

South German Union Conference

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South German Union Conference was first called the Central European Union (1913-1928) and it comprised the southern part of the German Empire. After World War I, its territory became the southern part of Germany and it changed its name to South German Union in 1928.

Territory and Statistics

Territory: States of Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria, Hessen, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Saarland; comprising the Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavarian, and Central Rhenish Conferences.

Statistics as of June 30, 2018: churches 219; membership 15,553; population 35,330,760¹

Organizational History

At the General Conference Committee meeting on April 1, 1912, it was recommended that “the Bavarian, the Wurttemberg [i.e. Württemberg], Southern German, German-Swiss and Austrian, Bohemian, and Moravian-Silesian fields be cut off from the West German Union and organized into the Central European Union at the Friedensau meeting, the organization to take effect Jan. 1, 1913.”² Accordingly, the Central European Union was organized at the biennial session of the West German Union at Friedensau in July 1912.³ First, Luxembourg was transferred from the South German to the Upper Rhenish Conference.⁴ Second, the West German Union was divided into the West German and the Central European Unions. The West German Union encompassed the western part of the German Empire (seven conferences and one district), German-speaking Switzerland (a conference), most of the Austrian half of Austria-Hungary (three missions), and the kingdoms of Belgium and the Netherlands (two missions).⁵ Seven of these church units separated to form the Central European Union. Its territory was the southern part of the German Empire (three conferences), Switzerland excepting the French-speaking region, and most of Austria.⁶ The church units were the Bavarian, Württemberg, South German, and German-Swiss Conferences, and the Austrian, Bohemian, and Moravian-Silesian Missions.⁷ The new union commenced work on January 1, 1913, with nearly 3,000 members.⁸ Its headquarters was at Nonnenweg on the corner of Birmansgasse in Basle. It had no institutions.

Starting union officers were: president, Otto Eduard Reinke; secretary, Otto Schildhauer; treasurer, N. Schlatterer; and auditor, G. Woysch. Executive committee members were Otto Eduard Reinke, F. Prieser, H. Fenner, E. Gugel, J. Erzberger, J. Wolfgarten, J. Muth, F. Gruber, and H. Böx.⁹

Church Administration and Territory

In the first half of the twentieth century, the two World Wars transformed the map of Europe. During the same decades, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Europe experienced almost constant growth. From its original membership of nearly 3,000, the South German Union reached 11,000 members in 1948.¹⁰ Both developments called for constant rearrangement of church organization.

The first series of changes occurred before or during World War I. In 1914, the headquarters was moved from Basle to Bauerstraße 38, Munich.¹¹ The Adriatic Mission, covering the territory of Carniola, Istria, and Dalmatia (now Croatia and part of Slovenia), was transferred from the Danube Union to the Central European Union, probably in late 1914 or early 1915.¹² In 1914, the Austrian Mission was divided into the Austrian Mission (Upper and Lower Austria) and the Anterior Austrian Mission (Carinthia, Salzburg, Styria, Tyrol, and Vorarlberg).¹³

With the formation of new nation states after the war, all non-German missions were detached from the union. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was established late in 1918, and the Adriatic Mission became part of the new unattached field, the Yugoslavia Mission.¹⁴ Czechoslovakia declared independence on October 28, 1918, and a year later, on November 14, 1919, the church units in the Czech lands became part of the Czechoslovakian Union.¹⁵ The German conferences were reorganized as well, with some of the new conferences being very short-lived. Since Alsace-Lorraine was annexed to France after the war, this territory was detached from the South German Union and organized into the Alsace and Lorraine Conference under the Latin Union in 1919.¹⁶ After or during the war, the Austrian missions were also detached from the union,¹⁷ but reattached shortly after.¹⁸

During the interwar period, the organization continued to change due to church growth. In 1919, the Bavarian Conference was divided into the North and South Bavarian Conferences,¹⁹ and parts of the South German and Württemberg Conferences were detached to form the new Black Forest Conference.²⁰ In 1920, the South German Conference was divided into the Main-Neckar and Rhenish-Pfalz Conferences, with the former now including the new territory of the districts of Frankfurt am Main, Hanau, and Höchst.²¹ In late September 1920, the Austrian missions (which by now were three, with the new Styrmarch-Carnten Mission) were organized into the German Austrian Conference (called the Austrian Conference from 1925) and reattached to the union.²² In 1921 several changes occurred. The union headquarters were moved to Tizianstraße 35, München.²³ The Rhenish-Pfalz Conference was dissolved, with at least some of its territory added to the Main-Neckar Conference (renamed Central Rhenish Conference in 1930).²⁴ The Black Forest Conference united with the Württemberg Conference to become the Württemberg-Baden Conference, which in turn divided into the Baden and

Württemberg Conferences shortly after.²⁵ In 1928 the German Swiss Conference united with the Lemman Conference (covering the French-speaking part of Switzerland) to form the Swiss Union under the Southern European Division.²⁶ In 1928 the name of the Central European Union was changed to its current name, the South German Union.²⁷ In 1929 the headquarters was moved up the road, from Tizianstraße 35 to 18.²⁸ In 1934 the union grew in territory when part of the Thuringian Conference (in the West German Union) joined with the North Bavarian Conference to form the Franconian-Thuringian Conference.²⁹ In 1935 the headquarters was moved to Libanonstraße 6, Stuttgart.³⁰

It seems that in the years leading up to World War II and onward, the church administrative relationship between Austria and the South German Union fluctuated. In 1935 the Austrian Conference became an unattached field of the division, only to be attached to the South German Union again in 1936 as the North and South Austrian Conferences.³¹ Two years later, in 1938, it was unattached again,³² and reattached again the year after.³³ In 1946 the Austrian Conferences were “administered temporarily by the Southern European Division.”³⁴ The following year they were merged into the Austrian Conference and transferred from the South German Union to the Southern European Division.³⁵ The union headquarters also moved twice within Stuttgart during the war.³⁶

The South German Union continued to grow after the wars and to the present day, but at a slower rate. In the 26 years from its organization to the outbreak of World War II (1912-1938), membership increased by 6,000. However, during the 70 years from the close of World War II to 2018 (1946-2018), it increased by 7,000. The trend in the union’s organization, therefore, tended towards simplification. In 1947 the Franconian-Thuringian Conference was divided into the Franconian Conference and District Thuringia, which was transferred from the South German to the East German Union.³⁷ In 1949 the Franconian Conference was renamed the North Bavarian Conference.³⁸ In about 1963, the Central Rhenish Conference was divided into the Hessian and Rhineland-Palatinate-Saar Conferences,³⁹ but this was undone in September 1970, when they reunited.⁴⁰ In November 1970 the Baden and Württemberg Conferences joined to form the Baden-Württemberg Conference.⁴¹ Moreover, in 2009 the North and South Bavarian Conference merged into the Bavarian Conference.⁴² The headquarters moved several times after the war: in 1968, to Marienhöhe 31 (61), Darmstadt; in 1972, to Diemershaldenstraße 23, Stuttgart; and in 1977, to Senefelderstraße 15, Ostfildern.⁴³

At its organization, the South German Union (then Central European Union) consisted of four conferences and three missions. After World War II, it consisted of five conferences. Since 2009 there have been but three conferences: the Bavarian, Baden-Württemberg, and Central Rhenish Conferences.

Institutions

The union first established institutions in the early 1920s.⁴⁴ In 1920 it bought a sanitarium in Bad Aibling, Upper Bavaria, “with a little farm, and three buildings, with bathhouse and a park of seven acres.”⁴⁵ The Bad Aibling

Sanitarium opened the same year.⁴⁶ "It operated in the summers between 1920 and 1943," "offering a variety of water treatments, especially mud baths, under the direction of Rosa Staerr. The institution had 40 rooms for patients, with a total capacity of 60 beds."⁴⁷ During World War II, the institution was used as a hospital. After the war it was turned into a refugee camp until 1952. In 1953 it reopened after considerable renovation as both a sanitarium and a retirement home.⁴⁸ The sanitarium is listed in the *SDA Yearbook* until 1962. The retirement home's name is Wittelsbach Retirement Home (*Haus Wittelsbach*), and it continues to operate.⁴⁹

In the early 1920s, the union also opened a nursing facility in Wiesbaden.⁵⁰ It is listed in the *SDA Yearbook* until 1950 and was "a prominent health resort."⁵¹

In 1921 the union opened the Central European Missionary Seminary at Kirchheim unter Teck. From 1922 to 1924, the seminary was run in the sanitarium facilities at Bad Aibling. In 1924 it moved to Marienhöhe in Darmstadt. From 1939 to 1947, the seminary was closed due to World War II. In 1994 the seminary was phased out after assets were merged with Theologische Hochschule Friedensau.⁵²

In April 2006 the union opened Odenwald Home for Disabled (*Haus Odenwald*), an apartment complex for disabled people, close to Groß-Umstadt. In 2018, 25 inhabitants were living in 23 single or double apartments in the condominium.⁵³

In about 2007 the union reopened Haus Schwarzwaldsonne Freudenstadt, a retreat center with a 43-bed capacity in Freudenstadt.⁵⁴

In July 2014 the union opened Haus Lichtblick in Gaildorf, an assisted living residence with 20 apartments.⁵⁵

Executive Officers Chronology

Presidents: O. E. Reinke (1912-1913);⁵⁶ Georg W. Schubert (1913-1926);⁵⁷ E. Gugel (1926-1934);⁵⁸ Gustav Seng (1934-1953);⁵⁹ R. Dettmar (1953-1962);⁶⁰ Karl F. Noltze (1962-1969);⁶¹ Joachim Hildebrandt (1969-1987);⁶² Harald Knott (1987-1994);⁶³ Bruno Liske (1994-2002);⁶⁴ Günter Machel (2002-2014);⁶⁵ Rainer Wanitschek (2014-2016);⁶⁶ Werner Dullinger (2016-present).⁶⁷

Secretaries: Otto Schildhauer (1912-1919); W. Edener (1920-1921); secretary-treasurer: Otto Schildhauer (1922-1927); Gisela Grünzeug (1928-1931); Marta Haecker (1932); secretary-treasurer: Helene Kofink (1933-1946); O. Neubauer (1947-1949); secretary-treasurers: O. Neubauer (1950-1958) and M. Woysch (1959-1970); Reinhard Rupp (1971-1976); Wilfried Ninow (1977-1979); Hartmut von Bezold (1980-1982); Bruno Liske (1983-1995); Dietrich Mueller (1996-2012); Jochen Streit (2013-2019).⁶⁸

Treasurers: N. Schlatterer (1912-1919); M. Haupt (1915-1916); Helene Kofink (1917-1921); secretary-treasurer: Otto Schildhauer (1922-1927); Helene Kofink (1928-1949); secretary-treasurer, Helene Kofink (1933-1946); secretary-treasurers: O. Neubauer (1950-1958) and Martin Woysch (1959-1975); Reinhold Kluttig (1976-1977); Wolfgang Gunka (1978-2005); Andreas Huber (2006-2007); Werner Dullinger (2008-2015); not listed (2016);

Dieter Neef (2017-present).⁶⁹

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