

Events Leading to the Establishment of Regional Conferences

By Delbert W. Baker

The following 15 events were catalysts that directly or indirectly provided impetus for the establishment of regional conferences. The threads running through these incidents were a deep desire for evangelistic empowerment, Christian fairness, and administrative parity.

1889—The Kinny Proposal

Charles M. Kinny, when faced with segregation on the day of his ordination at a Nashville campmeeting, first proposes the idea of regional conferences.

1890—The Kilgore Policy

A policy of racial segregation is proposed by Robert M. Kilgore, a white Adventist leader in the South, and is adopted by the General Conference. It facilitates segregation in the majority of white Seventh-day Adventist churches until the 1950s.

1891—The Prophetic Challenge

Ellen G. White delivers a historic message to General Conference leaders relative to how the Seventh-day Adventist church should relate to blacks and the race question.

1909—The Sheafe Stand-off

Lewis C. Sheafe, a prominent black Adventist minister, appeals to church leadership for integration and parity in the denomination. He leaves the church after repeated rejections and other unfortunate events.

1910—The Negro Department

Under the leadership of Arthur G. Daniells, president of the General Conference, the Negro Department is established. Racial sensitivities are aroused when its first three leaders are white.

1918—The Black Director

William H. Green, attorney and minister, is appointed the first black to lead the Negro Department and the first black in the General Conference.

1920s and 1930s—The Unfortunate Schisms

Several leading black ministers leave the Adventist church, primarily because of racist policies toward blacks. Most notable are James K. Humphrey, John W. Manns, and M.G. Nunez.

1926—The “No Authority” Policy

The church takes action to allow black ministers to be appointed as leaders of the black union work. Blacks are jolted by a clause in the policy that states that the “[black] union [leader] has no administrative authority.”

1929-1930—The Formal Resolution

Black leaders present a formal resolution for black conferences in order to facilitate better development of churches, schools, and institutions, at General Conference councils. A committee is appointed (consisting of 11 white and 5 blacks) to study the advisability and make a recommendation. After recommendation, the request is categorically denied and blacks are told to drop the issue.

1932—The Oakwood Strike

Oakwood students implement a campus-wide strike, protesting among other things the lack of black leadership at the school. General Conference leadership eventually meets all of their demands. James L. Moran becomes the first black president of Oakwood College.

1937—The Barnett Confrontation

Charles Barnett, black Adventist publisher of the Associated Negro Press, publicizes racially discriminatory practices of Adventist churches, schools, and institutions.

1943—The Byard Incident

Lucy Byard dies after she is refused treatment at Washington Adventist Sanitarium because of her race.

1943—The Layperson's Organization

A group of Washington, D.C. laypersons form the "National Association for the Advancement for Worldwide Work Among Seventh-day Adventists" to address racial wrongs and inequities.

1944—The Freedom Appeal

Laypersons and ministers draft and circulate a protest document addressing the Adventist church entitled "Shall the Four Freedoms Function Among the Seventh-day Adventists?"

1944—The Regional Decision

J.L. McElheny, General Conference president, calls Spring Council pre-meetings to discuss and vote on a recommendation for regional conferences. The recommendation is voted.

Source: Delbert Baker, *Telling the Story: An Anthology on the Development of the Black SDA Work* (1996). Loma Linda, CA: Loma Linda University Printing Services, pg. 2/7.