

Adventist Education in the Caribbean Union Conference

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Adventist education has been a powerful tool for spreading the Adventist message and strengthening the church in the Caribbean. The Caribbean Union Conference comprises Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, United States Virgin Islands, and the islands of Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten; comprising the East Caribbean, Grenada, Guyana, North Caribbean, South Caribbean, and South Leeward Conferences; and the St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Tobago Missions.

Background: Emancipation to 1899

After the emancipation of slaves in 1834, the islands of the British West Indies witnessed many changes through the end of the nineteenth century. Social reforms were implemented by the colonial government, among them education. The impetus for change came from philanthropists, protestant missionaries, and the “conscience-aroused” British government.¹ Schoolhouses had already been erected and managed by the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Moravians, Presbyterians, and other denominations by the time Seventh-day Adventists arrived on the scene.

It was in the early 1870s that the Adventist Church began to focus on developing a denominationally-based school system.² On October 14, 1858, the *Review and Herald* reported the opening of the first school in Battle Creek. Later, Battle Creek College was opened in 1872, and in March 1873 the General Conference passed resolutions recommending the formation of an educational society and, henceforth, the work of denominational educational system began.³

The colporteur work had begun in British Guiana in 1886,⁴ and the first evangelist, F. H. Westphal, arrived in 1894.⁵ However, it was not until 1899 that concerns about education were identified. D. U. Hale, upon his arrival in January 1898, documented the great need for teachers there.⁶ Minutes of the thirty-third meeting of the board of trustees of the Foreign Mission Board of Seventh-day Adventists recorded that in September 1899 Hale requested teachers for British Guiana, but this request was not granted.⁷ Later, having arrived in New York, he

made the following statement as recorded in the minutes:

He thought that an industrial school should be established for the purpose of affording natives who possess ability, a preparation for labor in extending present truth; that after a short time, such a school could be practically self-supporting; that the Board will find it necessary to provide land, buildings, and pay the salaries of teachers.⁸

By December of that year, Hale resigned,⁹ and talks about a school for British Guiana would not resurface until the early 1900s.

The first church school in the Caribbean was opened in Jamaica after missionaries arrived there in 1892.¹⁰ Allen Moon reported some years later that there were “many openings for schools and church work.”¹¹ During this period, the presence of Adventist missionaries and literature evangelists was intensifying across the Caribbean region. A few years after the first Adventist minister arrived in Trinidad in 1894¹² a school was planned for Couva. E. W. Webster reported:

The Couva church school is being pushed as fast as possible. From the ten lots of land purchased of the Crown when that church was built, we have sold five and one-half lots, and expect to soon have a neat school building erected. We must have a teacher who has been trained in the Lord's method of instructing the young; but the Couva church will not be fully able to support such an one.¹³

At the end of the decade, requests forwarded to the Foreign Mission Board for the opening of schools in the larger Caribbean islands were met with resistance; however, this move would not deter the brethren from striving to meet the pressing needs in the fields. In spite of this position by the Foreign Mission Board, church members pursued the erection of church schools.

Although there was no Adventist school in Barbados at the time, the *Youth Instructor* was circulated in a school there, according to Glenn Philipps: “The children are delighted with the *Youth Instructor*. I lent one to each child for a week, the next week that child exchanges his paper with another. They are most beautiful.”¹⁴ In 1890, Dexter A. Ball sought permission from the Foreign Mission Board to start a school in the island, but the Board “declined to approve the establishment of a school in Bridgetown.”¹⁵ It was not until 1897 that the first school was organized at Tudor Street, Bridgetown, by Elam Van Duesen with Charles Cave as one of its teachers.¹⁶ In 1899, James A. Morrow wrote of four young men who taught in the school in Barbados. They were monitors whom he described as “pupil teachers, under masters, and work six hours per day, for which they receive \$1.75 to \$2.25 per month and some instruction after school hours.”¹⁷

In the same year (1899), at the 23rd meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Foreign Mission Board in New York in August, A. J. Haysmer was asked to go to Trinidad to “acquaint himself with the conditions that exist, and advise [the Board] relative to what is best to do with the farm and industrial school.”¹⁸

Calls for Schools (1900-2000)

In the early 1900s, calls rang out for school buildings across the region. J. S. Washburn wrote in 1907 about the lack of schools in the Caribbean territories:

There has never yet been a school established for all this large membership. The public schools in those sections are conducted either by the Church of England or by the Catholic church, so that our youth are compelled to attend schools conducted by other denominations. Surely, if such conditions prevailed in the United States, we should feel the great importance of our own schools more than ever before.¹⁹

In November 1920, the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* cited a South Caribbean Conference report which pointed out the need for a school in which “some training can be given to qualify workers for the field.”²⁰

In 1924, S. E. Kellman reported in the *Inter-American Messenger* that there were 800 young people “who for years have begged the opportunity of a Christian education.” Their appeals later moved the brethren to provide such a school in the South Caribbean Conference.²¹ This institution would become the East Caribbean Training School.

In British Guiana, D. C. Babcock in 1925 described the situation as “perplexing.” He argued that:

Schools should be established, and teachers provided for both the aborigines and East Indians. We earnestly plead for men and means to supply our needs, that at least the rising generation may be so taught the ways of the Lord, that many may be saved in God's eternal kingdom. Opportunities are opening everywhere for such schools; and as plans are being laid for large numbers of East Indians emigrating to this colony from their native land, we must get ready to receive them. Give us a helping hand.²²

In 1931, C. E. Andross expressed the need to provide primary education to the various islands. He indicated that teachers were being trained and the South Caribbean Conference was ready to offer assistance to churches to begin the planning for the church schools. “It is suggested that any church looking forward to the establishment of a church school in their midst begin at once to count the cost and to gather funds for the same.”²³

Calls for assistance also came from the Caribbean Training College (now University of the Southern Caribbean) in 1954. The *Pacific Union Recorder* reported that the college was unable to meet the demands for classroom space, a new administration building, and a chapel. Filling this need would provide more trained help in the various mission fields.²⁴

South Caribbean Conference (Trinidad)

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a proliferation of Adventist schools across the Caribbean. The first church school established in Trinidad was at Couva. After the first few months, the *Adventist Review and Herald*

reported that the school yielded “good results”.²⁵ The school opened doors in 1900 with a population of twenty-five students with Rachel Peters as the principal.²⁶

Later that same year, L. M. Crowther informed the Foreign Mission Board that the Couva church in Trinidad was unable to financially sustain the church school. Consequently, the board voted to place the school under the management of the superintendent of the West Indian Mission Field.²⁷

In 1926, an estate of 264 acres, eleven miles from Port of Spain, was purchased on which to locate the East Caribbean Training School.²⁸ The institution was to open in the autumn of 1926²⁹ and by 1930 had an enrollment of about seventy students.³⁰ The institution officially opened in 1927 in Maracas Valley, Trinidad, as East Caribbean Training School. In 1929, the school was renamed Caribbean Training College. The college was recognized as an institution for teacher training by the government of Trinidad and Tobago in 1954 and renamed Caribbean Union College in 1956.³¹ In 2006, the institution was granted university status by the local government and renamed the University of the Southern Caribbean.

In 1944, the first scholarship plan of the college was implemented whereby students engaged in colporteur work received funds for their tuition. Of the ten students who took up the challenge, nine were successful in earning full scholarships according to W. E. Read, president of the Caribbean Union at the time.³²

Joseph Grimshaw summarized the school situation in the South Caribbean Conference in 1963. In 1938, there had been four elementary schools. The number had increased to seven by 1942 with an enrollment of 270 students. By 1958, the number of schools had reached seventeen with a student population of 2,209. In 1963, there were twenty-one elementary schools with an enrollment of 3,042 students. In total, school enrollment exceeded 4,000 in 1963.³³

Many other schools were opened, but did not operate for long. For example, in Tobago alone schools were established in L’Anse Fourmi, Moriah, Parlatuvier, Bethel, and Mason Hall, but they were shut down for various reasons.

Between 1991 and 1998, four centers of early childhood education were opened in Marabella, Cumuto, Tabaquite, and Flanagin Town.

East Caribbean Conference (Barbados)

By 1900 in Barbados, Adventists had secured a home for the church that would become the home of the Bridgetown Adventist School for the next forty years.³⁴ The wives of missionaries, such as Mrs. W. A. Sweany, operated the first school.³⁵ Mrs. Sweany arrived on the scene in 1901 and functioned as teacher and principal of the Bridgetown Church School. By this time, Charles Cave had left to pursue a career in nursing at the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan.

The Sweanys immediately began fundraising and asked North American Adventist brethren for assistance to provide books and other resources. The situation seemed dire as Glen Phillips reported that although the tuition was five cents a week, many people could not afford it.³⁶ Meanwhile, adult classes were conducted in “scrubbing, sweeping, cooking, and sewing.”³⁷ By 1902, approximately thirty students were enrolled in the church school and the curriculum included Bible, reading, writing, physiology, hygiene, sewing, and arithmetic.

The school received support from not only the brethren in North America, but also many local church members, according to Phillips, sold *Signs of the Times* to provide funding for school operations. Sweaney was then able to provide new seats, desks, and refurbished black boards.³⁸ She remained at the school until 1904.³⁹

By the 1920s, a church school operated out of one room at the back of the Bridgetown church, but the church members could not afford to send their children there. The small enrollment and increasing operational costs were problematic.⁴⁰ The elementary school was reopened in 1944 and later moved to a new building, which was opened in 1948 at Bank Hall, St. Michael.⁴¹ A high school opened in September 1953 with 150 students. Benjamin G. O. French, a St Lucian, was principal.⁴²

The other Adventist primary schools operated during the 1950s were at Hillaby, St. Thomas, and Speightstown, St. Peter. In 1951, the Hillaby Seventh-day Adventist Elementary School was officially recognized after the Francis family began operating it.⁴³ By 1961, the Barbados Secondary School had moved to its own property and experienced some degree of academic success.⁴⁴

In 1987, the Bridgetown Primary School building was complete. By then the total number of elementary school enrollment across the island was approximately 225.⁴⁵

In the first half of the twentieth century, the East Caribbean Conference which was comprised of the East Caribbean Mission and Leeward Island Conference/Mission, recorded three elementary schools in existence by 1903. The number was reduced to one school by 1910, and the student population, which was fifty in the beginning, later decreased to eighteen in 1913. However, the 1940s witnessed a turnaround as the number of elementary schools increased from six to thirteen in 1951, and later fluctuated between thirteen and fifteen from that time until 1980.⁴⁶

In St. Vincent, the Bequia Seventh-day Adventist Secondary School had a steady increase in enrollment, with a few fluctuations, from forty-four in 1964 to 149 in 1987.⁴⁷ The Dominica Seventh-day Adventist Secondary School maintained a steady enrollment of 170 students from 1985 to 1987.⁴⁸

Guyana Conference (British Guiana)

In British Guiana in 1904, D. C. Babcock reported that the church in Georgetown was calling for a school. Plans were laid and in March that year a school was opened in the Georgetown neighborhood of Albouystown. The old church building was used as the school,⁴⁹ which catered to East Indian children.⁵⁰ Babcock reported later

that year that the East Indian school was supported by a North American church member, Gordon Loucks, from North Dakota.⁵¹

Two elementary church schools were opened in 1907;⁵² however, no record could be found of the locations. In that same year, Carrie Davis and O. E. Davis wrote about engaging a brother to take up the school work in Georgetown.⁵³ By 1910, statistics showed five elementary schools in the country. Between 1911 and 1942, the number of elementary schools fluctuated from one to five.⁵⁴

In 1939, there were four schools in operation, two of which provided for the needs of the Mount Roraima Indians. Each school had approximately 100 students and was managed by Elder Arthur Carscallen and his family with assistance from R. E. Brooks and his wife.⁵⁵ Records showed that six schools existed by 1943, and the number increased to ten by 1951.⁵⁶

In 1954, Percy Manuel reported that Pastor and Mrs. R. E. Brooks worked among the Indians for fifteen years and were able to send five students from the local mission school to Caribbean Union College, where they trained for three years and returned to work among their people.⁵⁷ Manuel pleaded with the North American brethren to support increased educational opportunities for the young Indian children who lived in the “jungle” of British Guiana and other youth across the Caribbean islands.⁵⁸

In 1964, Georgetown Academy was established (formerly known as Georgetown High School).⁵⁹ There were thirteen schools by 1970. By the time the Forbes Burnham government abolished private education in 1976, which led to the church schools being nationalized, there were 880 students enrolled in Adventist elementary school.⁶⁰

The Davis Indian Training School

The Davis Indian Training School was born out of the Mount Roraima Mission, which was located at Paruima in the Kamarang. The director in 1956 was William Tol,⁶¹ and the training school was fed by three elementary schools, which existed at the time. The schools, which were described as “all-age,” were located in Paruima, Waramodong, and Kako.⁶²

Tol wrote in 1960:

The three existing primary school buildings are bursting at the seams, even though new facilities have been provided in very recent times. Our staff of primary school teachers has increased from two to eight, in just a little more than three years. And they are doing a fine job with the meager facilities at hand. Before the end of this year a new school building will be completed at Kako village; also a home for the teacher and his family. The children of Waramadong and Paruima are having school in the rear of the church buildings, but the enrollments have climbed so rapidly that we must build new and better school homes.⁶³

Ten years later, the same sentiments expressed by Tol were echoed in Steve Willsey's lament that in 1970, sixty years after the Kako, Waramadong, Paruima, and Kaikhan schools were established, there was only one worker from among the Indians. Amidst the lack of funding and other resources "this, perhaps, is the saddest note of all." The training school, which had opened in 1961, was closed three years later for lack of teachers.⁶⁴

Other Conferences and Missions

The Caribbean Union was reported to have experienced significant growth in schools in the twentieth century. By 1947, there were twenty-six elementary schools which increased to twenty-eight in 1948, thirty in 1949, thirty-six in 1950, and forty-two in 1951. According to the *Adventist World Education Report*, by 2000 the Caribbean Union Conference was reported to have a total of fifty-two educational institutions. This number included thirty-eight elementary schools, thirteen secondary schools, and one tertiary level institution. By the end of the year 2000, there were twenty-six Adventist primary schools and seventeen secondary schools in the Caribbean Union Conference.⁶⁵

In addition to the schools previously discussed under other missions and conferences, the North Caribbean Conference steadily recorded a total of six schools from 1976 to 1987.⁶⁶ Between 1981 and 1987, the Antigua High School maintained a student population between 100 and 160.⁶⁷ Two elementary schools were recorded for the Grenada Mission from 1985 to 1987.⁶⁸ The first elementary school in Suriname opened in 1964 with an enrollment of twenty-six students. By 1969, the number of schools had increased to three and remained steady until 1984. The number was then reduced to two in 1987 with a total enrollment of 605 students.⁶⁹

Professional Development for Educators

In the latter part of this decade, professional conferences on Adventist education convened from time to time annually in different locations across the Caribbean. The topics usually covered included an emphasis on Adventist philosophy of education, teaching methods and strategies, classroom management procedures and discipline, current research, school management, financial operations, and professional ethics.

In 1944, J. T. Carrington stated, "We sense greatly the need of uniformity on one hand, and adaptation to colonial methods and instruction on the other, so as to bring about better coordination between our church schools and the Caribbean Training College."⁷⁰

On one such occasion in Barbados in 1965, the minister of education in the Barbados government, Cameron Tudor, emphasized the following, which was recorded by K. S. Wiggins: "He challenged the teachers to the task of providing the youth with an anchor, a firm foundation in these days of social and spiritual tumult, and submitted that God and the blood of Christ was that anchor."⁷¹

In the early twenty-first century, local conferences and missions organized for professional development in the relevant areas of need. Teachers also attended the Inter-American Division Teachers' Congress to meet professional development needs.

Secondary Schools in the Caribbean Union Conference (1900-2000)

1904 Mission School Bridgetown, Barbados (Re-established in 1922).

1909 Church School, Georgetown, British Guiana

1927 Caribbean Union College High School, Maracas Valley, Trinidad

1948 Bates Memorial High School, Sangre Grande, Trinidad.

1950 St Croix SDA Secondary School, US Virgin Islands

1951 St. Thomas / St. John SDA Secondary School

1952 Harmon High School of SDA (formerly Scarborough SDA High School; renamed in 1957), Scarborough, Tobago.

1953 Southern Academy, San Fernando, Trinidad.

1953 Barbados Secondary School, Bridgetown, Barbados.

1953 Bequia SDA Secondary School, Port Elizabeth, Bequia

1958 Mountain View Academy, Richland Park, St. Vincent, West Indies

1958 Grenada SDA Comprehensive Secondary School

1964 Georgetown Academy, Georgetown, Guyana.

1964 St Lucia SDA Academy, Castries, St Lucia

1964 Andrews High School, at San Juan, Trinidad.

1980 Dominica SDA Secondary School, Portsmouth, Dominica

Primary Schools in the Caribbean Union Conference (1900-2000)

1897 Bridgetown SDA Primary School, Barbados

1913 Port of Spain SDA Primary School, Trinidad

1916 John Roberts Memorial SDA Primary School, Tobago

1934 Pinehaven SDA Primary School, Trinidad

1942 Scarborough SDA Primary School, Tobago
1945 Cumana SDA Primary School, Trinidad
1945 Sangre Grande SDA Primary School, Trinidad
1945 Richland Park SDA Primary School, St. Vincent
1948 Eucharist Lewis SDA Primary School, St. Lucia
1949 Maracas SDA Primary School, Trinidad
1950 Siparia SDA Primary School, Trinidad
1951 San Fernando SDA Primary School, Trinidad
1951 L'Abayee SDA Primary School, St. Lucia
1951 Bequia SDA Primary School, Bequia
1952 San Juan SDA Primary School, Trinidad
1953 Erin SDA Primary School, Trinidad
1953 Charlotteville SDA Primary School, Tobago
1961 Emmanuel Combined School, St Lucia
1962 Point Fortin SDA Primary School, Trinidad
1976 Ebenezer SDA Primary School (formerly Roseau SDA Primary), Dominica
1977 Rio Claro SDA Primary School, Trinidad
1978 Western District SDA Primary Academy (formerly St Joseph SDA Primary), Dominica
1980 Leeward SDA Primary School, St Vincent
1982 Westport SDA Primary School, Trinidad
1992 North Regional SDA Primary, Tobago
1999 Temple SDA Primary School, Dominica

Early Childhood Centres in the Caribbean Union Conference (1900-2000)

1991 Marabella Early Childhood Centre
1992 Cumuto Early Childhood Centre

1998 Tabaquite Early Childhood Centre

1998 Flanagin Town Early Childhood Centre

2001 Pinehaven Early Childhood Centre

2005 Torrib Trace Early Childhood Centre

Tertiary Institutions in the Caribbean Union Conference (1900-2000)

1927 University of the Southern Caribbean (formerly Caribbean Union College)

2001- Present

The twenty-first century brought with it new thrusts in education across the Caribbean. With many schools in operation, there was a focus on the modernization of teaching practices evidenced in the adoption of new technology. The high school curriculum was improved to include subjects such as information technology, industrial technology, mechanical engineering technology and electronic document preparation and management (EDPM).

In the primary schools, technology was introduced by way of integration into the classroom activities. Teachers were engaged in workshops to develop the requisite skills and improve on the use of technology in the classroom.

The early childhood branch of education experienced continued growth in Trinidad as two new centers were opened in D'Abadie and Princes Town. In 2018, the Georgetown Seventh-day Adventist Academy was opened in Durban Backlands. This institution was the first official denominational school to be owned and operated by the Adventist Church in Guyana in forty-two years.⁷²

The turn of the century also brought increasing opportunities in higher education for Adventists in the Caribbean. These opportunities became possible as the University of the Southern Caribbean expanded operations and opened extension campuses in south Trinidad, Tobago, Guyana, Barbados, Antigua, and St. Lucia. Undergraduate programs offered at the main campus were also increased to more than forty. There was also an increase in graduate programs. Master's degrees in education, national security and intelligence, occupational therapy, and pastoral theology were now offered.

Some courses in both the masters and undergraduate programs had previously been offered online; however, the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic demanded a change in program delivery mode for both graduate and undergraduate programs. In March 2020, the prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Keith Rowley, ordered that all educational institutions be closed in order to manage the spread of the coronavirus. As a consequence, all academic programs became available online. This change from the traditional face-to-face mode to online

learning was also the case for the primary and secondary schools in the Caribbean Union Conference.

The Adventist educational institutions in the Caribbean Union Conference continue to play a remarkable role in the progress of the mission to provide “true education ... an education that secures to the successful student his passport from the preparatory school of earth to the higher grade, the school above.”³

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