

North American Regional Department

By H. D. SINGLETON

With delegates from all parts of the world present, it is reasonable that many may ask, What is the North American Regional Department? You may say you are acquainted with the Sabbath School, Lay Activities, Missionary Volunteer, Education, Publishing, and other departments in the organization, but why the North American Regional Department?

That is a good question. May we answer by stating the North American Regional Department is different from the other departments because it exists to foster and care for the work of the United States' largest minority group—its citizens of African heritage. Let us tell you about the work in this group.

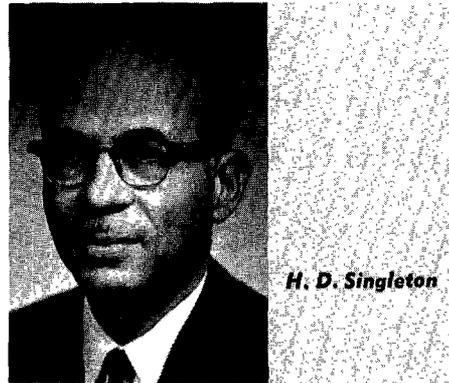
From the very beginning, citizens of this heritage have been a part of the Advent Movement. Even in the Millerite movement one of the preachers was a black man named Charles Bowls. Still another one was John W. Lewis, of Providence, Rhode Island.

Not many are aware of the fact that among those given visions prior to God's choice of Ellen G. White was a man of color named William E. Foy. He related his visions before large audiences during the early 1840's.

As the Seventh-day Adventist Church developed here and there in the North,

a few Negroes were found in its congregations. Even at the first Seventh-day Adventist church in Washington, New Hampshire, O. O. Farnsworth is said to have observed that they had Negroes in attendance.

However, in the early days the truth spread very slowly among black Ameri-



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cans, so that there were only about 50 believers as late as 1894.

Sensing this slow development, God's servant, Ellen G. White, made a call in the 1890's for aggressive evangelism

among the colored people of the South. In time, many workers, both white and black, responded. Among them was Mrs. White's son, Edson, who built the missionary boat the *Morning Star*, which cruised down the Mississippi River and docked at Vicksburg, Mississippi. Edson White began a far-reaching work of mission schools, churches, and literature ministry. By 1909 there were about 900 believers in the United States. Several Negro ministers were active in spreading the message. It was at the General Conference session of 1909 that it was felt that the work among the black minority would be hastened with the organization of a department at the General Conference level. By 1918 the secretary of the department reported a membership of 3,500. It was in 1918 that the first black man, W. H. Green, was made secretary of the department.

As the membership, number of churches, and the ministry enlarged, Regional departments were organized in the union and many local conferences.

By 1944, when the membership had grown to 17,891, and the churches to 235 in number, the plan for Regional conferences was decided upon. There are eight Regional conferences, covering all of the United States where we have black congregations except the two unions on the Pacific Coast and the Northern Union.

In 1951 G. E. Peters, who had served as secretary of the department since 1941, was joined by C. E. Moseley, Jr., as his associate, thus enlarging the scope of the work done. Since then black leadership at the General Conference level has increased until during this past quadrennial period eight men have been serving in the General Conference. These men serve in all parts of the world.



This expansion of leadership by Negroes to general church areas has extended into the union conferences, where staffs in six unions are integrated.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church leadership has set itself the goal of greater brotherhood in the relationships between black and white members. At the Autumn Council of 1961 and in subsequent councils, actions have been taken outlining the principle of Christian brotherhood that is fundamental to this church. These principles have been promoted with the hope that the membership at the grass roots level will become fully aware of the teachings of the church in race relations and will willingly carry out these principles. We need to foster constantly the programs through which all segments of the membership are being educated and reminded of these things. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit, we are told in volume 9, page 209, of the *Testimonies*, will be accompanied by a "triumph of humanity over prejudice. . . . And the color line will be regarded by many very differently from the way in which it is now regarded."

Membership Increases

When we met in Detroit four years ago the membership in our Regional churches was 57,202. Four years later we report to you a membership of 70,003, which is a net gain of 12,801. I believe the total gain for the whole of North America is 45,400. This means the Regional churches had a net gain of one out of every 3½ persons gained in North America. This also means our gain in membership was greater than our whole Negro membership was in 1935, which was about 50 years after the first Negro church was organized. When Regional conferences were organized in 1945, the membership was 17,000, but today with

70,000 members we have multiplied more than 400 per cent in 25 years. We now have 444 churches, 307 ordained and licensed ministers, 50 Bible instructors, 260 church school teachers, and 195 literature evangelists.

The total membership for the North American Division on December 31, 1969, was 426,295. Of this amount the Regional churches had a membership of 70,003; hence, one in every six members in North America is in a Regional church. So whereas generally in the United States the black man is considered as America's tenth man, among Seventh-day Adventists he is the sixth man. These figures immediately raise questions, however, of employment in the church, since only about one in 14 of the ministers is a Negro, and only about one in 100 of the credentialed or licensed employees is of this race. We are hopeful of wider employment, especially in our institutions.

Although we traditionally occupy the lowest financial level in the United States economy, having a per capita income of about 54 per cent of the national average, we have been faithful givers to God's cause. The tithes for the year 1969 alone amounted to \$8,587,802.26, an increase of almost \$1 million over the previous year. The total mission giving for the one year was \$1,723,838.60. Compare these figures with the \$50 tithe for all Negro members in one year in the 1890's.

The church is becoming more and more conscious of her responsibility to the needs of the inner cities and other disadvantaged areas. Far-reaching plans are being considered calling for widespread involvement by Seventh-day Adventists in this most needy work.

This Spring Meeting of the General Conference Committee considered actions

to greatly strengthen the development of our Regional work financially, organizationally, as well as in interpersonal relations.

The General Conference has been very aware of the needs brought about by our rapid growth and has been very liberal toward the educational, church building, evangelistic, medical, and operational problems during the past four years.

Respect to Workers Who Have Died

We pause to pay respects to fellow workers who have fallen in the past quadrennium: F. L. Peterson, who for so long held leading positions among us; R. T. Hudson, president of North-eastern Conference; J. W. Allison and his wife, who met with tragic deaths in Grants, New Mexico; Mrs. Philippa Vanderberg, a missionary, who was killed in an automobile accident in Monrovia, Liberia; J. E. Johnson, Los Angeles, California; Alma Tibbs, Orlando, Florida; A. E. Webb, Perris, California; Colin Pitter, New York City; C. S. Myles, Dallas, Texas; J. B. E. Williams, Apopka, Florida; R. L. Reynolds, Oakwood College; C. C. Eaton, Syracuse, New York; H. D. Warner, St. Albans, New York; J. G. Thomas, Atlanta, Georgia; Rene Adrien, Brooklyn, New York; Fitzgerald Jenkins, Nashville, Tennessee; Wilmot Fordham, Camden, New Jersey, and Mrs. Alyne Dumas Lee of Oakwood College.

We thank God for His many blessings. We thank Him for His faithful ones who labor loyally for the finishing of the work. We feel the need for a greater infilling of the Holy Spirit, and an all-out preparation to meet our God. We humbly pray for this deeper experience as we face the challenge of warning the more than 22 million black Americans of our Lord's return.

The vastness of Convention Hall is captured in this photograph showing the more than 30,000 people who crowded the building for the Sabbath morning worship hour, when Robert H. Pierson spoke on the subject "That the World May Know"—the theme of the General Conference session, displayed in bold-relief lettering at the back of the platform.

