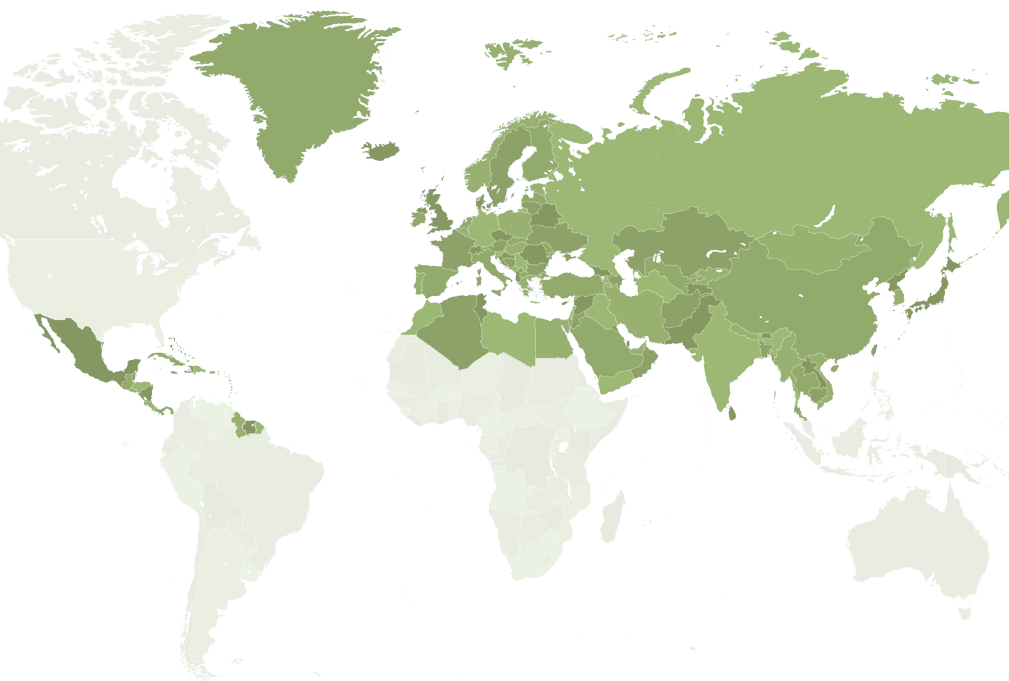


SENT! VOL. 1



A HISTORY OF UPCI GLOBAL MISSIONS

Asia, Europe/Middle East, Central America/Caribbean

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A Chapter Closed— A New Chapter Begun

A single moment seemed to linger with profound consequence, transfixing a congregation of nearly twenty thousand people at the 1973 General Conference of the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI). That clarion moment came late in the evening of the Foreign Missions service that, for many, was the high point of that conference and for many conferences to come. Attendees from the United States, Canada, and numerous other nations met at the Salt Palace in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The preaching had concluded. Amazing testimonies of the miraculous had been given. A record sacrificial offering had been received. Then Foreign Missions director T. F. Tenney made a call for men and women to surrender their lives to missionary service. He asked veteran missionaries to Indonesia, George and Helen White, to come forward from the large group of global missionaries seated behind him. George White was seventy-four years old. His health was failing. He and his wife had served in Indonesia since 1933 with only a few years' absence following the Second

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World War. With great emotion, T. F. Tenney told the congregation that the Whites, who had reluctantly retired that year, had come to him during a late-night missionary prayer meeting the previous evening and volunteered to return to Indonesia since there seemed to be no one available to take their place.

Brother Tenney explained to the congregation, "I told Brother White that, no, you have done your part. Your health is not good. It's time for someone else to come forward and take your place."

At that moment, a low moan swept across the assembled thousands, and then a penetrating silence fell upon the arena. Suddenly, there was a clear message in an unknown tongue that seemed to be amplified to the farthest balcony. Immediately, there was an interpretation. "Who will go for the white-haired one? If you will go, I will give you the white hair of wisdom."

There was no mistaking the voice of the Spirit. A cry of intercession moved across the thousands assembled there, and hundreds poured down the aisles to the front for a prayer of dedication and submission to the will of God. Even to this day, there are those who remember receiving a confirmation of their call to global missions in that service.

There have been other memorable missionary services since 1973, but a transition took place there that many at the time may not have recognized. George and Helen White were the last still-serving UPCI missionaries of the generation who had labored for the gospel on foreign fields prior to World War II. What those who attended that conference witnessed

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in that intense and poignant moment in the Spirit was a story concluding, a chapter closing. A mantle was being passed.

Since then, another generation of missionaries has nearly finished its course. Of the UPCI global missionaries who picked up the mantle from George and Helen White and were appointed in the 1970s, few remain in active service. Of those who still serve, most have risen to key leadership roles, including the general director of Global Missions, Bruce Howell, who was first appointed to El Salvador in 1979.

Over the next few years, another generational transition will be completed, but the story of global missions has never been more compelling. By almost any measure, the pace of global evangelism is accelerating. When George and Helen White retired in 1973, there were 128 fully appointed UPCI missionaries, with works established in sixty-four nations. In 2019, there were nearly seven hundred fully appointed missionaries and hundreds more short-term missionaries, with churches and preaching points in 230 nations and territories worldwide.

From the pages of Isaiah to the Book of Acts church at Antioch, and through the centuries to an Apostolic church called by His name in our day, the challenge of the Spirit remains: “Who will go?” Just as the Old Testament prophet, there has always been a man or a woman who responded, “Here am I. Send me.”

The geopolitical and economic repercussions of the Second World War changed the world for generations to come. In hindsight, it is evident that the

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United Pentecostal Church, with its global missions emphasis, came into being at a pivotal and strategic hour in modern world history. The numerical growth and global reach of Oneness Pentecostal missions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has surpassed the evangelistic impact of the Book of Acts apostolic church of the first century.

From a beginning of forty missionaries in nine nations, by 2019 the UPCI had well over one thousand missionaries, with churches and preaching points in 230 nations and territories. In 1945, the highest overseas constituency estimate was four thousand. In less than seventy-five years, that number has grown to well over four million. From 2009 to 2019, the UPCI constituency outside North America grew from 1.93 million to 4.38 million, more than doubling in ten years. Those numbers do not include the many millions of other organized and independent Apostolic believers worldwide. Never in history has the New Testament church been closer to fulfilling the prophecy of Matthew 24:14: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”

At current rates of growth, it is expected that the UPCI global family of believers will increase by many millions in the next twenty years. In 1999, the Oneness scholar Talmadge French estimated that there were from fifteen to twenty million Oneness believers, in both organized and independent church groups worldwide. A 2019 survey by the Oneness Studies Institute, directed by Talmadge French, puts the current global

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number of Oneness Pentecostals at 33.9 million in eight hundred groups and independent fellowships. The first-century church established the apostolic pattern. The twenty-first century, Jesus Name baptized, Spirit-filled church is poised to conclude the harvest that the first-century church began.