



Crimea Mission (CaUM) Headquarters

Photo courtesy of Crimea Mission.

Crimea Mission

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The Crimea Mission is an attached field of the Euro-Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists. It was organized in 2014, and its headquarters is in Simferopol, Republic of Crimea.

Territory and Statistics

The Crimea Mission is comprised of the Republic of Crimea. As of 2021, it included twenty-five churches with a membership of 1,713 amongst a population of 1,912,000 people. Its mission headquarters is located at Vorovskogo Street 5, 295000 Simferopol, Republic of Crimea.¹

Origin of the Adventist Work in Crimea²

The beginnings of the Adventist ministry in the Crimea Mission date back to the first half of the nineteenth century, when Crimea was part of the Taurida Governorate of the Russian Empire.

From 1822 to 1826, Joseph Wolf visited Crimea during his missionary journey, preaching everywhere about the soon coming of Christ. Later, former German colonists who emigrated from the Russian Empire to America became acquainted with Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. From America they sent Adventist books and brochures to their relatives and friends who lived in Russia. In this way, as early as 1882 there were several people in the Taurida Governorate who had learned about the Adventist Church and decided to keep the Sabbath holy according to the commandments of God's Law.

One of the well-known Adventist pioneers in Crimea was Philipp Reiswig, who had emigrated from Russia to the United States, where he became an Adventist thanks to the missionary work of Ludwig Richard Conradi. Despite his advanced age and speech impediment, which caused him to stutter, Reiswig returned to Crimea in 1883 to preach the gospel. He brought with him a trunkful of Adventist tracts and papers, which he distributed as he visited house to house. In those days any open preaching of non-Orthodox views was persecuted by law, so Reiswig, professing poor eyesight, usually asked someone to read to him from the pamphlet that he held out. If the reader showed any interest, he would let him keep the pamphlet. As a result of his work, several groups of believers were organized in the villages of Saki and Japontschi.

Gerhard Perk (1859-1930), a native of one of the Mennonite colonies in southern Russia, became a prominent figure in the early history of Russian Adventism. In 1882 through the pamphlets, Perk learned about the Adventist teachings and became convinced of the correctness of the Adventist message. Later, he became a colporteur for the British and Foreign Bible Society in Russia and joined the Adventist Church.

In early July 1886, the General Conference sent L. R. Conradi to Russia to visit those who observed the Sabbath. Accompanied by Gerhard Perk, Conradi traveled by sea from Odessa to the Taurida Governorate. At the seaport of Yevpatoria, Conradi and Perk met some German Baptists to whom they preached for two days. Afterward, they went to the village of Demir Bulat where they were met by a group of Mennonites, who had been keeping the Sabbath for four years. There were several similar groups in this area. After regular meetings during several weeks, a group of believers decided to join the Adventist Church. The first baptism of two people took place in a lake near the village of Berdy Bulat, seventy kilometers from Simferopol (today it is the village of Privolnoe, Krasnoperekopsky District). Another seventeen people, mostly former Baptists and Mennonites, had been baptized according to the biblical principle before they were acquainted with the Adventist message. Therefore, they were admitted to the Adventist Church on profession of faith.

As a result, on July 31, 1886, in the village of Berdy Bulat, the first Adventist church in Russia was organized according to the constitution of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Gottfried Tetz, who also received baptism, became the first elder of this local church.

The first Adventist churches in the cities of Yevpatoria and Sevastopol appeared at the close of the nineteenth century. According to statistical reports of the Adventist Church between 1886 and 1890, the number of church members in Crimea increased from thirty to seventy-one.

In 1905, the freedom of religion was proclaimed in the Russian Empire. In the years 1905-1906, a Bible study group of twenty-five members was organized in Yalta to become an Adventist congregation two years later.

In the city of Simferopol, the Adventist church was established due to the active missionary work of colporteur Fyodor I. Solodukha, who arrived in the city in 1910. In 1914, the Simferopol church numbered about twenty members. Another church was organized in Simferopol in 1921 in which there were forty members.

Before World War I, there were a couple of large Adventist families (ethnic Germans) in the town of Dzhankoy. Later several other people, who had moved from other places, joined them. Between 1917 and 1919, this group increased due to an influx of former Orthodox Christians, Baptists, and Molokans.

In subsequent years, Seventh-day Adventists appeared in other towns and villages of Crimea.

Organizational History³

At the time of organization, the first Adventist church in Crimea, the missionary activities in Russia were guided by the Central European Conference of the SDA Church. On February 1, 1891 the Eastern European Mission Field was established to supervise the Adventist work in Russia. The delegates to the constituency meeting elected L.R. Conradi the field chair and pastor E. Welk the district chair for the Don region and Crimea.

On September 26, 1901, in the city of Forstenorte in the Terek region (North Caucasus), the ninth session of the Eastern European Mission Field took place. At this session, the South Russian Union, which also included

Crimea, was founded.

In 1907, there were sixty-eight Adventists in Crimea, and by 1910 the number had increased to seventy-four. At that time, there were two churches in the city of Yevpatoria (one Russian and one German) and a church in the city of Sevastopol, as well as small companies and isolated members in other populated areas.

From 1907 to 1909, Pastor David Gäde served in Ukraine, Bessarabia, and Crimea. He was a German colonist from Russia, who, after completing his studies in the United States, worked by the assignment of the General Conference. He served as the chair of the Black Sea Mission, which included Crimea, until the beginning of World War I.

The period of World War I was a severe shock for the Adventist Church in Crimea. Houses of prayer were closed, worship services were banned, and many ministers and lay members were exiled to Siberia or the Caucasus. However, remaining Adventists gathered every Saturday for worship in wooded areas or steppes outside of towns. The Revolution of 1917 in Russia brought relief for a short time.

During the ensuing terrible time of civil war, Adventists in Crimea continued to gather for worship. In those years, traveling literature evangelist I. Petukhov, a former sailor of the Black Sea fleet, conducted missionary campaigns in schools and theater auditoriums that attracted hundreds of people between 1918 and 1922. As a consequence, many people were baptized. In 1926, Petukhov, who was actively preaching the gospel, baptized seventeen people.

In 1926, the Crimea Mission Field was part of the South Eastern Union, and within its territory there were six churches (each numbering no less than fifteen members) and four companies (each numbering no less than five members) served by two pastors and two Bible workers. All told, there were 258 church members in Crimea.

In 1927, the second congress of the Crimean churches and companies was held in Sevastopol. Using this opportunity, the chair of the All-Union Council of Seventh-day Adventists, H. J. Löbsack, visited the Adventist churches in Crimea.

Between 1929 and 1939, the authorities dissolved all Adventist congregations and closed the houses of prayer. Ministers and active lay members were arrested. During those years, worship services were conducted secretly in small groups in private houses or outdoors.

After the beginning of World War II in 1941, ethnic Germans, including Adventists, were deported from Crimea.

After the liberation of Crimea in 1944, the threat of reprisals hung over the believers, although it was also a period of relief from persecution. Thanks to the courage of a lay member S. I. Kasyar, the congregation in Simferopol was re-registered and began to conduct worship services in a rented house. From 1947 to 1954, Peter G. Silman was in charge of the churches and companies in Yevpatoria, Yalta, Alupka, Feodosia, Stary Krym, and other places in Crimea.

In a short time, the Simferopol church, pastored by Parfentiy D. Kostomsky (1954-1958) and then by Vasiliy F. Makarov (1958-1960), grew substantially. In the following years, this church was supervised by a Ivan N. Gandabura, who also visited the cities and villages in Crimea where he conducted evangelism.

In 1965, P. I. Kulakov became the Adventist church leader for the southern Ukraine. A member of an underground all Ukrainian council of Seventh-day Adventists, Kulakov served in this capacity until 1977, when a new territorial division of the Adventist Church in Ukraine was introduced.

On October 8, 1978, Ivan A. Vishnevskiy was elected a senior interregional pastor of the Kherson Conference, which united churches and companies in the Kherson, Crimea, and Kirovograd regions. Later, this conference was renamed the Crimea Conference and existed until 1987. By that time, it included twenty-one churches with 1,305 members.

In order to develop the Adventist ministry in southern Ukraine more effectively, a special congress was held in Odessa July 3-5, 1987, with the participation of delegates from the Odessa and Crimea conferences. The congress decided to merge the two conferences into the Southern Ukrainian Conference and elected Georgiy G. Galan conference president.

The second congress of the Southern Ukrainian Conference was held May 15-18, 1991, in the city of Nikolaev. Vladimir I. Kucheryavenko was elected the new conference president.

From 1993 to 1998, new Adventist congregations appeared in Crimean towns including Bakhchisarai (1993), Sevastopol-Severnaya (1993), Feodosiya (1994), Kerch-Arshintsevo (1995), Krasnoperekopsk (1997), Saki (1995), Sevastopol-3 (1995), and Sudak (1995). Companies were organized in the towns of Armyansk, Belogorsk, Zuya, Malorechenskoye, Pervomayskoye, Primorskiy, and Utyos. According to documents of the fifth congress of the Southern Ukrainian Conference, additional congregations in Crimea were organized including in Simferopol, Yevpatoria, Lenino, and Chernomorskoe. New companies appeared in Ayvovoye, Balaklava, Vnukovo, Gvardeyskoe, Goncharnoe, Gurzuf, Dolinka, Zheleznodorozhny, Zaozerno, Krasny Mak, Krymskoe, Nizhnegorsky, Roshchino, Sokolino, and Shchelkino.

Until 2014, the Adventist congregations in the Crimean Peninsula belonged to the Southern Ukrainian Conference. At the end of the third quarter of 2014, there were twenty-six churches and nine companies with 1,873 members in Crimea.

Due to the changed political circumstances in 2014, the ESD executive committee, with the support of the General Conference, made a decision to establish a separate church organization—the Crimea Mission attached to the Euro-Asia Division—for more effective development of the evangelistic ministry in the territory of the Republic of Crimea. The Crimea Mission officers elected included Eduard A. Siminyuk, president; Timofey A. Gladkov, secretary; and Mikhail N. Gavrilyuk, treasurer.

On December 14, 2014, the first session of the Crimea Mission was held attended by forty-five delegates from twenty-six Crimean churches, ESD officers, and leaders of the Southern Ukrainian Conference as guests. The delegates elected the members of Crimea Mission executive committee and directors for thirteen departments.

In order to more effectively guide the church ministry in the Crimean Peninsula, the executive committee of the Euro-Asia Division decided at its meeting in May 2017 to charge the leaders of the Caucasus Union Mission (CaUM) with taking administrative and spiritual care of the Crimea Mission.

After the political changes that took place in 2014 in the territory of Crimea, the Crimea Mission faced a number of urgent issues. Those issues were mainly related to the re-registration of all churches, the registration of houses of prayer as required by Russian law, as well as the registration of the Crimea Mission proper. There were also personnel issues aggravated by the active migration of the population, which affected church members. Despite these changes, the Adventist churches and companies in Crimea made every effort to develop the gospel ministry. The main emphasis was placed on the establishment of centers of influence in houses of prayer, total member involvement in missionary work, organization of new churches and companies in places where there was no Adventist presence, and the creation of an atmosphere of acceptance and love among church members.

Mission and Outlook

The Crimea Mission pays particular heed to the ministries for children and young people that include summer and winter camp meetings at the seaside, Bible quizzes, musical festivals, and leaders' meetings. The most popular spiritual and educational program among the children and teenagers of the Crimea is *Heavenly Team* (Heaven.com), organized in a prophetic school-like fashion. In recent years, over seventy teenagers and children from different parts of Crimea have come every month, along with their parents, to the Adventist Spiritual Center in Simferopol to attend classes by age groups.

Another important area of the Crimea Mission efforts is the Medical Missionary Service. A health-promotion project called *The Gospel Health House in the City of Happiness* is conducted on a regular basis in the house of prayer house in the city of Yalta. The house of prayer in Sevastopol offers a dental clinic, and in Simferopol there is a health shop, a vegetarian café, and a small-scale production of health food. One of the Crimea Mission's goals is to build an Adventist sanatorium.

SOURCES

Due to decades of persecution, historical sources were very often not preserved in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and as a result, Adventist history in Russia and other successor states of the USSR is dependent on collective memory and oral traditions, on which this article draws.

Löbsack, H. J. *Velikoye Adventistskoye dvizheniye i Adventisty Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii* Rostov-na-Donu: Altair, 2006.

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NOTES

1. "Crimea Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Crimea Mission," accessed October 27, 2021, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=53007>.
2. H. J. Löbsack, *Velikoye Adventistskoye dvizheniye i Adventisty Sed'mogo Dnia v Rossii* (Rostov-na-Donu: Altair, 2006), 160-162, 167.
3. Ibid.

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