

Mission Sonlight, 2nd Qtr 08-Trinidad/University of Southern Caribbean script/2nd edition

Narrator: Welcome to Mission Sonlight, reporting from the Inter-American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Trinidad is the most southerly Caribbean island in the Inter-American Division, and lies just 7 miles off the coast of Venezuela. Along with Tobago, Trinidad forms an independent nation within the British Commonwealth.

Trinidad covers an area of 1,864 square miles, which is roughly just smaller than the state of Delaware. This island nation is rich in vegetation and wildlife. It boasts of over 400 species of birds, 600 butterfly species and 700 varieties of orchids. The Pitch Lake, located on the southwestern coast is the world's largest natural reservoir of asphalt. On the island, visitors will discover tropical rain forests with towering canopies of mahogany and teak trees; wetlands with exotic wildlife and remote beaches where leatherback turtles lay their eggs.

Trinidad is considered to be the birthplace of calypso, steel drum music and the limbo. Early steel drums were made from discarded kettles, cookie tins and oil drums that were hammered into concave sections.

Christopher Columbus was the first known European who had contact with the early settlers of Trinidad was. He set foot on the island on July 31, 1498. This led to attempts to establish settlements on the island. The first lasting settlement wasn't established until 1592.

With the arrival of Europeans, the natives of Trinidad became the focus of slave traders and many raids were attempted on the island. Many of the people who were taken

captive were used as slaves in pearl fisheries. In 1797, the Spanish surrendered the island to the British and eventually slavery was abolished in 1833.

This created a labor shortage for the sugar plantations and the cacao estates, which were the main economic contributors on the island. The government began to rely on indentured labourers from India. As these workers completed their contracts, many chose to settle on the island and it their permanent residence. Today, Trinidad's diverse population reflects these early labourers with 40% of the population being ethnically Indian. The rest of Trinidad's people include blacks at 39%, while 18% of the island is mixed race. There is also a small contingent of Chinese and whites that call Trinidad their home. Trinidad was once called the Rainbow Country by Desmond Tutu, because of it floral growth and diversity of population.

Trinidad, along with Tobago, together declared their independence from Britain in 1962 and became a republic on August 1, 1976.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a long history on this island and today exciting things are taking place. The South Caribbean Conference, organized in 1906, oversees the work of the church in Trinidad. There are 116 churches with a total membership of 52, 589 baptized members.

Trinidad is home to the University of Southern Caribbean or USC, formerly known as Caribbean Union College, and is the longest existing Tertiary Education institution in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago committed to the provision of quality Christian education for the Caribbean region and the world. USC is accredited by the Accrediation Council of Trinidad and Tobago and offers a number of undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Recently the University celebrated 80 years of educational training for Seventh-day Adventist young people from around the world.

Trevor Gardner: “Imagine for 80 years we had a college serving this region and serving this Division and serving it well. Over the last 2, 3 four years we have been advancing the move to university status and without question God has blessed us immensely. That now is reality.

The institution has a rich legacy of servicing the Caribbean Union Territory. In a more expansive way we provide services for a number of countries within in the Inter-American Division. We have English as a Second Language program. A number of our Spanish-speaking brethren, Portuguese-speaking brethren. Dutch speaking brethren, French-speaking brethren come here for instruction. So we service that area. In fact we service even a wider community-our students come from 42 countries of the world. The Division services something that we continue to find engaging and something that we need to put more and more emphasis in because as the church expands within the Inter-American Division the demand for English is one of the commanding demands within the needs of the Division. We are one of the schools, which historically this service has come from, through the English as a Second Language. We are also expanding and teaching four languages as regular parts of the curriculum, which would meet again the expanding needs of the Division.

Narrator: USC draws it student population from around the world.

Stephen Pilgrim: We have students coming from well over 30 countries of the world. In fact every continent is represented here, except Australia. And so bringing students from

far away, it's important to have somewhere they can come and feel part of a family environment.

In fact, further to that, the University of the Southern Caribbean holds, as it's unique selling position the fact that it is a faith-based, values-added university. One of the reasons that we can make sure that that happens is to bring students here. Home them here. Train them here. Provide them with hands, heart and head education. So having them to live here where they can get a paper of qualifications and academic excellence but they can also get other inputs that make them an all-over and holistic person is what we seek to do.

Narrator: USC has grown rapidly in recent years and the spiritual atmosphere has been uppermost in the minds of the administration, faculty and staff.

Trevor Gardner: Our student body has increased tremendously over the last three years. As a matter of fact, we have tripled our enrollment. That has put on our campus a tremendous challenge to meet the spiritual needs of the students on our campus, particularly those in our residence halls.

Our presence in terms of our religious ethos on the campus is a very strong presence. Students attend worship regularly. They worship both in organized worship and they worship individually and in small groups.

In our female and male residents halls our chapels, our worship environments are extremely limited. Both in the accommodations of number and in the quality of the environment. Nonetheless the students continue to worship and demonstrate the kind of spiritual strength and ethos that one would expect on our campus. We are very happy about that.

Narrator: With rapid growth comes the need for capital development. USC seeks to have students feel that while they are living on the campus that it is their home. As the university plans its capital development projects this thought is kept in mind.

Stephen Pilgrim: The dormitory is going to be a central spot or central area of the university campus in a short while. I would want to take us back spiritually or Biblically to the whole idea of the temple. The temple was central to the life of the children of Israel. To a certain extent that is what we are seeking to do here because at the dormitories we'll be having chapels located there. A central chapel and others that students could from time to time find solace in going in there and pray to their God, to my God, to your God, and gain spiritual strength. That's absolutely important. That is what undergirds the life of a USC student here on this campus.

Narrator: As the University has grown and established its desire for excellence, so has the country of Trinidad. The state government has announced that it is launching the Vision 2020 Plan to achieve first world status of undergraduate levels of education in Trinidad. As a part of this, they will be offering tuition support for nationals of Trinidad and Tobago to attend universities, and this includes USC.

Recognizing that this will place a tremendous strain on existing infrastructure, the government has announced that it will award grants to schools and universities to aid in their capital development.

The Prime Minister of Trinidad announced that USC would be the first private institution in Trinidad and Tobago to receive a grant, which totals US\$15.5 million. This grant will be used to build new residence halls, a school of business, an early childhood education center, a school of social sciences and a school of education.

Although these funds will help to bolster the building infrastructure on the campus there is still a need for places of worship for the students.

Trevor Gardner: The spiritual leaders of the campus will be severely challenged over the next five years. The government has afforded the opportunity for more students to come to our campus. Within the context of that attendance about anywhere from 43 to 53% of those students will be non-Seventh-day Adventists. We have never had that type of non-Seventh-day Adventist representation on our campus. This means that we will have to be working doubly hard.

Interestingly enough the government that is providing free tuition for students has also asked that we maintain the ethos of our campus, the values of our campus. We have three tertiary institutions in the country. The significant difference in our campus from the others is the value-laden curriculum, the spiritual curriculum. The church orientation. We are the only private institution. The government wants us to maintain that. They want to insure that as we educate the students, that part of the student's education is maintained so that it begins to affect the nation. **In reality, one government official told me if we are able with that influx of non-Seventh-day Adventist to maintain our** Adventist structure and our Adventist ethos and beliefs and maintain the institution in the same way as it is now then he anticipates that we will have created a model for the nation to save its own soul.

He says in reality the nation is shifting rapidly toward copying other nations. And their working feverishly saying how do we maintain the culture and ethos of this nation. And if we are able to achieve this in our school with this major challenge of this major influx of non-Seventh-day Adventist he says possibly they could take that model and

begin to utilize it as a model for the nation. So we are really excited about the prospects of providing a model that the government could look at and say “These Seventh-day Adventist people are able to maintain their ethos in their school and be able to translate it to incoming students to the degree that those students respect those values and live those values. It would be a powerful message if the government would take that same model. So we are documenting the principles involved while we are doing the practices so that even some of our other schools as they grow will have the privilege to expand at the rate we are expanding, they can also have a model to say okay they maintained theirs this way, maybe this can be helpful to us.

Narrator: As a part of the worldwide church family, each of us has a role to play in helping to reach the students of USC. The 13th Sabbath offering for 2nd quarter 2008 partially be used to build adequate chapel facilities in the dormitories of USC. Today the chapels are insufficient in size and are in a state of disrepair.

Linley Beckles: This is the Lynn Austen (not sure if this is the correct name as it was hard to understand on the recording) Chapel for ladies. It seats comfortably 75-80 students. At the moment, the capacity of the dormitory is well over 160, and we have more students than that. At this moment they can hardly fit into the chapel for any kind of session, but they enjoy coming here every morning, every evening for corporate worship. This place is also used as a place where young ladies would come to find their God and to be with their God.

These walls are very ancient. Basically they are made out of wood and a little bit of concrete, in some cases cardboard. They have decades of paint on them. As you see it's really peeling off here. I'm scaling off maybe about 10 layers of paint at this time.

With the capacity that we now have, we'll be happy to have much larger worship room for the ladies who really do enjoy themselves and find it significant coming to this worship room.

Trevor Gardner: Our effort is to try to provide an environment where worship is pleasing. The environment itself is encouraging in this respect. The possibility of a new environment for worship will certainly enhance that opportunity, and thus the chapels we are looking forward to for our residence halls.

Narrator: USC seeks to make a difference in the lives of its students while they are living and studying on its campus. However, the lifelong difference is what they are most focused on as they minister to students in the classroom, the dormitory and in realm of spiritual influence.

Shirley McGarrell: Now that we have gotten the accreditation from the government and GEFT (Not sure this is the correct acronym, not clear on video) approval which is government financial assistance for students we are now in a position to attract national students as well as international students. Hence, the need for all the expanded physical facilities. Undergirding all of that is one aim and one thrust and that is to prepare better citizens, students who can fill their rightful places in this world. Students who can find their places in the leadership in civil society, in governments of the state as well as in the church. But more so, people who are prepared for the heavenly kingdom. That is really our underlying goal. The more people we have, the more we are empowered to do that type of thing in a quality way. Our thrust really is to prepare a lot of people so that they can help to make the world a better place before Jesus comes. As a result we are not like the other two government universities. Our distinctiveness lies in our ethos, our

philosophy, our worldview. We demonstrate this by the way we integrate faith into the process of teaching and learning so that every subject that we teach we tend to bring in something that is godly, something that has the element of faith. Something that will point all of the students to God, who is the source of all wisdom and all knowledge and all love.

We try in a very strong way to let our emphasis be not purely on academics but on ethics and on integrity and on value, moral conduct and good social behaviour. These are the things that help to make up what we call our own distinctiveness and make us different and separate from the other two government universities. We want to be known for that, a values-oriented university where people can leave here with a better understanding of what life is all about, people who can make a difference in the world. That is really why we want more dormitories, more residence halls, more offices, more teachers, so that we can do this in a more holistic way, in a bigger way and in a better way.

Stephen Pilgrim: Others have asked us why USC? Why should they send their students, their children? Why should they come to USC? We say this to them. We say cultural diversity, moral integrity, intellectual curiosity, that is USC.

When a student graduates from here they should be able to say, “We’ve had an experience of a lifetime,” and they will be able to go into society, into their communities to make a difference, because when they came here, we made a difference in their lives.

Trevor Gardner: Because individuals give to 13th Sabbath Offering, that helps to facilitate the type of services that we can provide for students within the Inter-American Division, within our territory. So every gift is important in building the quality service

and the opportunity of the service we give to God in service of missions. So your gift is without question of immense value to us.

Because you give, Christ is lifted up and we all become a better people with Christ's presence in our lives.

Narrator: The Seventh-day Adventist Church has committed to being a worldwide church family. As family, we choose to meet the physical and spiritual needs that exist within our family circle. This quarter, we are focusing our attention and our offerings on the Inter-American Division. What are you budgeting to support our members in Inter-America? Plan now for the gift you will give on Sabbath, June 28.

Reporting from the campus of the University of Southern Caribbean in Port of Spain, Trinidad, this is Mission Sonlight.