

# Southern Academy of Seventh-day Adventists, Trinidad and Tobago

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The Southern Academy of Seventh-day Adventists is a privately-run, co-educational secondary school for students eleven to nineteen years of age, located just outside San Fernando, South Trinidad, along the Palmiste Branch Road, Duncan Village La Romain. It is one of four Adventist secondary schools in the country, with a constituency that stretches from Guayaguayare in the south east to Cedros in the south west, as well as much of central Trinidad.

In the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary publication, Joseph Grimshaw, the first principal of the school, reveals interesting dynamics that led to the establishment of the institution: "In December 1952, I was requested by elder Charles Manoram to start a school in the district of San Fernando. Having had recent surgery, I told elder Manoram that I was willing to accept, but that I would not be available until the beginning of the school term in January 1953. On January 9, 1953, I arrived at the church building at about 8:00 am followed by Elder Carrington, his daughter Joyce, and Miss Una Roach, the other two teachers who had recently graduated from Caribbean Union College. We discussed the staff arrangements. Joyce Carrington would take infants and standard one, Una Roach standards two, three and four, and I would take standard five. The majority of the pupils appeared to be for standard five."<sup>1</sup>

The school is privately managed by the education board of the South Caribbean Conference, as well as by a local school board, headed by the district pastor. Starting from humble beginnings, the school has made remarkable progress over the decades, both in physical expansion and student success, and this without any funding from extra-church sources. This achievement is notable, especially as it has been accomplished within an educational environment in which secondary education in both public and assisted schools, is managed and fully funded by government.

Eric John Murray has provided critical information on the evolution of Southern Academy:

"In 1953 Southern Academy was opened as the secondary section of the San Fernando School. Like its sister high school, Harmon and Bates, Southern Academy was at first operated by the local church with assistance from the conference, before coming under direct conference control years later."<sup>2</sup>

Beginning with 57 students and two teachers, operating in the San Fernando church building, the school moved on to rented quarters. Forms 1 to 3 with a population of 100 students were located at Unity Hall on Le Gendre Street, San Fernando. Forms 4 and 5 also totalling 100 were housed at the Naparima Loan Society on Coffee Street, San Fernando. By 1957, the school was moved to its own premises on Pouchet Street, San Fernando.

Further changes in the development of the school occurred when the late Pastor Samuel L. Gadsby, in 1969, encouraged the school's board of managers and the executive school board to purchase seven acres of land in Duncan Village, La Romain. However, the school struggled to maintain its recognition as a leading Christian educational institution in this highly competitive educational arena. As a consequence, it became necessary to relocate the school once more.

In January 1996, a new school building located at Palmiste Branch Road, Duncan Village, La Romain was officially opened by then Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Honorable Basdeo Panday. It was dedicated on March 10, 1996. The new site which accommodates extra-mural classes of the University of the Southern Caribbean, has enabled the institution to fully realize its policy aims, as well as increase its intake in recent years.

The school is a relatively small institution with a student population numbering around 400 per annum. It has an academic staff of 26, ancillary/classified staff of six, including a school chaplain, a guidance counsellor, administrative assistant, and janitors. In recent years, most of the student intake have had their fees paid by government, in its effort to provide free universal secondary education to the children of the nation<sup>3</sup>

The school pursues a grammar-type syllabus in line with most of the traditional denominational institutions of the country, and has not broadened to include a vocational syllabus similar to that of the new comprehensive schools. Students are prepared to write the national CSEC examination in the fifth form, and the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) at advanced level. In 2008, the school stopped preparing students for CAPE.<sup>4</sup> Yet its offerings are broad enough to include the traditional humanities, the science subjects and business studies options, equipping students with entry qualifications for universities locally and abroad. This still remains the syllabus of choice in any school in the country.

In keeping with the global vision of Adventist education, Southern Academy provides a holistic programme of instruction. Even though it avoids open rivalry with others, there are football and cricket teams for boys, and netball teams for girls, to cultivate the positive values of co-operation and team-spirit. Students are encouraged to participate in many of the cultural events offered during the year to schools throughout the country, such as national debates or music festivals, to widen cultural exposure and inter-school linkages. Its religious focus is clearly achieved in the range of spiritual exercises conducted, and the number of baptisms within the school annually.<sup>5</sup>

## Challenges and Refocusing

Weekly chapel services, regular and special bible classes, inclusion of life skills as a subject, field trips, health features in chapel, engaging in outreach programs and special programs planned by the school's chaplain and guidance counsellor are the major strengths of the school's program that endeavour to meet the school's philosophy, goals and mission. However, some areas that need improvement include community outreach-increased visitations to constituency churches and neighbouring community projects. Technological advancement that would enable greater access to information, and communication with the community at large, is another area where growth is necessary.<sup>6</sup>

## Principals

Joseph Grimshaw (1953); A. C. W. Haynes (1954-1956); Rupert Ham-Yin (1957-1958); J. B. Haynes (acting) (1958-1959); John Ambrose, (1959-1964); B. W. Benn (1964-1968); Melvin Gadsby (1968-1970); Merrill Mc Kenzie (1971-1974); Hollis James (1974-1976); Harrihar Soonoo (1976-1977); Mervyn Chapman, (1977-1978); Winston Cordner (1978-1981); R. N. Edwards (1981-1982); Carlyle Wilson, (acting) (1982); Benjamin Igwe (1982-1985); Candy Juba (acting) (1985) Keith James (1985-1989); Lincoln Dyer (1990-1997); Carl Haynes (1997-2005); Jessica Cunningham (2005-2007); Avette Allen (2007- present).<sup>7</sup>

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### SOURCES

Murray, Eric John. *A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad and Tobago 1891-1981*. St. Joseph, Trinidad: The College Press, 1982.

Southern Academy of Seventh-day Adventists. *50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Publication*, 2003.

Southern Academy of Seventh-day Adventists. *Accreditation Self-Study 2010*.

South Caribbean Conference Education Department archives. St. Augustine, Trinidad.

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### NOTES

1. Southern Academy of Seventh-day Adventists, *50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Publication*, 2003.
2. Eric John Murray, *A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad and Tobago 1891-1981* (St. Joseph, Trinidad: The College Press, 1982), 87.
3. Southern Academy of Seventh-day Adventists, *Accreditation Self-Study 2010*, 16-18.
4. Osric James, interview by author, November 12, 2019.

5. *South Caribbean Conference Education Department archives, St. Augustine, Trinidad.*<sup>?</sup>

6. *Accreditation Self-Study 2010*, 26

7. *Ibid.*

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