

# North Caribbean Conference

---

## SYLTON BROWNE

Sylton Browne is a former president of the North Caribbean Conference (2005-2017).

---

The North Caribbean Conference (NCC) is a part of the Caribbean Union Conference in the Inter-American Division (IAD) of Seventh-day Adventists. It was organized in 1975 and reorganized in 2011. Its headquarters is in Christiansted, St. Croix, United States Virgin Islands. Its territory includes Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands (including Anegada, Jost Van Dyke, Tortola, and Virgin Gorda), the United States Virgin Islands (St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas), and the islands of Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten. As of June 30, 2021, the conference was comprised of thirty-one churches with a combined membership of 16,352. The region's population was 200,000.

## Background

With the Caribbean region's wide-ranging territory encompassing many islands, Adventism entered individual islands or, in some cases, island clusters over a broad span of time. For that reason, there is not a single, simple, cohesive, or straightforward history of the origins of the NCC. In brief, William Arnold, a colporteur, entered Antigua and Barbuda in 1888 by William Arnold. Three years later, he moved to St. Kitts and Nevis. The United States Virgin Islands was entered in 1900 by Dr. A. Palmquist, a self-supporting missionary and colporteur.<sup>1</sup> Reliable evidence confirms a visit to these islands in 1891 by D. A. Ball, literature evangelist and medical missionary, who may have set the stage for Palmquist's permanent mission.<sup>2</sup> Pastor Lee Wellman began work in the British Virgin Islands in 1901. The first Adventist missionary, J. J. Smith, in Montserrat labored here from 1913 to 1915. Work did not begin in Anguilla until 1932 when it was initiated by L. H. Gardiner, president of the Leeward Island Conference.<sup>3</sup> In 1940, Eddy Hodge and Atkins Rogers, both laymen, started work in Sint Maarten (Netherlands Antilles).

## Organization of the North Caribbean Conference

The Northern Caribbean Conference was administratively born from a realignment of the former East Caribbean Conference. By 1975, when it was clear to church leaders that the territory of the East Caribbean Conference was too expansive for effective growth and administration, they effected a realignment that led to the birth of the North Caribbean Conference. At the time of the 1975 territorial adjustment to create the NCC, the membership was 8,108 in forty-seven congregations. Evangelistic thrust coupled with effective leadership closer

to the people resulted in the steady growth of membership of the conference, reaching 22,774 in eighty-seven congregations by 2005.

The North Caribbean Conference commenced operation on January 1, 1976, following a territorial adjustment of the East Caribbean Conference (ECC) with the approval of the Inter-American Division and executed through the Caribbean Union in an inaugural session held in St. Thomas, United States Virgin Islands, on August 27, 1975. At the time, this new conference was comprised of the eastern Caribbean islands of Antigua and Barbuda, Anguilla, Montserrat, Nevis, and St. Kitts; the Netherlands Antilles of St. Eustatius, Saba, and Dutch St. Maarten; the British Virgin Islands of Tortola, Virgin Gorda, and Anegada; and the United States Virgin Islands of St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas. With about forty-two churches, the conference supported 7,000 members.

The first president of the conference was William Wilson Thomson (more familiarly known as W. W. Thomson) who had been previously the president of the East Caribbean Conference. Also selected as the secretary-treasurer was Surinam-born Eugene Blackman, who had previously been secretary-treasurer of the East Caribbean Conference. Other administrators appointed to the new conference were Campbell Rogers, publishing director; J. C. Shillingford, lay activities, Sabbath School, and communication; Oriel Fleming, youth, health and temperance; E. W. Carnegie, stewardship and education; and Eugene A. Blackman, ABC manager.

The North Caribbean Conference had tremendous resources and potential in terms of finances and man power. The conference experienced rapid growth in church membership, the result of several evangelistic drives. Statistical data in 1975 showed that about fifty percent of the members of the conference were under 35 years old. The conference's initial theme, "Even So Come Lord Jesus," was widely internalized by its members<sup>4</sup>

The first president of the field as noted above was W. W. Thomson, who served two three-year terms from 1976 to 1982. The succeeding presidents were Belgrove N. Josiah (1982-1994), Jansen E. Trotman (1994-1999), John R. Josiah (1999-2005), and Silton N. Browne (2005-2017). Desmond F. James became president in 2017 and was serving at the time of writing. After 1997, the conference's term of office was four years instead of the former three years.

The island of St. Croix was selected as the location of the headquarters, and the property at 32 Castle Coakley was purchased as the NCC base of operations. The large dwelling home of Roland Haylock was reconfigured with minor additions to become a modest headquarters.<sup>5</sup> Hurricane Hugo, which hit St. Croix on September 17, 1989, badly damaged the building, necessitating the erection of a new office building, completed and dedicated in 1992 under the administration led by President B. N. Josiah.

The demands and expense of operating a fifteen-island conference with several nationalities (American, British, Dutch, and independent small nations) and several currencies, among other reasons, made it necessary to consider another territorial adjustment. This intention was voted in a conference session of 2005, and was approved by the Inter-American Division and executed in March 2011, giving birth to the South Leeward Mission

(SLM) comprised of Antigua, Barbuda, Montserrat, Nevis, and St. Kitts. These were all former British colonies, and all used the Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$) as legal tender, for a cohesion not previously experienced in the NCC. The headquarters was established in Antigua. At the time of the adjustment, the membership of the combined NCC (15 islands) was 25,405. The emerging SLM membership (five islands) was 11,599 in forty-eight congregations at the time of its organization; the NCC now comprised of the remaining ten islands had a new beginning membership of 13,806 in thirty-four congregations.<sup>6</sup>

## Challenges and Opportunities

At different times, the number islands listed in the territory of the NCC has varied. This variation is due to the practicality and accessibility of an Adventist presence to be established. For example, although the British Virgin Islands claims to have about 120 islands and cays in its territory, the organization initially counted only Tortola and Virgin Gorda, then added Anegada because in the 1980s there was a group of about fifteen members there and land was acquired on which to develop church facilities. Similarly, Saba was added to the Dutch islands of St. Maarten and St. Eustatius when the work developed there with members baptized and a church building was erected. Although Carrot Bay church on Tortola has conducted meetings on Jost Van Dyke and at one time (around 2009) there were two members on the island that boasted a population of 120 people, that island has not been reckoned in the count. Emigration issues can significantly impact the work in these small islands as well. For example, in 1980 the intern pastor, Ernan Norman, a native of Anegada (whose mother was the matriarch of Adventism in Anegada), conducted evangelistic meetings on home ground and baptized nine people, including a few siblings. As of 2019, surviving members of this family were all living in the United States, and there was only one known church member remaining.

The NCC has been significantly affected by emigrational variables throughout its history due to ready access to the United States mainland, where about half of its membership has relocated, which has created a tension between the book membership and the actual attendance. However, as of June 2019 the membership of the NCC was 15,521 in thirty-five congregations. The conference administers five schools on St. Croix, St. Eustatius, St. Maarten, St. Thomas, and Tortola. Three of these schools (St. Croix, St. Thomas, and Tortola) have a secondary or high school division thereby providing education for kindergarten through grade 12.<sup>7</sup>

## List of Presidents since 1975

W. W. Thomson (1976-1982), B. N Josiah (1982-1994), Jansen Trotman (1994-1999),

1999-2005 John R. Josiah (1999-2005), Silton Browne (2005-2017), Desmond James (2017-present)

---

### SOURCES

Arnold, William. "From South America." *ARH*, July 7, 1891.

Brown, George W. "New Conference Organized in Caribbean Union." *Inter-American Flashes*, October 14, 1975.

Combie, V. Knowles. "The Work of the Seventh-day Adventists in the United States Virgin Islands." Unpublished paper, 2019. Personal collection of Silton N. Browne.

North Caribbean Conference archives. St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.

Palmquist, A. "A Trip to the Virgin Islands." *ARH*, October 15, 1901.

Plank, I. T. and Tryphean St. T. John Cornet. *Rivers of Water: A History of Seventh-day Adventism in Anguilla, Its Roots and the St. John Shoot*. Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2012.

---

## NOTES

1. A. Palmquist, "A Trip to the Virgin Islands," *ARH*, October 15, 1901, 674-675.
2. William Arnold, "From South America," *ARH*, July 7, 1891, 423.
3. I. T. Plank and Tryphean St. T. John Cornet, *Rivers of Water: A History of Seventh-day Adventism in Anguilla, Its Roots and the St. John Shoot* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2012), 49-50.
4. George W. Brown, "New Conference Organized in Caribbean Union," *Inter-American Flashes*, October 14, 1975, 1.
5. V. Knowles Combie, "The Work of the Seventh-day Adventists in the United States Virgin Islands," unpublished paper, 2019, personal collection of Silton N. Browne.
6. The North Caribbean Conference Session Reports 2009, 2013, 2017, North Caribbean Conference archives, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.
7. North Caribbean Conference Secretariat (Secretary and Administrative Assistant) 2019, North Caribbean Conference archives, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.

---

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