

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN TOBAGO.

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Early History

In the **18th century** the Scottish Presbyterians, also known as the Church of Scotland, established work on the island among the slave population and hence the foundation of a Presbyterian Mission in Tobago was established. The congregation of the early Presbyterian Mission therefore consisted mainly of Afro-Tobagonians.

When the Presbyterian Church made provisions for a clergyman to serve on the island in the early nineteenth century, the local Court House was placed at its disposal until its new church was built. The island's first church (or "Kirk"), The Church of Scotland was built in Scarborough in **1813**. At a meeting of the committee of the Presbyterian Association held on October 5th 1841, it was resolved that the Kirk (Church) in Scarborough and the one in Delaford should be lent to the established church on the island, The Church of England (Anglican Church) for ecclesiastical purposes, until required by the Association.

The Presbyterians did not take root in Tobago however, and by 1871, having received no assistance from the State they eventually had to withdraw from the island. Their mission was handed over to the Anglican Church along with their two properties, one at Scarborough (the old Anglican Boys School) and the other at Delaford (St Paul's). An indication of the Scottish influence is still seen on the island, one such example is the name "Kirk" Street in upper Scarborough.

Revival of the Mission:

A little over a century later in the year **1989**, Reverend Everson T. Sieunarine, a Presbyterian Minister from the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad, visited the island in his capacity as the Moderator of PCTT and Prison Chaplain assigned to Trinidad and Tobago. During his visit to minister and offer words of encouragement and hope to the prisoners, he took the opportunity to meet with Presbyterian families living on the island, and arranged for a worship service. And so, without much ado the Presbyterian Church from Trinidad began its mission work in Tobago.

In the years that followed, Rev Everson T. Sieunarine and other Ministers made several trips to the island and organized many services that took place at the homes of various Presbyterian members who had either relocated to Tobago to work or make Tobago their homes. Some of the families present at that first service were those of Mrs Sheila Dial-Marajh, Mr Larry Delochan, Ms Rebecca Dial and Mr. Malcom Bhola all located in Lowlands.

In **1998**, the "Tobago Presbyterian Mission" which was started by Rev. Everson T. Sieunarine, was placed under the purview of the Northern Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad & Tobago (PCTT). To date the "Mission" continues to receive support from the Presbytery in the form of Ministerial supply, supervisory and financial assistance in spreading the gospel message to the people on the Sister Isle.

In the year **2002** under the leadership of the Rev. Albert Bailey, The Tobago Presbyterian Mission held its first Congregational Meeting and elected a Local Board and Elder, thus from then to be known as "**Presbyterian Church – Tobago**"

Towards the end of **2003**, Rev Bruce Kramer, the serving Minister at the time, together with a regular visitor, Father Colin Sampson of the St Patrick's Parish Anglican Church, entered into discussions with Bishop Calvin Bess for the use of the St Francis Anglican Church in Bon Accord to conduct our monthly communion services.

Eventually, other Ministers such as Rev. Albert Bailey, Rev Bruce Kramer, Rev Daniel Teelucksingh, Rev. Annabella Lalla Ramkelawan, Rev. Joy Abdul, Rev Anna Sharma, Rev. Geraldine Reid, Rev Emmanuel Ramdeen,

the late Rev Cyril Paul, the Late Rev. Ian Gadjadhar and many others traveled to Tobago every month to facilitate the gathering of the Tobago congregation at various members' home for worship and fellowship. Some of these homes included those of the Gopaul's, Delochan's, Abdul's, Jalsa's, Rampersad's, Soogrim's and Mohan's families among several others.

On Sunday 28th March **2004**, the first service was held at the **St Francis Anglican Church** in Bon Accord. On Sunday 28th November in that year, the Presbyterian Church- Tobago celebrated its **Inaugural Service & 15th Anniversary** of their work and witness in Tobago. The Moderator at the time, the late Rt. Rev. Rawle Sukhu, officiated at that service. [[Leader in Worship was Rev. Anna Sharma](#)].

****In 2006**, September 25th (Republic Day) The First (1st) Annual Sports and Family day was held at the Canoe Bay Beach Resort. This has become a much anticipated event in the Calendar of the Tobago Church. It is held on or around the "Republic Day" weekend.

At the time of the celebration of the **20th Anniversary** of the Presbyterian Church- Tobago, Rev Emmanuel Ramdeen, Minister of the Chaguanas Pastoral Region was the Presiding Minister. He served as the Presiding Minister for just over three (3) years, having been first appointed in November 2006 and re-appointed at the beginning of each consecutive year up to 31st December 2009.

The Rt. Rev. Elvis Elahie visited Tobago for the first time in his official capacity, as the Moderator to share in the 20th Anniversary commemorative service of the Presbyterian Church - Tobago which took place on Sunday 22nd November **2009** at the St. Francis Anglican Church, Bon Accord. The service was broadcasted live on 101.7 fm Heritage Radio and started promptly at 4:00pm. Leader in worship, Rev. Emmanuel Ramdeen, gave the introduction and made the Call to Worship. The St. Charles Prayer Group Choir was also present to share in this milestone event.

- January 01st 2010 to June 30th 2010 – Rev. Everson T. Sieunarine was appointed as Minister to the Presbyterian Church - Tobago
- July 01st 2010 to March 31st 2015 - Rev. Adrian Sieunarine was appointed as Minister to the Presbyterian Church –Tobago. He has since been reappointed until 31st March 2015
- At various times second Sunday services were held at members homes. Various persons have officiated over these, from Lay persons, Presiding Elders to other Ministers. Among them include Rev. Damien Sieunarine, Rev. Kimberly Ramlochana, Mr. Sam Sinanan, Mr Kenrick Seepersad, Mr. Larry Kowlessar, Ms. Linda Rattansing, Mrs Annette Ragbir, Mrs Judy Sooknarine, Ms. Simone Singh and others.

The Local Board, in Tobago, has made commitments to take on Charity and Social work in the form of helping the community and those less fortunate. In this regard, in the year **2010**, the church started taking up a second collection - a **Benevolent Fund**.

The Tobago Presbyterian "Singing Missionaries", the name given to our outreach-choir, was borne out of the 20th Anniversary service in 2009. In 2010, we had the assistance for musical accompaniment from Mrs. Marilyn Ramkisson, the members went on a drive to revive the dying tradition of caroling. The aim was to use this as a means to meet persons in the community, as well as to foster fellowship and goodwill among members. This was consistent with our mission to promote the work of the Church and create a meaningful impact in our society through our actions. That first caroling was so successful and well received that it was decided to make it a yearly event. Contributions received from our caroling endeavors are used to purchase food hampers and toys to be given to needy families in the community.

Part of the outreach included the "adoption" of the Percy family of Crompston, Storebay Local Road ext., Crown Point Tobago. On the 25th November 2010, thanks to the help of the National Social Development Program

(NSDP), Mr. Chance the electrician assigned by NSDP, Mrs. Marissa Elias who liaised with T&TEC and WASA, and numerous other helpful individuals including Mr. & Mrs. Beltran and Euline Khan who took the Percy family under their wings, the family was able to receive electricity for the first time. The work continues and we are currently seeking assistance to help this family, consisting of a retired father and his two school aged sons, to restore their house which is now in a dilapidated state and split in two.

Also in 2010 we had a visit from members of CANACOM (Caribbean & North America Council for Mission). In the middle of August 2012 members of YAM (Young Adults in Mission) of CANACOM visited the Family First Foundation, a children's home for abandoned and abused children and painted the outside of the building. In the ending of August 2012, Mr. Nathan Nagir and some other members of the YAM visited Family First Foundation to continue the painting work and to give the youngsters some recorders, along with some music lessons.

In November 2012 The Moderator of PCTT, The Rt. Rev. Brenda Bullock officiated our November communion service.

During the 2012 Christmas caroling session we visited Infinity, a newly opened home for the aged, among other places including the children's home mentioned above.

In 2013 as part of our benevolent outreach we donated a fan to the Happy Haven School for physically and mentally challenged children as part of our benevolent outreach. Later on as part of our annual caroling initiative, our Elder, dressed as Santa and we treated the children of the Happy Haven School sharing gifts and treats.

Present Days

Rev Shirvan Siloch was the last appointed Minister to the Presbyterian Church Tobago from April 2015 to August 2015. **

Presbyterians have placed great importance upon education and life-long learning. Continuous study of the scriptures, theological writings, and understanding and interpretation of church doctrine are embodied in several statements of faith and catechisms formally adopted by various branches of the church. It is generally considered that the point of such learning is to enable one to put one's faith into practice; some Presbyterians generally exhibit their faith in action as well as words, by generosity, hospitality, and the constant pursuit of social justice and reform, as well as proclaiming the gospel of Christ.

Presbyterians in Trinidad & Tobago can boast of a well-established education system from Pre-school to Primary, Secondary, Vocational and Tertiary. The Church's involvement in education followed the age-old practice of religious teachers schooling their group of disciples in temples, monasteries and convents. Thus churching and schooling were from time immemorial, recognized as partners. The strategy of the early missionaries was two-fold, evangelistic and educational. Many reached out to rural communities preaching the gospel and establishing congregations and schools. Today the Presbyterian population is approximately 40,000. This is proof that humble beginnings lead to remarkable conclusions.

The Presbyterian Church-Tobago although a small but growing congregation, continues to meet for worship service at 5:30pm on the fourth (4th) Sunday in every month at the St. Francis Anglican Church Bon Accord Tobago. It is our hope and prayer that one day we will have our own place of worship and also bring to Tobago the benefits of a similar education system as exists in Trinidad.

NEC TAMEN CONSUMEBATUR, the Church's motto which translates "Burning yet not consumed," is inspired by Moses' experience at Mt Sinai's burning bush. It tells of a story about a burning bush though engulfed in flames is not ever consumed. So too is the Faith of the Presbyterian Nation. The flame of their faith continues to burn brightly despite varied challenges.