

History of the Southwest Region Conference
<http://mysouthwestregion.org/about/our-history>

CURRENT HISTORY

The Southwest Region Conference (SWRC) represents a unit of church organization comprising the congregations of these areas:

- Arkansas
- Louisiana
- New Mexico
- Oklahoma
- Texas

This conference is one of five local conferences that make up the Southwestern Union. All races make up the membership, but the majority of the constituency is comprised of a Black population of the area which stands at 3,957,986. Statistics (June 2008): churches, 100; missions, 13; membership, 23,020; church schools, 9; teachers, 18.

THE BEGINNING OF THE WORK

The Seventh-day Adventist faith was preached and taught to Blacks in the territory currently known as the SWRC at least as early as 1876, the same year in which the Rust brothers [SDA laymen] came into Texas and gathered the first group of white converts in the Dallas area. D.M. Canright, visiting Texas in May, 1876, reported that one of the young members, Eddie Capman, was conducting a night school three times a week for Negroes, teaching old men and little children together to read and write. He also described a preaching service for whites where many Negro people, according to the local custom, sat outside and listened.

Later the same year, A.B. Rust reported going with Parson Medlin, who had attended Capman's night school, to preach in several settlements in neighboring counties. In a community of 700 at Mansfield, white visitors sat outside. The next spring, Joseph Clark and his wife, from Ohio, taught a school at Grand Prairie, near A.B. Rust's home, in a building that had been erected by the Negroes, with the aid of contributions from the local white citizens.

The first Negro church in the area of the present SWRC was organized in New Orleans, Louisiana, on June 4, 1892. This was the result of the work of C.M. Kinney, a Negro pioneer minister who found six Negro Seventh-day Adventists in the city on his arrival the preceding October. He reported the newly founded church as the fourth Negro church in the denomination (preceding it were those at Edgefield Junction, Tennessee, 1886; Louisville, Kentucky, 1890; and Bowling Green, Kentucky, 1891).

In 1901, a report from Sidney Scott, a Negro minister, tells of a group of converts in Catcher, Arkansas; also of a whole congregation, the "Monarch" church, though he does not mention the place. Also in 1901, a group was organized into a company in Houston, Texas, as a result of the work of two colporteurs, Mrs. Pack and Mrs. Dysart, who had won converts there in 1898. This

company was organized into the Berean Church on February 21, 1921, with a membership of 63, after a series of meetings held by the Union's Negro evangelist, M.G. Nunez.

Other workers and evangelists in the area were A.C. Chatman, Page Shepard, W.S. North, T.B. Buckner, N.B. King, J.H. Lawrence, J.G. Dasent, F.S. Keitts, T.H. Coopwood, Caleb Martin, and John W. Green.

From 1936 to 1938, new churches were organized in Fort Worth, Laredo, Palestine and Longview, Texas. In 1941 and 1942, 48 more were baptized from two meetings held in the Valley and Corpus Christi, Texas.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BLACK WORK

There was no continuous method of organization. For years (1911, 1912, 1921, 1922) the Yearbook listed a Southwestern Union Mission for Negroes organized in 1920. Beginning in 1917, there were, under one or another of the local conferences, departments, missions or committees; and from 1932, a Union Negro Department (or committee). These continued until 1946, after which a Regional Mission, comparable to the Regional Conferences in several other Unions, was set up.

THE SOUTHWESTERN MISSION

On December 16, 1946, the Negro constituency of the Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, and Texico Conferences (the region of the Southwestern Union), were combined and organized into the Southwestern Mission, effective January 1, 1947. This was not the same as the Southwestern Union Mission for Negroes organized in 1910, with an executive committee composed of Union executive committee members and three Negro ministers. This new mission was a unit comparable to a conference, with its own officers, committee, and departmental secretaries, and headquarters at 3711 Oakland Avenue, Dallas, Texas.

The first mission officers chosen by the constituency were: W.W. Fordham – President; V.L. Roberts – Secretary, Treasurer, Home Missionary Secretary; J.H. Jones – Publishing Secretary; and Helen Wiggins Beckett – Sabbath School Secretary.

When the mission was organized, there were 27 churches, 1700 members, 17 workers, 4 schools, and an annual tithe of \$70,773.59. At the end of two years as a mission, the membership was 1,939 with a total net worth of \$35,824.85. By 1995, the annual tithe was approaching \$60,000,000.

THE SOUTHWEST REGION CONFERENCE ORGANIZED

On January 17, 1950, the Southwestern Mission constituency met in the Friendship Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, to hold its first biennial session. W.W. Fordham, President of the mission, made his progress report for the preceding two years. J.C. Kozel, Secretary – Treasurer for the Union, and who also served as chairman for the session, was pleased with the progress of the mission in such a short period. He entertained a motion to change the organization from a mission status to a conference status. The change was approved and the new organization was named the Southwest Region Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The same headquarters were maintained. The following officers and departmental secretaries were elected: W.W.

Fordham – President and Religious Liberty Secretary; W.L. Roberts – Secretary, Treasurer; C.C. Cunningham – Education, MV, Sabbath School Secretary, and Temperance Secretary; V.L. Roberts – Book and Bible House Manager, Press Secretary; O. Dunn – Publishing Secretary.

The period following the conference organization was one of growth and progress and a search for adequate housing for an expanding office. In 1958, the conference headquarters were moved from Oakland to 1990 South Boulevard. In that large facility, the conference office shared headquarters with the City Temple Adventist Church and the Southwest Region Academy. In 1968, the SWRC purchased the current building on Lanark Street which provided space for the conference headquarters. Near that time, 100 acres was also purchased for the purpose of building a conference center.

Other land was purchased on which a new facility was built for the City Temple Adventist Church at 1530 Bonnie View Road. An existing facility at 1600 Bonnie View road became the site for the Southwest Region Academy primarily supported by the City Temple Adventist Church, the constituent church between then and 2008.