



West Siberian Mission (WSM) Headquarters

Photo courtesy of West Siberian Mission.

West Siberian Mission

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The current West Siberian Mission (WSM) was organized in 2002 to oversee the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Tyumen and Omsk Regions of Siberia.

The West Siberian Mission encompasses the regions of Tyumen (including Yamalo-Nenetsky and Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Districts) and Omsk. As of 2020, it included twenty churches and twelve companies with a membership of 1,170. The mission was served by fourteen pastors and only eleven congregations possessed church buildings. The territory's population was 4,078,735. The West Siberian Mission headquarters are located at 3rd Severnaya Street, 71; 644122 Omsk; Russian Federation.

The History of Adventism in West Siberia

The history of Adventism in West Siberia predates 2002. Between 1911 and 1921, a Russian church unit, also called the West Siberian Mission, covered a large part of West Siberia. Its territory included the Akmolinsk, Semipalatinsk, Semirechye, Turgay, and Ural Oblasts, and the Tomsk and Tobolsk Governorates. In 1915, the membership stood at 550 in twenty-three churches.

The first Adventist missionaries came to Siberia by the close of the nineteenth century. However, Adventist doctrines were significantly spread during the mass migration of people from the European Russia to Siberia in 1908 and 1909.¹ By 1906, the European denominational organ *Zions-Wächter* listed a new "Russio-Asian Field" in the German Union.² Siberia became part of the East Russian Mission in 1907 and the Siberian Mission in 1909.

In the territory of current West Siberian Mission, in the city of Omsk the first Adventists appeared round 1907. The church in Omsk was organized by H. K. Löbsack. Soon thereafter, Karl Reifschneider was sent to serve in the same location. According to V. V. Teppone, there were thirty-nine church members in Omsk in 1909 and forty-one in 1910.³ In later years, the Omsk church was pastored by prominent preachers such as H. K. Löbsack, P. G. Silman, A. I. Rebein, I. P. Alekhin, and N. P. Alekhin.

In the city of Tyumen, the first Adventists appeared in 1910. A church was organized in Tyumen in 1914 where D. P. Reband, P. A. Pavlyuk, and others served as pastors. In 1910, the Asian Russian church units were reorganized. The East Russian and Siberian Missions were dissolved and the Siberian Union Mission was organized. It comprised the East Siberian, Ural, Turkmenistan, Volga, and West Siberian Missions. The changes went into effect at the start of 1911. The territory of the West Siberian Mission was the Akmolinsk, Semipalatinsk, Semirechye, Turgay, and Ural Oblasts, and the Tomsk and Tobolsk Governorates. Initial membership was 265. The first mission director, H. J. Löbsack, served until 1916.⁴ He was subsequently followed by H. Gäbel in 1918 (no director was listed in 1917).

During World War I and the Russian Civil War, church organization was either abandoned or went unreported. Consequently, the East Siberian Mission was constantly re-assigned to different parent fields, and finally went unreported in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. In 1914, the mission was listed under the European Division Missions.⁵ In 1916, the mission was listed in the West Russian Union,⁶ again under the European Division Missions in 1917,⁷ and in the Siberian Union Mission in 1918.⁸ From 1919 to 1921 there were no reports on Siberia in the *Yearbook*.

The Siberian Union was organized in 1920 or 1921.⁹ The territory of the West Siberian Mission became part of several church units: Akmolinsk Oblast, East Turgay, and Tobolsk Governorate became part of the West Siberian Conference; Semirechye Oblast became part of the Southern Siberian Conference; and Tomsk Governorate became part of the Central Siberian Conference.¹⁰

Church membership continued to grow, and Adventist groups emerged in different localities. The Russian Revolution of October 1917 opened new possibilities for the Adventist Church and the gospel ministry. However, the persecution of Christians, including Adventists, resumed after 1927. The Adventists in Siberia were pressured by the atheistic state as well.

During the Soviet period, the activities of the Adventist Church were strictly limited and church members were not allowed to preach the Adventist message freely. Rapid church growth began only in the 1990s. The large-scale evangelistic campaigns that were conducted by foreign and Russian evangelists reached the cities in West Siberia as well. As a result of Gary Kent's evangelistic program in Omsk, some 1,000 persons were baptized. Aside from planting new churches, new chapels were built. In Omsk, the first church sanctuary was dedicated in 2001 and that of the second church in 2004. Churches were also dedicated in the cities of Ishim (2008), Nyagan (2015), and Nizhnevartovsk (2016). In 2017, a church building was purchased in the city of Khanty-Mansiysk. Unfortunately, people's interest in studying the Bible has gradually decreased. In spite of difficulties, the Adventist Church continues to spread the Three Angels' messages by using the Christ's method of evangelism.

The Modern Development of Church Organization

The current West Siberian Mission was created on May 5, 2002, as a result of reorganizing the West Siberian Conference (center in Novosibirsk) into two entities: the West Siberian Mission (center in Omsk) and the Central Siberian Mission (center in Novosibirsk). The West Siberian Mission is a part of the East Russian Union Mission (ERUM) and comprises the Omsk and Tyumen (including the Yamalo-Nenetsky and the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Districts) Regions. The churches are located in large cities (Omsk and Tyumen) and in smaller ones (Ishim, Tobolsk, Zavodoukovsk, Surgut, Khanty-Mansiysk, Nyagan, Nizhnevartovsk, Salekhard, and others). The Yamalo-Nenetsky and Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Districts are situated in the Extreme North—a region with harsh climatic conditions. The churches in the Extreme North are small and located very far from each other and the WSM headquarters. The WSM area stands out for long distances, and the arctic territories, including city of Salekhard, are accessible only by plane.

In 2018, the ERUM Executive Committee made the decision to transfer the WSM headquarters from Omsk to Tyumen. This city has a rail connection with northern territories and more developed air communications with other cities and towns of the Omsk and Tyumen Regions, facilitating more convenient travel. There is also a good automobile road that shortens the way to churches in the Extreme North by 600 kilometers.

List of Presidents

Vladimir R. Link (2002-2003), Anatoliy A. Frolov (2003-2006), Timofey V. Chipchar (2006-2010), Aleksey A. Novoselov (2010-2015), Vasilij P. Stefaniv (2015-)

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Liubov' I. Soskovets, *Religious Denominations of Western Siberia in the 40-60s of the Twentieth Century* (Tomsk: Tomsk State University Publishing House, 2003), 229.
2. The cities listed are apparently all in the Caucasus, however (for instance, Sochi, Sochumi, and Yerevan), which does not, at least not by modern definitions, constitute part of Siberia. "Quarterly Report of the German Union Conference from January 1 to March 31, 1906," *Zions-Wächter*, May 7, 1906, 154. The church unit's name was given as the "Asiatic Russian Mission" in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1906), 75.
3. V. V. Teppone, *Iz istorii Tserkvi ASD* (Kaliningrad, 1993), 40.

4. For organizational changes and statistics, see Ludwig R. Conradi, "Progress in the European Division," *ARH*, November 10, 1910, 7; "Siberian Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1911), 110-111; "Report of Traktat-u. Mission Associations of the Siberian Union Field from January 1 to March 31, 1911," *Zions-Wächter*, May 1, 1911, 197.
 5. "West Siberian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1914), 125.
 6. "West Siberian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1916), 125.
 7. "West Siberian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1917), 133-136.
 8. "West Siberian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1918), 134.
 9. "Siberian Union," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1922), 103.
 10. "Central Siberian Conference," "South Siberian Conference," and "West Siberian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1923), 109-110. The Semipalatinsk Oblast is listed in both the South and West Siberian Conferences so it cannot be determined from the *Yearbook* to which church unit it belonged. (This error remains as long as these two church units, 1924-1926 existed.) The Ural Oblast is not listed in any church unit until 1927 when it is listed in the Central Volga Field and its western part in the North Siberian Field. "Central Volga Field" and "North Siberian Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1927), 144-146.
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