



Headquarters of the West Central Korean Conference, 2020.

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West Central Korean Conference

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West Central Korean Conference (aka Seojunghanhaphoe) is one of the five units comprising the Korean Union Conference of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists. First named the Central Chosen Mission when the Chosen Union Mission was formed in 1919, then reorganized as the West Central Korean Mission in 1978, and it was elevated to the West Central Korean Conference (WCKC) in 1983.

The WCKC territory includes the western part of Seoul, the province of Gyeonggi (except the counties of Kapyung, Kwangjoo, and Yangpyung), and the county of Chulwon in the province of Kangwon. As of June 30, 2019, the region had a population of 19,623,711. The conference itself consists of 166 churches and 86,375 members. It operates two educational institutions (Hankook Sahmyook High School and Hankook Sahmyook Middle School) and eight community and welfare centers.¹

Origin of Adventist Work in the Conference Territory

When the Korean Mission began in 1908, it had its headquarters at Soonan, Pyeongannam-do. The mission leaders planned to relocate to the capital of Korea and moved the offices to Wolam-dong, Seoul, in September 1909.² Missionary work in the WCKC area began with the church services at Wolam-dong. A Sabbath School started there in October. It then moved to Pyeongdong in the spring of 1910, and Kim Seok-young and others held a 10-day evangelistic series during October of that year. Twenty-seven people, including Jin-woo Lee, accepted the Adventist faith, of which 13 received baptism. They organized the Pyeongdong Church in January 1911, which became the first SDA congregation within the WCKC territory.³ In 1914, the church moved to Cheongjin-dong, Jongno-gu, becoming the predecessor of the Seoul Central Adventist Church. In addition, missionary work began in Janghyeon-ri, Yangju-gun in 1910 and Naegok-ri, Yangju-gun in 1912, and Sabbath Schools formed in Mapyeong-ri, Yongin-gun and Yeoncheon-gun in April 1915.⁴

In February 1910, officials of the Korean Mission divided Korea into four mission areas and selected Seoul, Soonan, Wonsan, and Gyeongsan as mission centers.⁵ The general meeting, held in August 1910 named the four territories as the Central Korean, West Korean, East Sea Coast, and the South Korean regions. The future WCKC's area was the Central Korean district.⁶ The history of the WCKC began in earnest when the Central Korean region organized as the Central Chosen Mission in 1919.

Organizational History

The Korean Mission, founded in 1908, became the Korean Conference in 1917, and restructured as the Chosen Union Mission in 1919. The Chosen Union Mission consisted of three units: the West Chosen Conference, the Central Chosen Mission, and the South Chosen Mission.⁷ The territory of the Central Chosen Mission included Seoul, Gyeonggi-do and Gangwon-do, as well as parts of Hamgyong-do and Chungcheong-do.⁸ The initial territory of the mission was larger than it would be later. However, the continuing development of missionary work required that church administration divide the territory several times.

The eighth general meeting of the Adventist Church held in 1934 broke the Chosen Union Mission into five missions: the Central Chosen Mission, the North Chosen Mission, the Southeast Chosen Mission, the Southwest Chosen Mission, and the West Chosen Mission. The eastern coastal areas along with Hamkyong Province became the North Chosen Mission, and the Central Chosen Mission included Seoul and Gyeonggi-do and the western part of Kangwon-do and Chungcheong-do.⁹

At that time, Charles L. Butterfield, superintendent of the Chosen Union Mission, also served as the director of the Central Chosen Mission. However, its first general meeting held in February 1920 appointed Howard Lee as the new director. The second general meeting reappointed Butterfield. Mun Gook Jeong replaced him at the general meeting held in June 1921. He led the mission for four years until Tae-hyun Choi became director at the fifth general meeting in June 1927. During this period, the mission had 545 church members and 31 Sabbath Schools. It then grew to 53 Sabbath Schools and 1,159 church members by 1934.¹⁰

In June 1947, after the country's liberation from Japanese rule, during the re-establishment of the Korean Union Mission, administration designated the North Korean region as the North Korean Mission and divided the South Korean region into two missions, the Central Korean Mission and the South Korean Mission. At that time, Myung-gil Kim was the superintendent of the Central Korean Mission, and its territory consisted of Seoul, Gyeonggi-do, Gangwon-do, and a part of Chungcheong-do. Since the Japanese had dissolved the Adventist Church in December 1943, only about a dozen churches could be restored during this period.¹¹ Unfortunately, when the Korean War broke out in June 1950, churches in the region of the Central Korean Mission again faced great difficulties.

The Korean War damaged churches throughout the country. Fifteen chapels belonging to the Central Korean Mission were destroyed. However, after the war, new Sabbath Schools were built in many areas. As a result of such efforts, the number of church members reached 4,032 by 1957.¹²

The eighteenth general meeting of the Korean Union Mission in December 1957 divided the Central Korean Mission into the Central Korean and Middle East Korean missions. As a result, the restructuring incorporated Kangwon-do, Checheon, and Danyang of Chungcheongbuk-do into the Middle East Korean Mission, and the Central Korean Mission had jurisdiction over Seoul, Gyeonggi-do, and Chungcheong-do (excluding Checheon and Danyang).¹³

In the 1960s, the Korean Adventist Church grew rapidly, especially the Central Korean Mission. According to a report at the twentieth general meeting of the Korean Union Mission held in December 1961, the number of baptized members doubled to 8,815 in four years.¹⁴ As a result, the Korean Union Mission re-divided the Central Korean Mission into two missions (Central and Middle West). The newly established Middle West Korean Mission had jurisdiction over the Chungcheong-do region, while the territory of the Central Korean Mission was reduced to Seoul and Gyeonggi-do.¹⁵ However, since 1966 the Korean Adventist Church has entered a period of stagnation, leading to the merging of the Central Korean Mission in 1968 with the Middle East Korean Mission.¹⁶

In the 1970s, innovative changes enabled the Korean Adventist Church once again to gain members. In particular, the Central Korean Mission led the growth by baptizing more than 1,000 every year. As a result, the mission expanded to 18,749 members in 234 churches and companies by 1978. In response, the Korean Union Mission divided the Central Korean Mission into the East Central Korean and West Central Korean missions. The territory of the West Central Mission consisted of Seoul: Jung-gu, Seongbuk-gu, Seodaemun-gu, Mapo-gu, Yeongdeungpo-gu, Gangseo-gu, Gwanak-gu, Gyeonggi-do: Incheon, Suwon, Uijeongbu, and five cities and 15 counties. It had 102 churches, 4,466 church members, 9,128 Sabbath School members, and 33 ministers.¹⁷ Pastor Dong-joon Kim became its first president.

By 1983, the West Central Korean Mission had expanded to 15,349 members in 120 churches and companies. As a result of having become financially self-sustaining, it was elevated as the West Central Korean Conference (WCKC) in 1983.¹⁸ At that time, Byung-deok Cheon became its president. When leadership appointed him

president of the Korean Union Conference in 1983, Jong-hyuk Kim assumed the position of president of the WCKC.

In 1986, the WCKC moved its headquarters from Bangbae-dong to the second floor of the new building of the Seoul Central Church located in Gyeonji-dong, Jongno-gu, Seoul.¹⁹ At the same time the conference launched a program to establish new congregations. In 1986, the WCKC established 10 new churches in Seoul and Incheon through a project named the "Caleb Movement" and 22 churches in the next three years by another pioneering program. The number of church members swelled to 30,210 by 1991.²⁰

Even in the 1990s, the church expansion movement of the WCKC continued. As a result, the number of churches and church members increased to 190 and 37,861 at the end of 1995.²¹ And at the end of 2000, the number reached 49,310 church members in 175 churches and companies. In addition, the number of ministers belonging to the WCKC totaled 350, and the tithe amounted to 9 billion won (\$7.8 million).²²

The WCKC formed a research committee to establish a proposed Gangnam Conference in September 2002, and discussed further division of WCKC's territory. However, after a long period of research, it decided against such a restructuring of its territory.²³ Then, in June 2004, the conference constructed new headquarters in Gongneung-dong, Nowon-gu, Seoul.²⁴

The WCKC reached its membership peak in 2006 and then entered a downward trend. According to a report at the thirty-fourth general meeting of the WCKC held in January 2007, baptisms was 7,565, down 182 from the previous session. Subsequent reports show that the number has been decreasing slowly. Therefore, in order to solve this problem, the WCKC developed a church-growth strategy to strengthen mission capabilities and established a program to revitalize church development in the Seoul metropolitan area and additional cities.²⁵ The establishment and implementation of this approach has become even more pressing since the 2010s.

On March 15, 2008, the WCKC celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of it becoming a self-sustaining conference. According to the data reported at the ceremony, the number of churches and companies has risen from 102 to 188 during the past 30 years, and the number of church members has increased from 10,342 to 66,974. At the meeting, the WCKC presented eight goals related to evangelism, spiritual growth, and church planting.²⁶

In 2015, the Korean Union Conference announced a proposal to form a research committee for breaking the WCKC into additional conferences, but this has not materialized either. The next year, in 2016, the thirty-seventh general meeting of WCKC decided to reduce the terms of officers of the WCKC to three years from the five years previously adopted at the thirty-sixth general meeting held in 2011.²⁷

On October 27, 2018, the Byeolnae Church, a member of the WCKC, conducted a service of gratitude for reaching 1,000 church members. It became the first church in the history of the Korean Adventist Church to surpass that number and did so while constructing a church building in a new city in Byeolnae during 2015, after the merger of the Sahman and Deoksong churches.²⁸ The Byeolnae Church symbolized the development of the

WCKC and its vision for the future. The following year, Pastor Won-sik Shin accepted the presidency of the WCKC at the thirty-ninth general meeting held in January 2019. The session also emphasized the WCKC's goal of "revitalizing local churches."²⁹

List of Presidents

Central Chosen Mission: Charles L. Butterfield (1919); Howard M. Lee (1920); C. L. Butterfield (1921); Mun Gook Jeong (1922-1927); Tae Hyun Choi (1927-1930); Keun Eok Lee (1931-1932); Tae Hyun Choi (1932-1937); R. S. Watts (1937-1939); Dong Shim Chong (1939-1943).

Central Korean Mission: Myung Kil Kim (1947-1954); Seong Won Im (1955); Dong Sim Jeong (1956-1957); Young Seop Oh (1958-1962); Jong Kyun Shin (1962); Yeo Sik Lee (1963-1965); Iyeol Kim (1966-1971); Mun Kyung Ko (1971-1977).

West Central Korean Mission: Dong Jun Kim (1978-1982); Byung Deok Cheon (1982-1983).

West Central Korean Conference: Jong Hyuk Kim (1984-1985); Kun Jun Kim (1986-1988); Yeoung Bong Joo (1989-1995); Dong Jun Kim (1996-1997); Seong Sun Hong (1998-2000); Myung Kwan Hong (2001-2004); Chun Kwang Hwang (2005-2009); Young Kyu Choi (2010-2015); Seung Dong Lee (2016-2018); Won Sik Shin (2019-).

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NOTES

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4. Man Kyu Ho, *History of One Hundred Years of Korean SDA, 1904~1945* (Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 2010), 496.
5. C. L. Butterfield, "Training in New Recruits," *ARH*, April 21, 1910, 13.
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10. Man Kyu Oh, *History of One Hundred Years*, 494, 495.
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12. "A Report of the Central Korean Mission," Minutes of the 18th General Meeting of Korean Union Mission (Seoul: Korean Union Mission, 1957), 11, 12.
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15. *Church Compass*, February 1963, 17.
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