MISSIONARY DEPLOYMENT HISTORY, ANNUAL COUCIL 2024

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After John N. Andrews and his children, Charles and Mary, sailed for Switzerland on September 15, 1874, 150 years ago last month, they were the only Seventh-day Adventist missionaries overseas for just over a year. In December 1875, Daniel and Marian Bourdeau arrived in Switzerland to aid Andrews. In 1877, John Gottlieb Matteson and his wife Anna landed in Denmark, which was the land of John's birth, as the first Adventist missionaries to Scandinavia. The same year, William and Jennie Ings and Maud Sisley arrived in Switzerland to further reinforce the Adventist mission in Europe. In 1878, William Ings traveled to England to visit family; on a brief visit he won two converts and he wrote to the GC recommending that missionaries be sent to Britain. As a result, the seventeenth General Conference Session in October 1878 voted to send John N. Loughborough to Britain. In December 1878, Loughborough and his wife Maggie were sent to England, as the first missionaries to the British Isles.

These were the pioneer Seventh-day Adventist missionaries outside North America. Many others followed, including Ellen G. White. Missionaries included some of the nascent denomination's most capable leaders. By the 25th anniversary of the founding of the General Conference in 1888, there was an Adventist presence on four continents: North America, Europe, Australia, and Africa. And there was a presence on the verge of Asia.

But in the 1890s, mission began to stall. There were several reasons for this, but probably the most important was that the model of organization adopted in 1863, which had been appropriate for an organization with just a few thousand members, confined to

the northeast and Midwest of the United States, was inadequate for an increasingly globe-spanning movement, with tens of thousands of members.

In 1901 and 1903, at two important General Conference Sessions, the Church's organizational structure was overhauled and made fit for purpose for a worldwide missionary denomination. At the same time, the leaders who emerged, were visionaries of worldwide mission and made the new structure work. These were Arthur G. Daniells, president from 1901 to 1922; William A. Spicer, secretary from 1903 to 1922; Irwin H. Evans, treasurer from 1903 to 1909, then president of the Asiatic Division, the first division; and Walter T. Knox, treasurer from 1909 to 1922. All prioritized overseas mission and 1900s saw missionaries from Europe, Britain and Australia joining American missionaries around the world. Good leadership made a tremendous difference.

The map that you see in front of you now is one with which William Spicer always traveled in North America. Spicer, after being secretary for 19 years, was then GC president for eight years, from 1922 to 1930. Every summer he spoke at multiple North American camp meetings and always took this map with him, to illustrate the mission challenge faced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church; the map illustrated the presence of rival world religions and the numbers of their adherents in contrast to Christian numbers (of which Adventists, of course, were just a fraction). This map is one of the treasures of the General Conference Archives. It is a reminder of the influence a good missionary leader can have in inspiring his listeners and readers to commit to mission.

The impact of the new structure and leadership on missionary numbers was swift and emphatic. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Seventh-day Adventist Church had

a global total of 148 "laborers in foreign fields."[1] In the first ten years after the 1901 GC Session, the average number of new missionaries sent to foreign fields each year was 73.6 and in 1908 140 new missionaries were sent out – almost the same in one year as the total number in place before the 1901 GC Session. In 1913 for the first time more than 150 new missionaries were sent out in a year. The numbers dropped during World War I, yet during the five years between the 1913 and 1918 GC Sessions, Spicer told the 1918 Session, "542 of our brethren and sisters have gone . . . into the regions beyond", an average "well above the hundred a year".[2] In 1920, with peace restored, an astonishing 310 new missionaries were sent out in twelve months. That number was probably distorted by missionaries who had been waiting the end of the war and of the influenza epidemic, but the number of new missionaries sent out in 1921 still exceeded 200. The average number of new missionaries per annum sent in the 1920s was 182. By 1930, the total number of new missionaries sent in the first three decades of the century (starting with 1901, the year of organizational reform and ending in 1930, before the impact of the Great Depression was felt) was 3,638.[3] Around four-fifths of these were from North America.[4] This chart shows the trend from 1900 to 1940.

With the Great Depression, the Church faced an immense challenge. But church leaders were determined to maintain the numbers of missionaries and the number of mission stations in spite of a financial crunch in the North American church, whence came

[1] "Foreign Laborers," GC Ar., RG 11, box 3900, fld. "Financial Papers."
[2] Quoted in *We Aim at Nothing Less*, 145.
[3] *We Aim at Nothing Less*, 145.
[4] See *We Aim at Nothing Less*, 146.

the bulk of the Church's financial resources. In 1930 and 1931, the workforce in North America was cut by 10 percent; yet, in the foreign mission fields, the workforce decreased less than 5 percent.[5] To be sure, "The 119 missionaries sent overseas in 1931 were equal to only 65 percent of the 183 sent in 1930. The next three years were far worse: the total for those years was 203—fewer than the *annual* totals in 1920, 1921 or 1926; the annual average for those three years (1932–34) was 67.67, the lowest for any three-year period since 1904–1906. Yet then the numbers of appointees reasonably rebounded until the beginning of World War II. In all, there were [still] 628 new mission appointments from 1930 through 1935."[6] Significantly, too, as GC Secretary Milton Kern pointed out in his report to the 1936 GC Session, 45 percent of the new missionaries originated from outside the North American Division, a much higher percentage than normal. While the figure of 628, in a six-year period, stood in contrast to the 714 appointed in just the preceding four years, it was, as Kern told the 1936 Session, still a sizeable number, given that, in his words, "we have been passing through most serious times, with cut budgets and depleted working forces." Furthermore, Kern stressed, "not one mission station has been abandoned during these hard years."[7] Even the Great Depression did not stop the mission! The leadership roles of GC president Charles H. Watson, Secretary Milton Kern, and Treasurer John L. Shaw were vital in maintaining a significant missionary enterprise.

Just as the U.S. economy was recovering, 1939 saw the coming of the Second World War. But church leaders' minds were still on mission. At the spring meeting in 1942, at the

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[5] *We Aim at Nothing Less*, 182.
[6] *We Aim at Nothing Less*, 182-83.
[7] Kern, "Report", 59-60.

lowest ebb of military fortunes for the Allies, church leaders came up with a bold plan. "[T]he General Conference Committee [gave] earnest consideration … to the necessity of having missionary families under appointment … for. . . when this present conflict ceases or when the Lord otherwise indicates that the way is open for missionaries to be sent forward once more." As a church leader reported, "The General Conference … decided that ten families should be immediately placed under appointment and definitely earmarked for work in the Moslem lands in the Near East with the understanding that arrangements would be made for these missionary appointees to study the language of the field and other subjects here in this country in preparation for the time when they can go forward to those mission fields. It is understood that it may be a year or two or possibly longer before the Lord opens up the way . . . to those fields once more."[8]

What leadership, what vision, was shown by President J. Lamar McElhany, Secretary Ernest D. Dick, and Treasurer William E. Nelson, to put ten families on salary in the U.S. and to undergo training at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, while waiting for conditions in the mission field to open up! Here you see the first class of missionaries, on graduating from a course in Arabic and Islamic studies at the Seminary in 1944. Within weeks, thanks to the Allied victory in North Africa, Neal C. Wilson and his wife Elinor and A. Gordon Zytkoskee and his wife Evelyn, had gone to Egypt, and others followed to the Middle East when the war was over.

The 1950s and 1960s were the golden era of the Adventist missionary enterprise. Initially under Dick as Secretary, and William H. Branson as President, then briefly under

[8] T. J. Michael to A. G. Zytkoskee, 13 Aug. 1942, in Zytkoskee appointee file GC Ar., RG 21, file no. 29973.

Denton E. Rebok as Secretary; then under Reuben R. Figuhr as president for twelve years from 1954 to 1966, and Robert H. Pierson as president from 1966, with Walter R. Beach as secretary for 16 years, 1954 to 1970. "Beach—articulate, well read, and a thinker—regularly had a crucial part in decision-making processes during Figuhr's presidency and in Pierson's first term (after which Beach retired)."[9] These were the golden days of Adventist mission, with a weekly column listing new "missionary sailings" in the *Review* and annual numbers of new appointees climbing steadily.

Beach was well supported by a talented group of associate secretaries and, again, leadership made a difference. "Secretariat consistently sought not only to recruit but also to build awareness of mission worldwide, and thereby to inculcate a spirit of sacrifice and generosity. Those who could [go,] would go; those who could not would pray or give. *Everyone* had their role to play in working the world field for the cause of Christ.[10] At the 1964 Annual Council, Secretary Beach drove home the point, declaring "we are a world missionary church—not just a church with missions in all the world".[11] The effects can be seen in the chart on the screen, which shows the steady rise in numbers of new missionary appointees, annually from 1940 through 1970.[12] In 1969–70, new missionaries totalled 970: by far the largest number of new missionaries sent into service in any two-year period in the Church's history. In 1967, 1969, 1970 and 1971, each year more than 400 new missionaries were sent to the field. But as the chart illustrates, this concluded an era of

[9] *We Aim at Nothing Less*, 187.
[10] *We Aim at Nothing Less*, 195-96.
[11] GCC, Oct. 23, 1964, GCC Proc., vol. XXI, pt. iii, 810.
[12] *We Aim at Nothing Less*, fig. 6.2, p. 196.

twenty-five years of mostly steady growth in missionary numbers. The record number of missionaries sent overseas in 1969–70 was a natural outgrowth of what came before: from the wartime low of 1941, through the high numbers sent abroad during 1945–47, which were artificially inflated by the dispatch of large numbers of appointees who had been waiting improvements in world conditions to travel, which in part led to the decline of 1948–50, whose other cause was the collapse of the Church's mission in China, and then occasional peaks and troughs in the fifties and sixties—yet overall, the trajectory was up, and, after 1950, *sustainably* so. The graph on the screen charts more than the annual numbers: it includes a polynomial trendline, which shows more clearly the steadily upward trajectory in this era. This huge investment of personnel resources was backed up by extraordinarily generous mission giving, especially but not only in North America.

Things changed and the missionary enterprise went into a period of decline, though the numbers of long-term missionaries, or ISEs as they are now known, has been supplemented by many volunteers and by global mission pioneers. Nothing has stopped the mission. But awareness of the decline in long-term missionaries has given rise to Mission Refocus. A huge mission task is still before us, and we need the whole World Church to be contributing to it. In the twenty-first century, as in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, nothing must stop mission! If Mission Refocus is to be a success, then we will also need bold, spiritual leadership at division and union levels to mobilize numbers of new missionaries to go, not just from North America to the rest of the world, but from everywhere to everywhere. In GC Secretariat, we call on you, as world leaders, to contribute to Mission Refocus, so that we can have the same commitment to cross-

cultural missionary work today as our pioneers had in the 1870s and 1880s, and as our early and mid-twentieth-century leaders had. With eight billion people to reach, there is still much to do, and missionaries are needed now more than ever.