

Everson, Charles Theodore

(1874–1956)

GOLDA RUCKLE

Golda Ruckle is currently a sophomore at Southern Adventist University, studying to earn her B.A. in History with a teaching licensure.

Charles T. Everson was among the foremost Seventh-day Adventist evangelists of the first half of the 20th century.

Early Life and Ministry (1874-1902)

Charles Theodore Everson was born on December 2, 1874, to a Norwegian immigrant couple who settled in Chicago, Illinois. His father died before Charles reached the age of 6, leaving his mother, Tilda Beise Everson, a seamstress, to support him and his two older brothers. Tilda Everson was said to have been “a loyal Seventh-day Adventist” who “reared her son in the truth.”¹

After graduating from high school in Chicago, Charles studied at Battle Creek College, Northwestern University, and the University of Chicago. For a brief period he taught in Adventist schools. He began ministry in the late 1890s as a chaplain with the Chicago city mission conducted by the Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association.²

Everson then headed west, conducting his first evangelistic campaign on record in Colorado Springs, Colorado, during the fall of 1899.³ Following this experience, he became the chaplain at the San Francisco city mission for a short time. He began meetings in Lorin, California, in 1901, but in August was called to the deathbed of his brother in Chicago and thus was unable to finish these meetings himself.⁴



Charles T. Everson, c. 1915.

Photo courtesy of Department of Archives and Special Collections,
Loma Linda University.

The tragic loss of his brother was followed by new beginnings for Charles Everson. He married Elise Regina Everson on September 19, 1901. Soon thereafter the Eversons were called to a ministry far from the United States.

Missionary to Rome (1902-1909)

The newlyweds went to California where Charles began a new series of meetings in Lorin, near Berkeley.⁵ In 1902 he took a leading role in a campaign to sell copies of Ellen White's book *Christ's Object Lessons* to raise funds for Adventist schools.⁶

In October 1902 the Eversons accepted a call to mission service in Rome, Italy, where they remained for seven years.⁷ Throughout his life and especially during this time, Everson wrote frequently for the *Review and Herald*. He wrote 43 articles and reports for the *Review* while in Italy, sometimes in consecutive weeks to report on the progress of a rare convert. He eventually learned Italian and was able to witness more directly, but initially spent a lot of time behind the scenes. Despite pushback from Catholic priests in Rome, Everson went ahead with plans for the organization of the church there that included medical and educational services, language classes and a school, as well as a canvassing ministry.⁸ Everson continually tried to start a series of public meetings, but throughout his time in Rome he could only draw interest from a well-educated few in private studies. He described some of the issues connected with his work in Rome in March 1907:

It is a continual battle to rescue a soul from death here; but the power of God is able to accomplish the same miracles today as in the early history of the apostolic church. . . . In these Catholic countries, arguments are not sufficient; the heart must be stirred, or no impression can be made. God must work, for man is helpless; and if God does not come in and help in a special way, the most determined and persistent efforts amount to nothing.⁹

By the time Everson returned to the United States in 1909, the Italian Mission, where he had been the director and sole ordained minister, had one church and a membership of 45.¹⁰

Evangelism in Chicago and New York (1909-1919)

Upon his return from Rome, Everson was called to work in the Northern Illinois Conference. His first major series of meetings was held in his hometown, Chicago, beginning in the autumn of 1911. These meetings drew as many as 500 attendees, and Everson was particularly effective in reaching those of "at least middle-class status," according to Howard Weeks in his study *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century*. Everson baptized 32 persons over the course of his first year in "major city evangelism." However, he was somewhat disappointed in the results of his work in Chicago, which he attributed to lack of Bible instructors to do personal work on behalf of interested individuals.¹¹

In 1913 Everson began his six-year ministry in the Manhattan-Bronx department of the Greater New York Conference. Although he had to contend with cultural barriers and other obstacles such as restrictions against going door-to-door in large apartment buildings, Everson soon became well known for successful long campaigns, running as long as seven months. He booked the Fulton Theater for 30 consecutive Sunday nights in 1915-1916, with audiences growing “until we tested the capacity of the theater.” He subsequently booked the larger Hudson Theater and once again the attendance increased until the theater “filled up to the top of the gallery.”¹²

Everson made extensive use of newspaper ads, tickets for special meetings, window cards, circulars, and direct news coverage as means for building his audiences.¹³ It became apparent during his first extended campaign that Everson had a unique ability to move audiences emotionally, which later became one of his most noted characteristics.¹⁴ During the six years he worked in New York, he averaged 100 baptisms a year.¹⁵ “He also was able to show the value of the meetings in economic terms, as the per capita tithe of the Manhattan church membership rose from \$30 to \$40-45, and the yearly amount of money turned over to the conference increased from \$8,000 a year to \$42,000 a year,” according to a study by Daniel G. Smith.¹⁶

Evangelism in the West (1919-1947)

Everson moved westward for the remainder of his evangelistic career, beginning with a two-year stint in Kansas City, Missouri.¹⁷ This was the first location where he used a privately funded “tabernacle”—a rudimentary wooden structure to accommodate large audiences, popularized by Billy Sunday, the most famous American evangelist of that era. It was a very successful trial run, with more than 300 people baptized by 1921. Though Everson may not have been the first Adventist to use a tabernacle, he came to be more closely identified with its use than anyone else.¹⁸

After this initial success with “tabernacle evangelism,” Everson moved on to Spokane, Washington. He would spend the remainder of the 1920s in the Pacific Northwest, where he did his best-known work almost exclusively using tabernacles, which could seat over 3,000 at a time.¹⁹ The first series in Spokane ran in 1922 for seven months and resulted in construction of a new church to house the 236 new believers that Everson baptized.²⁰ From Spokane he traveled to Walla Walla, Washington, for another series of effective meetings. It was here that Everson began using his time in Rome as a selling point for his meetings. At several times throughout his evangelistic career, Everson reported hosting special lectures about the city of Rome, featuring stereopticon slides of landmarks from the area, to help fund tabernacle evangelism.²¹

Everson’s next major series began in Portland, Oregon, on October 5, 1924, in his biggest tabernacle so far, reportedly one-third of the size of Billy Sunday’s famous tabernacle in New York. “The building process was a spectacle for many townspeople, and especially church members,” writes Daniel G. Smith. The building process was filmed and shown in a downtown theater, “no doubt a ‘first and last’ in SDA evangelistic history!,” Smith

observes.²² In Portland Everson began his work with radio, broadcasting his Wednesday night lecture over station KGW. He called the series "Some Unanswerable Arguments Showing Jesus Christ to be God."²³ The series was well-received, attracting listeners throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Returning to Washington, Everson conducted a four-month campaign in Bellingham and one-month series in Centralia before launching his next long series in Tacoma in the Fall of 1926. Despite harsh opposition, 225 people were baptized by the conclusion of the Tacoma effort. Campaigns in Seattle; Victoria, British Columbia; and Salem, Oregon, followed before Everson concluded his ministry in the Northwest where he began it with a series in Spokane that closed in July 1929.²⁴ Regarding his "sojourn in the beautiful North Pacific country," Everson reported: "In all, there were twelve campaigns held, which the Lord blessed with over 2,450 persons baptized into the truth. It amounts to about one a day baptized during the seven years of our stay in the North Pacific Union."²⁵

The pace of Everson's evangelism slowed somewhat after he left the Northwest, but he still had several major series ahead of him. In a series conducted in Oakland, California, in 1931, Everson cooperated with a new plan encouraged by denominational administrators in response to allegations that Adventist evangelists were prematurely baptizing people who were not well-instructed in their new faith. All candidates for baptism from the Oakland campaign were vetted by a committee of five in order to be admitted into the church. Even with this rigorous standard, 216 were baptized, not counting another 14 rebaptized. The results might have been "much better," Everson pointed out, had not the series been cut short by six weeks due to unforeseen circumstances. Even so, funds generated by Everson's separate lectures on Rome along with offerings received at the evangelistic meetings were more than sufficient to pay for the meetings in full, including workers' salaries.²⁶

For a series begun in Salt Lake City, Utah, in September 1938, Everson and his team secured a lot on which to build a tabernacle through an agent who was a leader in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and at the time was presiding bishop of Salt Lake City, locale of the church's headquarters. Everson avoided sharp criticism of the teachings of the Utah-based church (often called Mormon) and the meetings drew a good attendance of up to a 1,100. The campaign resulted in 85 baptisms, including the grandson of Ellen White's sister and his wife, who had been Baptists.²⁷

Final Years (1947-1956)

Everson's evangelistic career officially ended in 1947 when he retired following the death of his wife, Elise Regina Everson.²⁸ An acknowledgement he gave of her role in the 1938 Salt Lake City campaign conveys something of her contributions to the evangelist's success throughout his career: "Mrs. Everson, in her usual quiet, earnest way, led many to decide to follow the Master."²⁹

After becoming a widower, Everson reconnected with an old friend and convert from his time in New York, Nettie Belle Sanborn Ulp, who had recently been widowed. The two found solace in one another and were

married by the end of 1947.³⁰ Some 30 years earlier, Everson had purchased Elmshaven, the historic home of Ellen White located near St. Helena, California.³¹ The couple retired there as the proprietors and occupants of this landmark of Adventist history. The Eversons welcomed over 2,500 visitors from all over the world to Elmshaven every year, to show the simplicity of Ellen White's lifestyle and exhibit the books she wrote in her final 15 years.³²

Charles Theodore Everson passed away on April 15, 1956 at St. Helena Sanitarium and Hospital at the age of 81.

³³ In addition to his evangelistic preaching, he authored eight books, including *The Mysterious Number of Prophecy 666* (1927), *The Last Warning Message and Other Bible Lectures* (1929), *The Rich Man and Lazarus* (1935), *Church Membership* (1938), and a small book, *Jesus: For you, the light of God shines*. Without doubt, Charles T. Everson left a strong and lasting imprint on Seventh-day Adventist evangelism, not only with regard to methods but also spirituality and themes. According to Howard B. Weeks, Everson was among the evangelists of his era who emphasized righteousness by faith in his preaching.³⁴

SOURCES

1880 United States Federal Census. Chicago, Cook County, Illinois. Ancestry.com.

Brand, H. H. "Lorin, Berkeley, Cal." *Pacific Union Recorder*, September 26, 1901.

Campbell, M. V. "Rome in the Days of Caesar." *Lake Union Herald*, February 6, 1940.

"Charles T. Everson, Noted SDA Evangelist, Dies." *St. Helena Star*, April 19, 1956.

"Charles Theodore Everson obituary" (1). *Pacific Union Recorder*, May 7, 1956.

"Charles Theodore Everson obituary" (2). *ARH*, May 31, 1956.

Everson, C. T. "Evangelistic Campaign in Salt Lake City." *ARH*, September 22, 1938.

Everson, Charles T. "Tabernacle Campaign in Colorado." *ARH*, December 12, 1929.

Everson, Charles T. "Evangelistic Meetings, Palo Alto, California." *ARH*, May 19, 1932.

Everson, Charles T. "'Christ's Object Lessons' in California." *ARH*, August 5, 1902.

Everson, Charles T. "The Theater Meetings in New York City." *ARH*, July 6, 1916.

Everson, Chas T. "Progress of the Work at Rome, Italy." *ARH*, March 14, 1907.

"Mrs. Elise R. Everson Rites to be Held Today." *Washington Evening Star*, March 22, 1947.

"Obituaries: Elise Regina Everson." *ARH*, April 24, 1947.

"Nettie Belle Sanborn Everson obituary." *Pacific Union Recorder*, January 12, 1959.

"Prof. Charles Everson, Famed Adventist Evangelist, Passes." *Napa Register*, April 16, 1956.

Smith, Daniel George. "A Study of the Ministry of Charles T. Everson: Especially as it may have Influenced the Ministry of My Grandfather, Dan E. Venden." Andrews University, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1977.

"Visitors to Elmshaven." *Australian Record and Advent World Survey*, March 28, 1955.

Weeks, Howard B. *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century*. Washington: Review and Herald, 1969.

NOTES

1. "Charles Theodore Everson obituary" (1), *Pacific Union Recorder*, May 7, 1956, 13; *1880 United States Federal Census*, Chicago, Cook, Illinois, Roll: 198; Page: 80C; Enumeration District: 178, accessed November 30, 2021, Ancestry.com.
2. "Charles T. Everson, Noted SDA Evangelist, Dies," *St. Helena Star*, April 19, 1956, 5; "Charles Theodore Everson obituary" (2), *ARH*, May 31, 1956, 26.
3. Daniel George Smith, "A Study of the Ministry of Charles T. Everson: Especially as it may have Influenced the Ministry of My Grandfather, Dan E. Venden" (Andrews University, Seventh-Day Adventist Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1977).
4. H. H. Brand, "Lorin, Berkeley, Cal." *Pacific Union Recorder*, September 26, 1901, 6-7.
5. Chas. T. Everson, "Lorin, Cal.," *Pacific Union Recorder*, January 2, 1902, 7.
6. Charles T. Everson, "'Christ's Object Lessons' in California," *ARH*, August 5, 1902, 20-21.
7. "Charles Theodore Everson obituary" (2).
8. Smith, "A Study of the Ministry of Charles T. Everson."
9. Chas T. Everson, "Progress of the Work at Rome, Italy," *ARH*, March 14, 1907, 18-19.
10. "Italian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1909, 111, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1909.pdf>.
11. Howard B. Weeks, *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1969), 66.
12. Weeks, *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century*, 93-94.
13. Charles T. Everson, "The Theater Meetings in New York City," *ARH*, July 6, 1916, 15-16.
14. Weeks, *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century*, 94.

15. Smith, "A Study of the Ministry of Charles T. Everson."
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Weeks, *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century*, 132.
19. Ibid, 134.
20. Smith, "A Study of the Ministry of Charles T. Everson."
21. M. V. Campbell, "Rome in the Days of Caesar," *Lake Union Herald*, February 6, 1940, 3; Smith, "A Study of the Ministry of Charles T. Everson."
22. Smith, "A Study of the Ministry of Charles T. Everson."
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Charles T. Everson, "Tabernacle Campaign in Colorado," *ARH*, December 12, 1929, 25; Weeks, *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century*, 182-183.
26. Charles T. Everson, "Evangelistic Meetings, Palo Alto, California," *ARH*, May 19, 1932, 20.
27. C. T. Everson, "Evangelistic Campaign in Salt Lake City," *ARH*, September 22, 1938, 17-18.
28. "Mrs. Elise R. Everson Rites to be Held Today," *Washington Evening Star*, March 22, 1947, 10; "Elise Regina Everson obituary," *ARH*, April 24, 1947, 24.
29. Everson, "Evangelistic Campaign in Salt Lake City."
30. "Nettie Belle Sanborn Everson obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, January 12, 1959, 14.
31. "Charles T. Everson, Noted SDA Evangelist, Dies," *The St. Helena Star*, April 19, 1956a.
32. "Visitors to Elmshaven," *Australian Record and Advent World Survey*, March 28, 1955, 6; "Charles Theodore Everson obituary" (1).
33. "Charles T. Everson, Noted SDA Evangelist, Dies."
34. Weeks, *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century*, 127-128.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000