, Taylor wrote: "The first camp meeting on the islands was held in French Harbour, Roatán, in the new school built and ceded to the Honduras Mission by Captains Myrl and Kern Hyde."<sup>22</sup> Later, a high school curriculum was added to the school. Over the years, the institution's curriculum has been updated. As of 2019, it operates as a K-12 institution.<sup>23</sup>

*Utila Adventist Institute* is located in Countryside, Utila, Bay Islands. The Adventist school in Utila began operations for the first time when the teacher, Miss Winnie Holmden, from the United States opened it in 1899. Miss Holmden was followed by the Corwin's.<sup>24</sup> With the passage of time, this first school somehow also stopped operations.

By 1989, Utila Adventists organized to open a school that met their children's needs. The first classes were taught at Mr. Mowat Eden's house with 45 students between primary and secondary levels. Then, Mr. Patrick Flynn, a member of the Adventist church, donated land for the construction of an educational center. This institution officially began in February 1991 as "Utila Adventist Private Kindergarten." Eventually, the Ministry of Education granted permission to operate the Adventist institute, and operations started in February 1992. As of 2019, Utila Adventist Institute operates as a K-12 institution.<sup>25</sup>

*Jonesville Adventist Bilingual School* is located in Jonesville, Roatán. It began operations in 1938. The first classrooms were in a wooden church building by the seashore. In 1975, Mr. Eric Thompson donated the land on which the school currently stands. In February 2017, the school offered up to ninth grade, making the school a basic center. As of 2019, it operates as a basic K-9 center.<sup>26</sup>

*Berkshire Adventist Institute* is located in Brisas del Mitch, Mangrove Bight, Guanaja. In 1990, Pastor Peter Wood, motivated by the lack of an Adventist school on the main island, began working on what would be his last service for Adventist education. In 1991, Pastor Woods and the Bay Islands Mission made arrangements for the institution to open its doors and offer a Christian education. In 1998, the devastating Hurricane Mitch hit Guanaja, completely destroying the Adventist institution. The school was reconstructed in a new town 250 meters from Mangrove Bight and, since 2002, has been operating as a K-12 institution.<sup>27</sup>

*Oak Ridge Adventist Bilingual School* is located in Oak Ridge, Roatán, in front of the main cemetery. In 2009, the idea and vision of an Adventist school in Oak Ridge came to Sally Kirkconnell, Lewis Gough, Charlene Gough, and Eunice Gough. With this in mind, they embarked on construction of the school project. In 2015, the school began operations in a property donated by Ms. Sally Kirkconnell. As of 2019, it operates as a K-6 elementary school with permits to operate as a basic center.<sup>28</sup>

*Sandy Bay Adventist Bilingual School* is located in the Sandy Bay community of Roatán next to the Sandy Bay Adventist church. This school resulted from the concerns and desire of Brother Victor Bodden, who was leading in the Sandy Bay church. He and the Bay Islands Mission worked together to start an elementary school, which began operations on February 1, 2015. As of 2019, it has operated as a basic K-9 center.<sup>29</sup>

*Utila Youth Camp* is located in the Iguana Country neighborhood of Utila, Bay Islands. On November 12, 2015, Brother Shelby Lammar McNab Morgan donated 10 acres of land to build a youth camp and healthy lifestyle center. In October 2017, Utila Youth Camp officially opened.<sup>30</sup>

*Bonnacca Spring Water (Water Purifier Company)* is located in Guanaja, Bay Islands. The water purifier company was opened to benefit the Guanaja Adventist Institute and provide scholarships for low-income students. The Quiet Hour Ministries Group and District Pastor Waldo Casildo both had the idea.<sup>31</sup> The water purifier company began operations in July 2012 on the first floor of the Hispanic church of Guanaja. In 2013, the company moved to Marcasa's facilities. By 2019, the school board of Guanaja Adventist Institute managed the water purification company.<sup>32</sup>

#### *List of Presidents*

Victor Shepherd (1987-1992); Oswaldo Magana (1993-1994); Ramon Escalante (1995-1998); Jorge Reid (1999); Roberto E. Brown (2000-2009); Perry Elwin (2010-2017); Mauriel Bush (2017- ).

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