



Western Ukrainian Conference (WUC/UUC) Headquarters

Photo courtesy of Western Ukrainian Conference .

# Western Ukrainian Conference

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## NIKOLAY A. ZHUKALYUK, AND JÓN HJÖRLEIFUR STEFÁNSSON

Nikolay A. Zhukalyuk, pastor, writer, historian, and professional journalist. After his service in the Soviet Army, he devoted himself to church ministry. Over a period of thirty-five years in the Soviet period, Zhukalyuk carried out pastoral ministry and was one of the unofficial leaders of the SDA Church in the USSR. Zhukalyuk was the first president of the Ukrainian Union Conference. He established and served as a general manager and editor-in-chief of the *Dzherelo Zhyttia* Publishing House. He is author of 15 books, including books on the history of SDA Church such as *Afflicted*, *Tossed With Tempest*. At present, Zhukalyuk is serving as chief editor for the translation of the Bible into contemporary Ukrainian language.

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The Western Ukrainian Conference is the westernmost Ukrainian church unit, in operation since 1990.

## Territory and Statistics<sup>1</sup>

Period: 1990–

Territory: Regions of Lviv, Rivne, Volyn, and Zakarpattia

Population: 5,908,849

Membership: 6,222

Churches: 96

## Origin of Seventh-day Adventist Work in the Territory

The present-day Ukrainian regions that form the Western Ukrainian Conference are Lviv, Rivne, Volyn, and Zakarpattia. They cover territory that formerly belonged to other countries.<sup>2</sup> The Zakarpattian region belonged, in turn, to Austria-Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of Hungary, and to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic; the Kingdom of Galicia; and the Volhynia Governorate which belonged to Imperial Russia and was then incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR. The church units that covered the territory of the Western Ukrainian Conference before Ukraine disappeared from the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* during most of the Soviet era were the South Polish Conference (Galicia), the Volhynian Conference (Volhynia), and possibly the East Hungarian Mission (Carpathian Ruthenia).<sup>3</sup> Adventists did not begin working in the Minsk Region until 1925.

## Organizational History

The beginning of Adventism in Transcarpathia (Zakarpattia) is considered to be 1912, when Ivan Kapitan, returned to a village of Ilnitsa after serving in the Austro-Hungarian army. There, in the Hungarian city of Miskolc, a small tract came into his hands. Contrary to the teaching of the official church, the tract asserted the necessity of observing Sabbath, and centered around a near Second Coming of Christ. After a short time, a group of people willing to study the Holy Scripture was organized in Ilnitsa. This fact became known to a pastor of the Adventist church in the Slovakian town of Košice, who visited them. In November 1912, the first baptism of twelve people took place in Ilnitsa.

A second baptism was held in the spring of 1913, and the Adventist congregation was organized.

Organizationally, the Transcarpathian Missionary Field was attached to the Austro-Hungarian Union. The union sent Pastor Friedrich Kessel there for missionary service. He was assisted by Arpag Muroi and Joseph Albrecht. In 1917 the family of Vasiliy and Maria Khiminets joined the Church. Their son, Ivan V. Khiminets, became a long-time leader of the Adventist Church in Transcarpathia. Despite the difficulties and persecution of Adventist

believers, the Adventist message spread throughout Transcarpathia by 1920.

In 1921 the first Adventist church was built in Ilnitsa. Further development of the Adventist Church in Transcarpathia was associated with the ministry of Pastor Vasiliy Mikhnoy. In May 1941 the leaders of the Hungarian Union invited Ivan V. Khiminets to study at a missionary school. In October 1944, when Transcarpathia was occupied by Soviet troops and the region became a part of the USSR, visits by foreign pastors were strongly forbidden, so Khiminets was invited to Debrecen, Hungary. After his ordination to pastoral ministry in September 1945, he was appointed as head of the Adventist Church in Transcarpathia.

Khiminets was responsible for his congregation until 1978, when Mikhail Lutsio took over. In May 1987, Lutsio was replaced by Anatoliy Voronyuk, who served until the unification of all three local conferences of Western Ukraine into the Western Ukrainian Conference of the Ukrainian Union.

In 1967, 1978, and 1981, Ukrainian church units were organized, all called districts. They first appeared in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* in 1982, after decades of no reports from Ukraine due to communism. They were listed under the Association of Seventh-day Adventists in the Ukrainian SSR (today's Ukrainian Union Conference).<sup>4</sup> Three of the ones organized in 1978 were the Lvov, Volinian, and Zakarpattian Districts. The Lvov District comprised the Lvov, Ivano-Frankovsk, and Ternopol Regions, the Volinian District the Volyn and Rovno Regions, and the Zakarpattian (also called Trans-Carpathian) District the Zakarpattian Region.<sup>5</sup> The Ivano-Frankovsk District was renamed the Western Ukrainian District in the late 1980s.<sup>6</sup>

In 1990, the three districts—in fact, all the Ukrainian Districts—became conferences.<sup>7</sup> The headquarters of the Trans-Carpathian Conference was located at ul. Olbrachta 21, Mukachevo. Membership was 1,238. Initial officers were President A. I. Voronyuk, Secretary A. N. Kolody, and Treasurer M. R. Kolesnik.<sup>8</sup> The Volinian Conference headquarters was located at ul. Komminterny 34, Lutsk. Its membership was 1,244. Starting officers were President P. L. Burilo, Secretary V. N. Kotyrio, and Treasurer D. D. Gritsuk.<sup>9</sup> The Western Ukrainian Conference had headquarters at ul. Boikovskaya 24, Lvov. It had 1,040 members. Its first officers were President I. F. Khiminez, Secretary I. Y. Noshin, and Treasurer B. Z. Samoilenko.<sup>10</sup>

In 1992 the three conferences merged into the Western Ukrainian Conference.<sup>11</sup> Its offices were located at ul. Botkina 55, Lviv. Membership was 3,690. Initial officers were President A. I. Voronyuk and Secretary-Treasurer B. Stasyuk.<sup>12</sup>

The conference headquarters has always been in Lvov or Lviv (known by its Ukrainian name after the country's independence). In 1993 the address was listed at ul. Gurskoy 38,<sup>13</sup> in 1995 at Ivana Bagryanogo 38,<sup>14</sup> and in 2000 at Korolenko Street 1.<sup>15</sup> Since 2009, the headquarters has been at Ivana Bagryanogo Street.<sup>16</sup>

From 1216 members in 1990, membership increased during most years. It peaked at 6,941 members in 2011, and has been declining since.<sup>17</sup>

The first constituency meeting of the Western Ukrainian Conference was held in the prayer house in Lvov on February 20-23, 1991. A total of 59 delegates represented 55 congregations with 3,685 members. They approved a new name of the conference and elected officers, headed by Anatoliy Voronyuk.

In February 1994 the second conference constituency meeting convened. Due to a series of evangelistic campaigns membership had increased by more than 1,500, and this time 194 delegates represented 78 congregations with 5,283 members. They elected a new president, Fyodor Trikur, a native of Transcarpathia, who had extensive pastoral experience of pastoral in the Russian cities of Ussuriysk, Chelyabinsk, Voronezh, and Belgorod.

The third constituency Meeting met in February 1997. A total of 154 delegates represented 81 congregations with 5,972 members. Pastor Fyodor Trikur was reelected for the next three-year term. The meeting was marked by a controversial decision on reorganizing the conference, initiated by the Ukrainian Union with the purpose of improving missionary service and financial opportunities in the territory of Subcarpathia. Accordingly, the Ivano-Frankovsk and Ternopol Regions were included in the Bukovinskaya Conference.

The fourth constituency meeting was held in January 2000. The 141 delegates, representing 96 congregations with 6,329 members, elected Pastor Valentin Shevchuk as president.

The fifth constituency meeting was held in April 2003. 143 delegates represented 101 congregations with 6,642 members. They elected as president Boris Korzhos, born to an Adventist family in the village of Shilovtsi, Bukovina. In April 2007 194 delegates reelected him president. Those delegates, representing 109 congregations, took part in the dedication of the newly constructed office building of the Western Conference. Formerly conference employees had to work in rented premises, which raised many difficulties, especially because the number of churches and members had almost doubled since Ukraine's independence.

Although the tendency towards church growth still persisted, it took a lot of evangelistic efforts, including satellite evangelism via the Nadiya (Hope) TV Channel. Thus, although 1,532 members joined the Church during the next four-year period, as a result of death (412), migration (500), and disfellowship (357), the WUC membership increased only by 104. It was with such results that the conference convened its seventh Constituency Meeting in May 2011, attended by 75 delegates representing 111 congregations with 6,991 members. The delegates elected a well-known pastor-evangelist, Alexander Antonyuk, the conference president for the next four-year term.

The eighth conference constituency meeting in July 2014 was to some extent unscheduled, as Alexander Antonyuk, for family reasons, had to emigrate from the country. A total of 172 delegates, representing 98 congregations and 40 companies with 6,536 members, arrived at Lvov. A matter of general anxiety was that in the preceding three years the number of members had decreased by 400. It emerged that the reason was a so-called adjustment of membership records in local churches.

Rapid church growth in the early 1990s had been triggered by spiritual hunger during the years of atheism and mass evangelistic campaigns led by foreign evangelists. However, over time many newly baptized members began to get involved in denominations with lower moral standards, or while doing business had returned to their former way of life. All the efforts of pastors and faithful members did not yield any tangible results. Local churches started expelling persons who not only neglected but also renounced their membership. As a result, 40 congregations became so small that they lost their status and were regarded as companies. It was emphasized that these companies were a vast missionary field that challenged the Church to re-establish their lost status. The newly elected president Valentin Shevchuk was called to cope with this situation.

By the end of 2017, the Western Ukrainian Conference comprised 96 congregations and 42 companies with 6,186 members. The conference was served by 29 pastors, 31 assistant pastors, and 19 missionaries.

## List of Presidents

Lvov District Senior Pastor: No listing, 1978–1981; N. A. Zhukaluk, 1982–1987. Western Ukrainian District President: N. A. Zhukaluk, 1987–1988; I. F. Khiminetz, 1989.

Volinian District Senior Pastor: No listing, 1978–1981; P. L. Burilo, 1982–1987. President: P. L. Burilo, 1987–1989. Volinian Conference President: P. L. Burilo, 1990–1991.

Zakarpattian District Senior Pastor: No listing, 1978–1981; M. M. Lutso, 1982–1987. President: A. I. Voronyuk, 1987–1989. Trans-Carpathian Conference President: A. I. Voronyuk, 1990–1991.

Western Ukrainian Conference President: I. F. Khiminetz, 1990; no listing, 1991; A. I. Voronyuk, 1992–1994; Fyodor F. Trikur, 1995–2000; Valentin A. Shevchuk, 2001–2003; Boris H. Korzhos, 2004–2011; Alexander I. Antonyuk, 2012–2014; Valentin A. Shevchuk, 2015–.

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### SOURCES

“Annual Charts and Statistics” for “Western Ukrainian Conference (1989–Present).” Accessed July 1, 2019. [http://adventiststatistics.org/view\\_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10565](http://adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10565)

*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*. 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996. S. v. “Belarus.”

*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Various years. <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/>.

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### NOTES

1. All statistics, except the period, from "Western Ukrainian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2018), 80.
2. In addition to the ones mentioned, a slice of the territory belonged to the Minsk Governorate in Imperial Russia. Adventists did not begin working in Minsk until after 1924. By then the border between Ukraine and Belarus had already been drawn, meaning that the Belarus Adventist work has no relevance to the work in the territory of the Western Ukrainian Conference. For the date of the entry into Minsk and other regions in Belarus besides Brest, see *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. ed. (1996), s. v. "Belarus."
3. Based solely on the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* it is not possible to confirm that Carpathian Ruthenia belonged to the East Hungarian Mission, but this is most likely. The reason for this uncertainty is that during World War II there were comitates in Hungary that had the same names as the administrative divisions (*közigazgatási kirendeltség*) of Sub-Carpathia: Bereg, Máramaros, and Ung. The *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* lists the comitates with this name, but it is unclear from this whether it ignored the complexity of the situation and intended to include both administrative units of each name, or whether Sub-Carpathia is excluded. The former seems to be more likely. It is, however, possible that there was no church organization in the area during the war, especially since the government banned the Church temporarily at least twice during the war.
4. "Association of Seventh-day Adventist [sic] in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1982), 335; "Ukrainian Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1990), 348.
5. "Lvov District," "Volinian District," and "Zakarpatian District," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1982), 336.
6. "Western Ukrainian District," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1988), 374.
7. "Trans-Carpathian Conference," "Volinian Conference," and "Western Ukrainian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1990), 349.
8. For the initial statistics on the Trans-Carpathian Conference, see that field in *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1990), 349.
9. For the initial statistics on the Volinian Conference, see that field in *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1990), 349.
10. For the initial statistics on the Western Ukrainian Conference, see that field in *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1990), 349.
11. "Western Ukrainian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1992), 108.
12. For the initial statistics on the enlarged Western Ukrainian Conference, see "Western Ukrainian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1992), 108.
13. "Western Ukrainian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1993), 102.
14. "Western Ukrainian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1996), 154; "Western Ukrainian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1994), 106.

15. "Western Ukrainian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2000), 120.

16. Either they moved between houses, the numbering of the houses changed, or there was confusion in the *Yearbook* information. The address number is 36a in 2009; 38a in 2013; 36a again in 2016, and finally 44 from 2017. "Western Ukrainian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2009), 102; "Western Ukrainian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2013), 85; "Western Ukrainian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2016), 90; "Western Ukrainian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2017), 92.

17. "Annual Charts and Statistics" for "Western Ukrainian Conference (1989–Present)," accessed July 1, 2019, [http://adventiststatistics.org/view\\_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10565](http://adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10565).

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