

Seychelles Mission

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Seychelles Mission is a church administrative unit of the Indian Ocean Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

The Seychelles Archipelago is a group of 116 granitic and coralline islands boasting lush flora and fauna. Lying immediately south of the equator, it is about 600 miles (1,000 kilometers) off the north coast of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. Four of the islands are man-made from land reclaimed from the sea bed. Its Exclusive Economic Zone (territorial waters) spread over 1,000,000 square kilometers of open ocean water. It has a land mass area of 177 square miles (459 square kilometers). Its population of 96,762 inhabitants (June 2018) is made of African, European, Chinese, and Indian origins. Seychelles has three official languages, English, French, and Creole.

Most citizens reside on three main islands, Mahé, Praslin, and La Digue. The other 113 islands are primarily for tourism, as nature reserves, or are privately owned. Seychelles was a French colony in the late 1770s after the islands' discovery, then a British colony until independence in 1976. The population is 98 percent Christian.

Origin of Seventh-day Adventist work in the Seychelles

The Republic of the Seychelles constitutes the Seychelles Mission of the Seventh-day Adventists, within the Indian Ocean Union Conference, which in turn is a part of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division. The Seychelles Mission comprises seven churches and three organized companies. Six churches and two organized companies are on the main island of Mahé, one church is on Praslin, and one Sabbath school branch group is on La Digue. As of June 30, 2018, the church membership in Seychelles Mission stood at 1,024 baptized members, served by three ordained ministers and three licensed ministers. The Mission office is in the district of St Louis on Mahé Island.

Seventh-day Adventist work in the Seychelles began in 1930 with Daniel Ignace, an evangelist from Mauritius. In spite of difficulties, an interest developed rapidly, and in 1931 the first baptism of 21 persons took place near Victoria, the capital city of the Seychelles on Mahé. A church of 23 members was organized, with Ignace as presiding elder.

In June 1932 the foundation stone was laid for building the first Seventh-day Adventist church in Victoria. In 1933 the church building was dedicated. Despite strong opposition, at times endangering the life of the missionary, the work went forward. Another evangelist-teacher, Rene Jayram, arrived from Mauritius in 1938 and established a school. Yvonne Celtel, a young Seychellois Adventist, helped Ignace in teaching some 20 children?²

Organizational history of the Seychelles Mission

1944 marked an important stage for the Seventh-day Adventist in Seychelles. The Seventh-day Adventist Church constitution was accepted and announced by the government of Seychelles.³ The Seychelles Islands Mission was organized in 1947 as part of the Indian Ocean Union Mission in the Southern European Division. From 1965 to 1973 it was a part of the Afro-Mideast Union. Resumed air transport made it possible for the Seychelles Mission to return to its former union in the Euro-Africa Division. In 1980 the Seychelles Mission became part of the Africa-Indian Ocean Division.²

In 1954 the mission school was transferred from Victoria to the newly acquired mission property at Bel Eau. The mission headquarters also moved there from Bel Air. The school developed well under the capable direction of Hermence Calais, a Seychellois native. With the increased number of students attending the school, a secondary school level was added in 1957.

In 1979 the government took over the mission station and school at Bel Eau, ending Adventist educational work in the Seychelles. A property at St. Louis was given as compensation, where the mission headquarters moved and settled into the existing buildings. A new church was built on that property in 1983. Many years later, the St. Louis church adopted the Port Glaud district for evangelism, and a group of believers formed and began to meet for Sabbath worship services in the school of that district. The group became an organized company in 1998 and a place of worship was purchased for them.

In 1957 Mildred Vel became the first Seychellois medical missionary when she journeyed to Madagascar, where she served for 28 years before returning to Seychelles in 1984. In 1968 the first Seychellois evangelist, John Stravens, returned from the Adventist seminary in Madagascar and entered mission service. In 1970 a woman donated a plot of land on Praslin to build a church. In 1976 Radio Seychelles granted the church broadcasting time every other Saturday evening.³

In 1980, as the Adventist church in the Seychelles celebrated its 50th Anniversary, its membership was 150.⁴ The church in Victoria was getting crowded, so the congregation was divided. One group in St. Louis served members living in the north and northwest of Mahé, while the remainder stayed in the Victoria church to serve people in the east and southeast part of the island.⁵ In January 1982 the new church building opened its doors. By the end of the first quarter of 1982, the Seychelles Mission church membership stood at 176, with 52 members at St. Louis, 118 at Victoria, and 6 at Praslin. In 1996, Praslin church received an ordained minister, John Adrianasoa and family from Madagascar, who later opened the work on La Digue Island.

In 1983 the church at Victoria became too small to host members from the southern region of the island, so a small group began to meet in the home of Egbert Fred. Three years later construction began on a new church building in the Anse Royale district.⁶ The Anse Royale church building was dedicated in 1991.

The contribution of the Seychelles Mission in supplying ministers

Although the Seychelles Mission is a small entity that requires the service of a small number of ministers, one major contribution the mission has made is the increasing number of young people who trained for the gospel ministry and served the church elsewhere.⁷ For instance, in 1988 Alex Esparon decided to enter the ministry, and so with his family he went to attend the seminary in Mauritius. When it closed, he transferred to the newly opened Mudende University in Rwanda.

In 1992, Michael Bijoux left home to undertake ministerial studies at Mudende University. Unfortunately, his stay was cut short due to political unrest in Rwanda. After spending a few months back in his homeland, he continued his studies in France at the Institut de Salève. After completing his studies in 1995, he returned home and began his pastoral duties at the St. Louis Church.⁸ Michael Bijoux became an ordained minister of the gospel on December 14, 2002. He later became the first Seychellois to serve as president of the Seychelles Mission, from January 2003 to December 2009.⁹

In August 2003, Nelson Joubert left for Madagascar for his ministerial studies, returning in 2007 to take up pastoral duties.¹⁰ More Seychellois workers have been added to the church's team of workers. Ntep Ntep, a Cameroonian who became a naturalized Seychellois, completed his ministerial studies at Asia-Pacific International University. He joined ministerial employment in the Mission in September 2008.¹¹ On September 1, 2014 the Seychelles Mission employed the first female Seychellois theology graduate, Christie Changty Young, also a graduate of Asia-Pacific International University. In December 2017, she ended her contract with the Mission to relocate to Mauritius.

List of Presidents

Hans Salzmann (1947-1952); Rene Mauch (a few months in 1952); Eugene Vervoort (1952-1955); S. Appave (1956-1960); Marc Supramayen (1961-1964); Caleb Brû (1964-1970); Seenyen (1971-1974); Claude Bosdedore (1975-1977); Charles Montille (1978-1983); Daniel Gueho (1984-1986); Mikel Beesoo (1987-1990); John Stafford (1991-1992); Eugene Vervoot (1992 - 1993); André Razafiarison (1993-1995); Danforth Francis (1996 -1999); Jean Paul Vimbouly (2000-2002) ; Michael Bijoux (2003-2009); Jonathan Nzuma (2010-2013); Maxwell Muwimi (2014-January 2016); Ellsworth M. Baxen (October 2016 - Present).

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. National Bureau of Statistics Republic of Seychelles (2018, August 31). *National Bureau of Statistics; Statistical Bulletin*. Retrieved from <https://www.nbs.gov.sc/downloads?task=document.viewdoc&id=449>.
2. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, second revised edition (1996), 5695.
3. F. Jackson, *The Seventh-day Adventist Mission in Seychelles: A Review of Events from Years 1930 – 1980*.
4. Ibid.
5. F. Jackson, *The Seventh day Adventist church in Seychelles: A Review of Events from Years 1980–1999*, 3.
6. Ibid., 7.
7. F. Jackson, *The Seventh-day Adventist Mission in Seychelles: A Review of Events from Years 1930 – 1980*.
8. F. Jackson, *The Seventh day Adventist church in Seychelles: A Review of Events from Years 1980–1999*, 12, 14.
9. Michael Bijoux, Interview by the author, September 21, 2018.
10. Ibid.
11. Ntep Ntep, interview by the author, September 23, 2018.

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