

Christensen, Carl Donald (1896–1977) and Alice Nicolene (Flatten) 1905–1976)

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Daniel A. Duffis is a pastor since 1982, originally from the Colombian Islands Mission. He worked as missionary in Colombia, the Dutch Islands of Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, and St. Maarten, also in the United States of America. He has a bachelor's degree in Education/Theology, a master's degree in Public Health, and a Ph.D. in Business. He and his wife, Marta have three grown children. He has written three books on Adventist Church history.

Carl and Alice Christensen were Adventist missionaries in Argentina, Chile, Peru, Panama, Mexico, and Curacao.

Early Life and Family

Carl Donald Christensen was born September 17, 1896, in Council Bluffs, Iowa, in the United States.¹ His parents Christen Jensen Christensen and Anne Marie Albrechtsen had migrated from Denmark with their first child, Jens, in 1890 and settled in Iowa,² where eight of their children were born. They moved to South Dakota around 1907, and their last three children were born there.³

Christensen first came into contact with the Seventh-day Adventist Church about the time his father was baptized in 1904.⁴ He was a member of the Danish-Norwegian Seminary Seventh-day Adventist Church in Hutchinson, Minnesota, which was organized in 1911. His sister, Esther Mae, was baptized there in 1916.⁵ Near the end of World War I, Christensen was drafted and enlisted in the United States Army on September 6, 1918.⁶

Upon his discharge from the Army on December 11, 1918, Christensen attended Hutchison Seminary in Minnesota. He covered his expenses through canvassing work. In the summer of 1921 along with other students, he canvassed in the Manitoba Conference in Canada.⁷ In 1922, he completed his academic and commercial courses in 1922. After graduation in 1923, he moved to South Dakota,⁸ however, the Manitoba Conference, recognizing his leadership and canvassing skills, asked him to work as field secretary.⁹ During the summer, he would help the student colporteurs that came from Hutchison Seminary. Christensen returned to the seminary to complete a Bachelor of Arts, and while doing so he was the leader of a group of twenty-seven student-colporteurs in 1924.¹⁰

He married Alice Nicolene Flatten (born February 2, 1905) on May 27, 1926, in Moody, South Dakota.¹¹ He was 29 and his bride was 21. Alice, born in South Dakota on February 2, 1905,¹² was the third child and second daughter of Peter Flatten, a Norwegian, and Lasene Thompson Flatten, of Danish origin.

Mission Work in Argentina

After graduating in 1925, Christensen was called to work with the South Dakota Conference and settled in Tuthill, South Dakota. One of his first assignments was to help in the Harvest Ingathering at Plainview Academy along with Elder Gordon Oss, the home missionary leader of the conference. The campaign was a success and the school brought in over \$650.¹³ He also preached his first evangelistic series in November 1925, during which South Dakota Conference President E. H. Oswald visited the meetings and preached a few nights.¹⁴ Christensen organized more evangelistic series and planted churches in Dallas, South Dakota and other little municipalities in the conference. For example, in the spring of 1926 eight people were baptized, and one was admitted into membership by profession of faith. It was his intention to organize a company in Dallas soon after.¹⁵

Less than two weeks after his marriage, the General Conference voted on June 7, 1926 to Christensen to Buenos Aires, Argentina.¹⁶ Four months later, he and his new wife left for the mission field,¹⁷ arriving in Buenos Aires on November 5, 1926.¹⁸ His mission was to work among the Danish people of the area.¹⁹ Christensen worked as a district pastor in the Buenos Aires Conference. The Christensens' son Charles was born in Argentina on September 14, 1928. Carl Christensen was ordained to the gospel ministry in Buenos Aires on October 25, 1930.²⁰

While working in Buenos Aires, Christensen learned of a Baptist minister who had vehemently opposed Adventism until he fell ill and was taken to the River Plate Sanitarium, a Seventh-day Adventist sanatorium in Entre Rios, Argentina. There he was given a copy of the little book, *The Marked Bible*. He later confessed to having misjudged the Adventists, accepted the Sabbath as truth, and even gave away a copy of the book to a little boy in Sunday school. This boy took the book to his parents and by this means many of their family members were converted.²¹

Mission Work in Chile

Christensen left Argentina and spent the next four years in Santiago de Chile, Chile,²² where he was the vice-director of the Chillan Training School (*Colegio Industrial Adventista de Chillan*) from 1931-1934. He also served as acting director for a few months until the arrival of the George B. Taylor in early 1932.²³ In addition to his administrative duties, Christensen taught Bible and pastoral training. Alice Christensen taught piano.

The Christensens arrived in Chile during the Great Depression. Many workers were laid off, salaries were cut for lack of funds, and families had very difficult time. Alice Christensen wrote back home to South Dakota to ask for special prayers for the workers and pleaded for a spirit of sacrifice.²⁴ Their daughter Margaret was born June 4, 1931, soon after they arrived, and another daughter, Marilyn, was born almost two years later, on April 9, 1933. Both were born in Chillan.²⁵

It was quite difficult to travel within the mission field and the long hours of travel, preaching, and administrative duties were exhausting. It was expected that missionaries would perform all duties necessary at school and church. Following is an excerpt of a letter he sent to his parents describing the workload he carried after classes were finished and his duties as an ordained pastor took precedence.

The day after school was out I left for the south part of Chile to visit the churches in the interest of the school and to baptize new believers where there are either only licensed workers or no workers at all. I was gone three weeks. I traveled in many different ways to reach the different groups and churches. I went horseback for fifteen to twenty miles in a stretch. In oxcart I traveled about four hours one night, and for another three hours afoot, reaching my destination at two o'clock in the morning. By boat I traveled a few hours, too, and of course in train, street car, and auto buss (sic). Still I forgot to mention I traveled in a sulky about fifteen or twenty miles, to a country church and returned early the next morning. It was a rather hard trip, but the Lord gave me the strength needed.

When one goes to these churches and groups, one finds the people hungry to hear the word of God. One must preach an hour and a half or two hours, at least, and then answer questions for another half hour or so, and to top it off they always want to learn some new songs. It does one's heart good, but a few weeks make a person rather tired. I celebrated seventy baptisms in those three weeks and baptized seventy-two new believers. For five days I had a baptism every day. Besides that, it happened that my trip came the last part of the old year and the first part of the new year, so it was time for new elections of church officers. That meant in several places new elders and deacons had to be ordained.

I will tell you about the happenings of one day, which will give you an idea of a missionary's duties on a trip through such districts. They wait for months and even a year or more to be baptized, at times. I baptized an old brother who had tried his best to get to a place to be baptized a year before, and he was unable to get there. I have baptized nearly 700 new believers since the middle of December. But I was going to tell you of one day's work on my trip. It was on a Thursday. In the morning I officiated at a wedding ceremony, and really two ceremonies, because another couple who had only been married civilly, wanted to be married by the church. In the afternoon we had a short sermon for the candidates for baptism, then examination of the candidates. Afterward we went to the river for the baptism. In the evening we had an election of new church officers, ordination of a deacon, and a sermon. I can assure you I was tired enough to sleep that night.²⁶

That was quite a work for a pastor, who also was vice-principal of the training school. Most of this ministry was accomplished during the school holidays at the end of the year and beginning of the next school year.

In May 1934 the family took a furlough from the mission field. They traveled from Chile to New Orleans, Louisiana, via Cristobal, Canal Zone, in Panama aboard the *S. S. Cefalu*.²⁷

Mission Work in Peru

In early 1935 the family was called to Peru,²⁸ where Christensen labored as the director and manager of the Lake Titicaca Indian Training School (*Colegio Adventista de Titicaca*) until 1939. During this time the school was going through some difficulties with the government and Christensen, among others, was instrumental in securing the necessary permits to keep the school open.²⁹ His efficient and strong leadership were quite productive. By the end of the 1935 school year, twenty-five students were baptized,³⁰ which was a testimony to his missionary spirit. During the following years there were more developments in the curriculum and additions to the buildings, and even more baptisms as the baptismal class became an important aspect of the school life. Many more workers were prepared and went into the field.³¹

The visit of Fernando A. Stahl to the school was a highlight in 1937 and very significant since he was the pioneer who had worked among the Indians decades earlier. Many of those he worked with were still in the area.³²

During the 1938 school year almost 190 students were registered, which was the highest number reported since the reopening of the school about five years earlier.³³ The number increased to a little over two hundred the next year, in spite of the opposition of the Roman Catholic priests of the area who tried to get the inspectors to close the school repeatedly. However, the inspectors told them the school was the best in the area.³⁴

In August 1939, Christensen returned to the United States on a furlough and settled in Lincoln, Nebraska,³⁵ where he enrolled at the University of Nebraska. He remained here until late 1940 when he completed his master's degree. His father Christen Jensen died on February 23, 1940, at age 70, in Kelso, Oregon.³⁶

Christensen returned to Peru after graduation in 1940. This time he was assigned to the Lima Training School³⁷ (*Instituto Industrial*) as principal, manager, Bible instructor, and carpentry teacher. From 1941 to 1943, he was also a member of the Inca Union executive committee and a member of South American Division education department board. During this time his wife taught music, piano, and penmanship.

Back to Chile and Move to the United States

Christensen returned to Chile in 1943,³⁸ where he became the principal of the Chillan Training School and continued as a member of the South American Division education department until early 1946. His wife was also part of the faculty.

Christensen asked for a permanent return to the United States in 1946,³⁹ as the couple wanted their children to be educated in the United States. Marilyn and Margaret were on the honor roll during their high school more than once.⁴⁰ Christensen became an associate professor of religion in the theology department at Walla Walla College in the North Pacific Union Conference between 1946-1950. He was also the associate pastor of the college church.

Return to the Mission Field

The Christensens were called back to the missionary field, this time to the Inter-American Division. He became president of the Panama Conference.⁴¹ In 1950, he was General Conference delegate for Central America. That same year, he led the first junior youth camp in Central America.⁴²

From 1950 to 1956, Christensen was president of the Panama Conference. Under his watch, the Colombian Islands of San Andres and Old Providence were separated from the Panama Conference and the Central American Union, and became a part of the Atlantic Colombia Mission and the Colombia-Venezuela Union in 1951. Four years later, the Colombian Islands Mission was organized.⁴³

Despite the overwhelming amount of work, the Christensens also supported the American Service men and women in the Canal Zone that were Seventh-day Adventists and were granted Sabbath privileges. The Christensens would feed them every Sabbath, organize games for them, and lead in the spiritual services for men and women of the armed services.⁴⁴

In mid-1956, the Christensens were asked to move to Mexico, where they were stationed at the Montemorelos Vocational and Professional College.⁴⁵ Christensen was the head of the Bible department, and taught character training and social science from 1956 to 1958, while Alice taught music. Christensen became the principal and business manager of Montemorelos Vocational and Professional School in 1958.⁴⁶ During his tenure, the school began the construction of a new church building.⁴⁷ Christensens remained at Montemorelos until 1960 when they were called to the Dutch island of Curacao as mission president.

For the next five years, from 1960 to 1964, Christensen was the president of the Netherlands Antilles Mission where he led the Church on the Dutch islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao. Under his leadership, Vacation Bible Schools were revived in Curacao.⁴⁸ It had been tried a few years earlier, but had been discontinued. Christensen planned for 200 pupils; over 350 attended. This children's evangelism program became a program in the conference.

Christensen started an elementary school on the island of Curacao and was instrumental in calling and mentoring young pastors into the field. Among them Orlando Newball, who later become a teacher at the Colombia Venezuela Union College and conference president, and James W. Zackrison, who also became a teacher at the same college and later became the Sabbath School director of the General Conference.

While in Curacao, his sister Esther Mae, aged 61, died on January 31, 1961, in Lodi, California.⁴⁹

The Christensens' three children followed their parents' example of service to their Lord. Their son, Charles, served in Peru. During the Pageant of Missions at the 1962 General Conference session, their daughters, Marilyn and Margaret, were among the new outgoing missionaries presented. Carl and Alice Christensen were called to stand with their children during the ceremony.⁵⁰

A couple of years later, Alice's mother, Lasene Flatten, died in Santa Rosa, California, on November 23, 1963.⁵¹

In Curacao, the conference purchased a property, which was renovated to serve as its permanent office. During the previous thirty years, the office had been moved many times even on different islands.⁵² In late 1964, Christensen announced his retirement from active service.⁵³ He left the presidency with the intention of retiring but was asked to go to Colombia. There, he became a Bible and ministerial training teacher at Colombia Venezuela Union College in Medellin, Colombia, from 1965-1967. While in Colombia, his mother, Ann Marie, passed away at age 96 on April 22, 1966, in Kelso, Oregon.

Later Years

The Christensens retired in 1967 and moved to Gentry, Arkansas. After three years Carl Christensen was called upon to return to Colombia in March 1970.⁵⁴ He attended the General Conference session in Atlantic City, New Jersey, as a general delegate, June 11-20, 1970. He returned home to Gentry, Arkansas, after a short stint in Colombia.

In retirement Christensen continued serving the church in many evangelistic series in his area. He was instrumental in leading the finance committee for the building of a new church in Gentry, Arkansas.⁵⁵

Sadly, Alice, his beloved wife of almost fifty years passed on February 4, 1976.⁵⁶ Just one year later he died in a tragic accident in front of his home on March 13, 1977.⁵⁷

Christensen had the distinction of being a minister of the gospel, educator and church and school administrator. He was principal of four training schools and colleges, a professor at two more colleges, and president of two conferences. His greatest legacy was the scores of church workers that were prepared under his leadership and mentoring, who directly influenced the workforce and the evangelistic progress of three divisions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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