



Southwest Korean Conference headquarters building in 2020.

Photo courtesy of Southwest Korean Conference.

Southwest Korean Conference

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Won Kwan Jang, B.A. (Philippines Union College), M.Div. (Sahmyook University), served as a local pastor since 1997 in 7 churches (Bonbu, Namwon-Dongsan, Jeonju-joongang, Jeju-Bonbu, Jeju-Joong ang/president of Jeju mission, Seojoongang and Namsun), and is now serving as president of Southwest Korean Conference.

Southwest Korean Conference (Honamhapoe) is one of the five conferences of the Korean Union Conference in the Northern Asia-Pacific Division. It was established as a mission in 1952 and was promoted to the conference in 1983. Southwest Korean Conference is headquartered in Gwangju Metropolitan.

Territory: Gwangju-city; and the provinces of Jeonbuk, and Jeonnam.

Statistics (June 30, 2020): Churches, 90; membership, 22,719; population, 5,107,418.¹

Origin of Adventist Work in the Territory of the Conference

It was 1914 when the first church in the Honam (Southwest Korea) area was planted.² Back in those days, the Honam region was a spiritually barren land for the Adventists to plant churches. Nevertheless, facing the poor conditions, God successfully initiated His churches in the Honam area including Songjeong-ri in Gwangju through the hard work of faithful, passionate pioneers.³ At that time, the Chosen Mission was supervising the Adventist churches of Korea in church planting and missionary activities. As the number of the churches and membership increased, the Chosen Mission was promoted to the Chosen Union Mission in 1919, and then it was divided into four mission fields for the sake of efficient management; the West Chosen Mission, the Middle Chosen Mission, the South Chosen Mission, and the North Chosen Mission.⁴ The Honam region fell under the supervision of the South Chosen Mission at that time.

The churches in the Honam region became stabilized through the active supervision and assistance from the South Chosen Mission, and the church membership also increased as a result of aggressive missionary activities until 1933. The churches in the Honam region were many, and yet, they did not have a missionary institution with the designation of "Honam." It was not until 1934 that they could organize the Honam Mission field in order to dedicate to missionary activities in the Honam region with its headquarters in Jeongeup.⁵ Despite lots of hardships, God's work kept progressing through the faithful workers. But in 1939 the Honam Mission field suffered a severe financial crisis and was merged with the Yeongnam Mission field to organize the South Chosen Mission with the headquarters in Daejeon.⁶ From that time on, the churches were afflicted with lingering financial difficulties and persecution by the Japanese government. But these trials rather helped the people of God experience spiritual growth. Consequently, the church got revived through the triumphant believers when Korea was liberated in 1945, and the Chosen Union Mission was restored after the general meeting of Korean Adventists in the region.⁷

In 1946, the Korean Union Mission was divided into the South and North, with the headquarters of the South in Seoul.⁸ In 1947 the South Korean Mission was restructured into the Middle Korean Mission and the South Korean Mission, and the headquarters of the South Korean Mission was located in Daejeon. After the restructuring, the churches became restored one after another and missionary activities got active. Unfortunately, when the Korean War broke out in 1950, the church again underwent a trial, but God turned it into a blessing. The Korean War served as a momentum for the church to make great strides as it attracted attention of the Adventists around the world along with the practical helps and prayers for the Adventist churches in Korea.

Organizational History

At the general meeting in Cheongu in 1952, the Korean Union Conference divided the South Korean Mission into the Southeast Korean (Youngham) Mission and the Southwest (Honam) Korean Mission.⁹ The Southwest Korean Mission covered the mission fields of Cholla provinces, Jeju-do, and part of Chungcheongnam-do with its headquarters in Gwangju. From that time on until 1965, the Southwest Korean Mission made rapid progress like the other missions of the Korean Union Conference. In 1963 the churches of Geunsan were reassigned to the Midwest Korean Mission. These churches had been originally reassigned to Chooncheongnam-do from Chollabuk-do. In spite of the reassignment, the average attendance of the Southwest Korean Mission topped 10,000. In 1965 the missionary activities of the Southwest Korean Mission reached a climax with 36,434 children enrolled at the summer Bible schools and 18,187 Sabbath School students.¹⁰

Unfortunately, a series of difficulties such as a halt to the relief supplies from 1966, a fire in the mission headquarters in 1967, and restructuring of the Southwest Korean Mission and the Midwest Korean Mission into the West-South Mission in 1968 resulted in pastoral layoffs. In the face of overwhelming odds, the church leaders rather perceived the importance of the Southwest Korean Mission as the missionary headquarters for the Southwest area and felt a strong desire for self-subsistence. It consequently led to a birth of the Southwest Korean Mission after separation from the West-South Mission in 1971.¹¹ The Southwest Korean Mission kept progressing and eventually could stand on its own as an independent conference in 1983.¹²

Established at the inaugural meeting in 1983, the Southwest Korean Conference continuously advanced through planting churches in urban areas and conducting large scale joint evangelistic meetings until 1997. Their efforts bore abundant fruit of more than twenty churches in Gwangju alone. But the constant pressure from separation movement in Jeju District from 1996 impinged on the missionary work in the Honam region until 2008. Eventually the Jeju District was separated from the Southwest Korean Conference in 2009.¹³ After this separation the Southwest Korean Conference could make preparations for a second leap. In 2012 the Southwest Korean Conference organized seven regional missionary associations and implemented regional missionary activities for four years, but the conference decided to resume the previous administrative system from 2016.¹⁴

The year 2014 saw the 100th anniversary of the missionary work in the Honam area, and the conference celebrated the centenary in the auditorium of Honam Sahmyook Middle & High School on September 27, 2014.¹⁵ It was an undeniable blessing of God for the churches in the Honam area to achieve development in the face of adverse environment. During the past century, Korea witnessed a lot of chronological and social changes locally and abroad. The Southwest Korean Conference did not fail to meet the social expectations by employing various evangelistic means in accordance with the changes, and God continually blessed the missionary work of the conference to be able to plant plenty of churches. Obviously, behind all these activities was God's invisible caring hand of protection, guidance, and providence to finish the last mission of the Adventists.

The sessional term of office of the Southwest Korean Conference was three years up to the 22nd session. It extended to four years for the 23rd session, and five years for the 24th session. As of 2020, the Southwest Korean

Conference is in the fifth year of the 24th session.¹⁶

The Southwest Korean Conference was overseeing a maximum of about one hundred forty churches and congregations, but during the course of time, the number was adjusted to 114 (90 churches and 24 congregations) by way of planting new churches, merges, dissolution, and the separation of Jeju District. As of now, 81 pastors are ministering to 22,664 church members in the conference.

There were ten schools set up in many parts of the Honam area, but currently only two accredited schools are in operation: Gwangju Sahmyook Elementary School opened in 1954 and Honam Sahmyook Middle and High school opened in 1953.¹⁷ Both the schools were translocated to the new buildings constructed in Juwol-dong in 1969. As of the end of 2019, 603 students are enrolled at the elementary school, 603 at the middle school, and 289 at the high school respectively.

The Honam Conference is also running seven social welfare institutions. The conference was commissioned to run Dooam Social Welfare Institution for the first time in 1993.¹⁸ From that time on, six more institutions were entrusted with the conference: Jeongeup Senior Welfare Center, Jeongeup Sahmyook Senior Welfare Center, Jindo Senior Care Center, and Soonchang Senior Care Center.¹⁹ In addition, one kindergarten, one senior welfare institution, and eight community child care centers are operated by some local churches in the conference.

In 1986 a large amount of money dedicated by a local lay member laid a steppingstone for the church members in the conference to take part in donation to purchase a site for constructing facilities and buildings for camping and training. In 1987 a site of 24,803m² was purchased in Gosi-ri, Hancheon-myeon, Hwasoon in Chollanam-do.²⁰ Afterwards additional purchases were made over several decades to secure the total area of 43,159m² now. The training institution now named "Mizpah Training Center" is available for camping, training with various facilities such as a playground, a swimming pool, indoor and outdoor auditoriums, accommodations, and a residence for maintenance employees.

The building site covering 6,200m² in Juwol-dong near Sahmyook School was purchased in 1966 on which the conference headquarters is now located. The Gospel Center constructed in the same place in 1980 is currently occupied by the conference headquarters and a local church. In 1991 another building having five floors above the ground and one underground was constructed for the purposes of medical clinics, restaurants, educational halls, and a church. In 1996, a multi-units house was built for the twelve families of the conference staff. Again, the conference prepared for building a mission center from 2003 to 2010, and a building having ten floors above the ground and one underground was erected in 2011.²¹ The building has been used as the mission center since 2012. The very same building named "Sahmyook Building" is now being occupied by a vegetarian restaurant, medical clinics, the conference headquarters, and a local church. Some spaces are leased out to the tenants, as well. Currently, four large buildings are standing on the land of the conference headquarters.

List of Presidents

Man Sik Huh (1952-1958); Chong Kyun Shin (1959-1962); Eung Jun Lee (1963, 1964); Young Jin Lee (1965, 1966); Mun Kyung Kho (1967-1970); Hyung Chang Lim (1971-1977); Young Geun Jung (1978-1982); Young Cheol Seol (1983-1988); Hyun Seok Kim (1989-1994); Ga Il Kim (1995-1997); Jeong Tae Kim (1998-2000); Young Tae Choi (2001-2003); Jae Soo Han (2004-2006); Hak Bong Lee (2007-2009); Byeong H. Lee (2010-2011); Jae Ho Kim (2012-2015); Hyu Jeong Cho (2016); Jeong Taek Park (2017-2020); Won Kwan Jang (2021-).

SOURCES

Church Compass, November, 1934; October, 1940; June, 1965; June, 1983; November, 1984; March, 2009; September, February, 2011; 2014; March, 2016.

Honam Mission 100th Anniversary. Gwangju: Southwest Korean Conference, 2014.

Lee, Yung Lin. *A History of Korean Adventist Church*. Seoul: Sijosa, 1965.

Oh, Man Kyu. *History of One Hundred Years of Korean SDA, 1904~1945*. Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 2010.

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

The 25th General Meeting Report of Southwest Korean Conference. Gwangju: Southwest Korean Conference, 2021.

NOTES

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2021), <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=10171>.
2. Honam is an official term for the provinces of Jeonbuk and Jeonnam.
3. Yung Lin Lee, *A History of Korean Adventist Church* (Seoul: Sijosa, 1965), 254.
4. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1920), 149, 150.
5. *Church Compass*, November 1934, 30.
6. *Church Compass*, October 1940, 29-30.
7. Yung Lin Lee, 82-84.
8. Following the change of national title, the name of the Union Mission was changed from the Chosen Union Mission to the Korean Union Mission. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1947), 104.
9. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953), 113.

10. *Church Compass*, June 1965, 8-9.
11. Man Kyu Oh, *History of One Hundred Years of Korean SDA, 1904~1945* (Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 2010), 359.
12. *Church Compass*, June 1983, 3-4.
13. *Church Compass*, March 2009, 10-11.
14. Bom Tea Kim, "Decided to Return from Seven Regional Missionary Associations to District-Region System," *Korean Adventist News*, May 27, 2021.
http://adventist.or.kr/app/view.php?id=News&page=1&sn1=&divpage=1&sn=off&ss=on&sc=on&keyword=%C1%F6%BC%B1%C7%F9&select_arrange=headn
15. *Church Compass*, September 2014, 2.
16. *Church Compass*, March 2016, 8.
17. *Church Compass*, November 1984, 13.
18. *25th General Meeting Report of Southwest Korean Conference* (Gwangju: Southwest Korean Conference, 2021), 41.
19. *Ibid.*, 41-44.
20. *Honam Mission 100th Anniversary* (Gwangju: Southwest Korean Conference, 2014), 166-167.
21. *Church Compass*, February 2011, 23.

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