

FIFTY YEARS AGO WORLD WAR II ended. The United Nations was formed. And a sea of change took place in the Adventist Church in North America. That year the church voted to organize regional conferences.

This year represents, therefore, a special time of celebration for Adventists in North

ences have positively changed the face of Adventism, making a notable contribution to every facet of the church's ministry, and engendering a new sense of identity, participation, and spiritual ownership among constituent members. As we reflect on how God has blessed the Black work in the United States through this means, His providence confronts us on every hand.

on boards, councils, and committees.

Membership in Black conferences is now approaching a quarter million, tithes more than \$90 million, and workers trained in regional conferences have made an inestimable contribution to the world church by serving at every level of the denomination, in North America and around the world.

Innovative programs and outreach plans of regional conferences annually add vitality and strength to the world church program (see sidebar "Looking to the Future"). Regional presidents and leaders have demonstrated administrative acumen that has matched, and in many cases surpassed, that considered to be the norm in the general church. Further, through regular councils, meetings, and boards, there have been ongoing network-

REGIONAL

by Delbert W. Baker CONFERENCES

50 Years of Progress

America, heralding as it does the fiftieth anniversary of that historic development. It is historic—and pivotal—because it established a new area of governance in the Adventist Church. As intended, regional conferences have dramatically expanded the Adventist work among Black people in the United States. Membership in these conferences is open to all people, and the term *regional* merely describes the distinctive geographic territories they cover.

During the past 50 years these confer-

Formed to achieve greater soul-winning results among Black Adventists in a "shorter space of time than would be achieved under the previously existing organization," regional conferences have brought about the following results, among others, in the Black sectors of the church:¹

- Dramatic increases in evangelistic outreach.

- New opportunities for training and experience in ministry.

- Increased opportunities for leadership, service, and participation in church governance.

- Normal eligibility for elected offices, and ex officio representation

ing and support for all aspects of the world church program. Clearly, the hope of those leaders who supported the establishment of such conferences has become a reality.

This article is not written to recount the entire history of regional conferences. There are several histories that already do so.² Instead it will provide the story of why and how church leadership came to establish Black conferences.³

The Way Things Were

The decade of the 1940s was a turbulent one for the United States. Change and conflict were constants. The country was still recovering from the Great Depression. Morale was low. And, perhaps most traumatic, the nation was struggling in the aftermath of the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the entrance of