

LATIN AMERICAN SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROGRAM -
PROGRAMA LATINOAMERICANO DE ESTUDIOS SOCIORRELIGIOSOS
(PROLADES)

**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:
RELIGION IN ANTIGUA-BARBUDA**

By Clifton L. Holland, Director of PROLADES

Last revised on 24 January 2011

PROLADES

Apartado 1524-2050, San Pedro, Costa Rica
Telephone (506) 2283-8300; FAX (506) 2234-7682
Internet: <http://www.prolades.com/>
E-Mail: prolades@racsa.co.cr

Religion in Antigua

Country Summary

Antigua and its dependencies, Barbuda and Redonda, are small islands located in the Leeward Islands in the northeastern area of the Caribbean Sea, and form an independent state within the British Commonwealth of Nations. Together, the islands have a population of 85,632 (2009 estimate): **Antigua** has an area of 108 square miles; **Barbuda**, 62 square miles; **Redonda**, less than one-half square mile; and numerous, small uninhabited islands. Antigua is generally flat, like Barbados, with higher volcanic hills along the Leeward and southern coasts; its highest elevation is Boggy Peak at 1,330 feet above sea level. The island is quite dry, but it has exceptionally fine harbors.

Antigua is the largest of the Leeward Islands, and the most developed and prosperous due to its upscale tourism industry, offshore banking, Internet gambling services and education services, including two medical schools: the University of Health Sciences Antigua (UHSA) and the American University of Antigua (AUA) College of Medicine.

Over 31,000 people live in the town of St. John's, the capital, which is located in the north-west of Antigua, near V.C. Bird International Airport – named in honor of Sir Vere Cornwall Bird (b.1910–d.1999), the first Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda. St. John's is the commercial center of the nation and its chief port. Other leading population settlements are All Saints (3,412) and Liberta (2,239), according to the 2001 census. **Barbuda** has a population of about 1,500, most of whom live in the town of Codrington.



Antigua's chief port is St. John's Harbor, which is able to accommodate large cruise ships. Fort James stands at the entrance to St. John's Harbor, while other nearby colonial fortifications are Fort George, Fort Charles, Fort Shirley, Fort Berkeley and Fort Barrington. English Harbor on the southeastern coast is famed for providing safe shelter to ships during violent storms. It is the site of a restored British colonial naval station, called "Nelson's Dockyard," named after Captain Horatio Nelson. The dockyard was established in 1725 to provide a base for a squadron of British ships whose main function was to patrol the West Indian seas and maintain Britain's dominance in the region during the 18th century.

Today, English Harbor and the neighboring village of Falmouth are internationally famous as yachting and sailing destinations and as a provisioning center. During Antigua Sailing Week, at the end of April and beginning of May, the annual world-class regatta brings many sailing vessels and sailors to the island for sports activities.

The nation's economy was initially based on sugar production, which was discontinued in 1972 and later restarted. Today, tourism dominates the economy, accounting for more than half of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Antigua is famous for its many luxury beach resorts.

Weak tourist activity since early 2000 has slowed the economy, however, and squeezed the government into a tight fiscal corner. The government also encouraged industrialization and a large oil refinery is now in operation.

Antigua is a recognized center for Internet online gambling companies. Antigua was one of the very first nations to legalize, license and regulate online gaming. Some countries, most notably the USA, argue that because the gaming transaction is initiated in their jurisdictions that the act of online wagering is illegal. However, this argument has been repudiated by the World Trade Organization.

The nation's ethnic composition is 91 percent Black, Mulatto and mixed Black/ Amerindian, 4.4 percent Other Mixed Race, 1.7 percent White, 2.9 percent Other (primarily East Indian and Asian). The majority of the white population is ethnically Irish, British and Portuguese. There is a small population of Christian Levantine Arabs (primarily of Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian descent) and a small population of Asians and Sephardic Jews.

Mixed-race relationships and later immigration resulted by the late 19th century in the emergence of **five distinct and carefully ranked race/ethnic groups**. At the top of this hierarchy were the **British**, who justified their

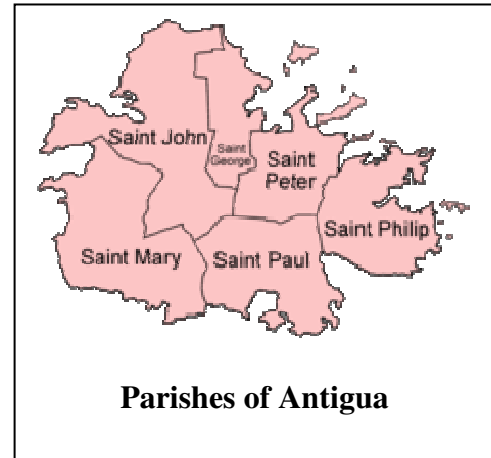
hegemony with arguments of white supremacy and civilizing missions. Among themselves, there were divisions between British Antiguans and non-creolized British, with the latter being on top. This was a race/ethnic hierarchy that gave maximum recognition to Anglicized persons and cultural practices.

Immediately below the British-ancestry population were the **mulattoes**, a mixed-race group resulting from unions between, generally, white European males and enslaved black African women. Many of these unions took place in the years before the expansion of the slave population. Mulattoes were lighter in skin color than the masses of black Africans. Some white fathers had their "colored" sons educated or trained in the crafts. They sometimes benefited them in other ways, which led to the development of a separate social class. Mulattoes gradually distinguished themselves from the masses of enslaved black Africans, and they developed complex ideologies of shades of skin color to legitimate their claims to higher status. These ideologies of shade paralleled in many ways British ideologies of white supremacy.

Next in this hierarchy were the **Portuguese immigrants**: 2,500 arrived as migrant workers from Madeira between 1847 and 1852 because of a severe famine in their homeland. Many established small businesses and joined the ranks of what was by then the mulatto middle class. The British never really considered the Portuguese to be their equals, so they were not allowed into their ranks. Among Portuguese Antiguans and Barbudans status differences move along a continuum of varying degrees of assimilation into the Anglicized practices of the dominant group.

Below the Portuguese were the **Middle Easterners**, who began migrating to Antigua and Barbuda around the turn of the 20th century. Starting as itinerant traders, they soon worked their way into the middle strata of society. Although the Middle Easterners came from a variety of locations in the Middle East, as a group they are usually referred to as Syrians.

The fifth group was composed of **Afro-Antiguans and Barbudans** who were located at the bottom of the hierarchy of social classes. African slaves began arriving in Antigua and Barbuda in large numbers during the 1670s, and very quickly came to constitute the majority of the



population. In this slavery environment, the Africans ceased being Ashanti, Ewe, Yoruba or other tribesmen and became identified as Negroes or Blacks other African nationals make up the population of Antigua & Barbuda.

During the 20th century, the colonial social hierarchy gradually began to change as a result of universal education and improved economic opportunity. This process provided Blacks with an opportunity of reaching the highest strata of society and government.

More recently, **Spanish-speaking immigrants** from the Dominican Republic and Afro-Caribbean immigrants from Guyana and Dominica have been added to the nation's ethnic mosaic. Many of the new immigrants were fleeing poverty and political unrest, and they entered at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Today, an increasing number of **Antiguans and Barbudans have migrated abroad**, mostly to the UK (Antiguan-Britons), the USA and Canada. A minority of Antiguan residents are immigrants from other countries, particularly Dominica, Guyana and Jamaica, with an increasing number of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Ghana and Nigeria. There is also a significant number of U.S. citizens (estimated at 4,500 people), which is one of the largest populations of resident U.S. citizens in the English-speaking Eastern Caribbean.

English is the official language, but many of the locals speak **Antiguan Creole**. However, the Barbudan accent is slightly different from the Antiguan. In the years before Antigua and Barbuda's independence, Standard English was widely spoken in preference to Antiguan Creole, but afterwards Antiguans began treating Antiguan Creole as a respectable aspect of their culture. Generally, the upper and middle classes shun the use of Antiguan Creole. The educational system, also, dissuades the use of Antiguan Creole and instruction is done in **Standard (British) English**.

Current Status of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. In 2008, there were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The Government is secular; however, it maintains a close relationship with the **Antigua Christian Council**. The Prime Minister is responsible for the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, whose role is to coordinate and facilitate greater interaction between churches, other religious organizations, and the Government, and to facilitate the free movement of pastors and missionaries in the country.

According to the 2001 census, 74 percent of the population was Christian. The Anglican Church was the largest religious denomination, accounting for an estimated 45 percent of the population. The Moravian adherents were 12 percent; Methodist adherents 9.1 percent; Seventh-Day Adventists 8.8 percent; and Roman Catholics were about eight percent. The **United Evangelical Association**, an organization that includes most independent evangelical churches, claimed an estimated 25 percent of the population. The Jehovah's Witnesses numbered slightly more than 1,000 members (about 1.5 percent). The Other Religions and No Religion categories total about 14.9 percent. Non-Christian religions included large numbers of adherents to

Myalism-Obeah, an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 **Rastafarians**, more than 200 **Muslims**, nearly 200 **Hindus**, and approximately 50 members of the **Baha'i Faith**.

Historical Overview of Social and Political Development

Antigua and Barbuda were inhabited as early as 2400 BCE by the Siboney Amerindians, but the islands were always rather sparsely populated, primarily due a lack of fresh water. The Siboney were later displaced by the Caribs, who later abandoned the islands. The Spanish first attempted to settle on the islands in the 16th century and the French in the 17th century.

After the French settlers departed, the British arrived in 1632 and succeeded in developing a means of conserving rainwater. During the 19th century, the colony prospered; settlers created tobacco and sugar plantations and imported slaves from Africa as laborers.

Sugar became Antigua's main crop after 1674, when Christopher Codrington arrived from Barbados and created the Betty's Hope Estate; he brought the latest sugar technology with him. Betty's Hope, Antigua's first full-scale sugar plantation, was so successful that other planters turned from tobacco to sugar. This resulted in their importing tens of thousands of slaves for sugar cultivation and processing.

Many British colonists in the West Indies initially used Amerindians and poor white Europeans (mostly Irish) as laborers on their plantations. Unfortunately, these ethnic groups succumbed easily to disease and/or malnutrition and died by the thousands. The slaves from Africa had the misfortune of adapting well to the new environment and, therefore, became the best source of cheap labor. In 1678, the population of Antigua was only 4,480 of which 2,308 were white and 2,172 were African slaves.

By the mid-1770s, the number of African slaves had increased to 37,500 from 19,800 in 1724 and 12,500 in 1713, whereas the white population had fallen from 5,200 in 1724 to below 3,000 by the mid-1770s. The slaves lived in wretched and overcrowded conditions, and could be mistreated or even killed by their owners with impunity. The Slave Act of 1723 made the arbitrary murder of slaves illegal but did not make their lives any easier. Between 1766 and 1779, Antigua produced an average of 10.7 tons of sugar, the second-largest amount after Jamaica in the British West Indies. Most of the fertile land was owned by a very few families (some of whom lived in England or Scotland) who controlled sugar production in the Leeward Islands. These families were known as the "sugar aristocracy."

Although slavery was abolished by the British in 1834, the limited job opportunities left the freedmen in virtual slavery on the sugar estates into the next century. In 1834, the population of Antigua was 25,330 of which 1,980 were whites and 23,350 were native Africans or their descendents. Gradually free villages began to emerge at places like Liberta, Jennings and Bendals, often based around Moravian or Methodist churches or on land reluctantly sold by the planters to a group of former slaves. Slowly a few Antiguans scratched together sufficient money to set up their own businesses – shops, taverns and tiny cottage industries. An embryonic black middle class emerged; nonetheless, economic progress on the island was extremely slow. By World War II, life for the vast majority of Antiguans was still extremely difficult, with widespread poverty across the island.

Unlike most of Britain's West Indian colonies, Antigua remained British throughout the colonial era (1632-1981). This was due, in large part, to the massive fortifications built around it, the major ones at Shirley Heights on the south coast.

Following social and political unrest in the 1960s, a new Constitution was adopted in 1966 that granted the islands self-government, although the United Kingdom of Great Britain remained

responsible for the islands' defense and foreign relations. Then, on 1 November 1981, Antigua and Barbuda became an independent state within the British Commonwealth system, with Queen Elizabeth II as the Head of State. The Right Honorable Vere Cornwall Bird was appointed as the first Prime Minister.

Vere Cornwall Bird (b.1909-d.1999) was a revolutionary union leader who defied British colonizers in the 1950s to demand higher wages for Antiguan sugarcane workers. A former Salvation Army Captain, he won the presidency of the Antigua Trade and Labor Union in 1943. The allied Antigua Labor Party (ALP) has controlled the National Assembly almost continuously, and Bird became the first Prime Minister following Independence in 1981. The dominant figure in Antiguan politics for more than 50 years, Bird retired in 1994; a son, Lester, was elected Prime Minister at that time and was reelected in 1999, and he governed until 2004.

Although V. C. Bird grew up in a squalid slum of dirt roads and overcrowded housing in St John's and barely finished elementary school, he is still revered as a "savior" by many, despite the many scandals that have tainted the family name and left the country hundreds of millions of dollars in debt. Under Bird, Antigua emerged from a poverty-stricken British colony to achieve rapid development. But, in more recent years, the nation also became known as one of the most corrupt in the Caribbean. As chief minister and later Prime Minister, Bird and his family amassed interests in some of the nation's most lucrative businesses. He also controlled important radio and television stations.

A defining moment in the history of Antigua and Barbuda is a legendary speech by Bird under a tamarind tree near the village of Bethesda in January 1951, when Antigua was still a British colony and Bird was a labor leader. Bird, by then called "Papa" by his followers, did organize the strike and there was no sugar harvest that year. The strike consolidated the Antigua Trade and Labor Union's power, and Bird went on to serve 21 years as its president. As an offshoot, he formed the Antigua Labor Party. When British landowners decided to close down the sugar plantations, Bird got a loan from the Royal Bank of Canada so that the local government could buy them, which amounted to 80 percent of Antigua's cultivated land.

Bird introduced free secondary education, island-wide electricity service and building projects, such as an international airport, a deep-water harbor and interior village roads. He aggressively promoted tourism, making Antigua a leading Caribbean tourist destination. Amid a long string of corruption charges, Bird was accused of dipping into a healthcare fund and stealing \$25,000. He admitted to the charges, but said it made up for money he gave to an ailing woman. A son, Vere Bird, Jr., resigned from his father's Cabinet in 1990 after Israeli and Colombian authorities accused him of conspiring to ship ten tons of Israeli arms through Antigua to Colombia's Medellin drug cartel.

* * * *

The Queen is currently represented by **Governor General Dame Louise Lake-Tack** (b.1944), who became the first woman to hold this position. A Council of Ministers is appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister, currently the Honorable **Winston Baldwin Spencer** (b.1948). The Prime Minister is the Head of Government.

Executive power is exercised by the government while **legislative power** is vested in both the government and the two Chambers of Parliament. The bicameral Parliament consists of the **Senate** (seventeen members appointed by members of the government and the opposition party, and approved by the Governor-General), and the **House of Representatives** (with 17 members elected to serve five-year terms).

The last elections held were on 12 March 2009, during which the Antigua Labor Party won seven seats in the House of Representatives, the United Progressive Party nine, and the Barbuda People's Movement one.

Between 1949 and 2004, the political system was dominated by the populist Antigua Labor Party. However, the legislative election of 2004 saw the defeat of the longest-serving elected government in the Caribbean. The elder V. C. Bird was Prime Minister from 1981 to 1994 and Chief Minister of Antigua from 1960 to 1981, except for the period 1971-1976 when the Progressive Labor Movement defeated his party. Prime Minister Lester Bryant Bird (who succeeded his father V. C. Bird) and Deputy Robin Yearwood had been in office since 1994.

The Judicial Branch is the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court based in Saint Lucia; one judge of the Supreme Court is a resident of Antigua-Barbuda and presides over the Court of Summary Jurisdiction. In addition, Antigua is a member of the Caribbean Court of Justice. The Supreme Court of Appeal was the British Judicial Committee of the Privy Council up until 2001, when the nations of the Caribbean Community voted to abolish the right of appeal to the Privy Council in favor of a Caribbean Court of Justice.

The **Royal Antigua and Barbuda Defense Force** (RABDF) has responsibility for internal security, prevention of drug smuggling, the protection and support of fishing rights, prevention of marine pollution, search and rescue, ceremonial duties, assistance to government programs, provision of relief during natural disasters, assistance in the maintenance of essential services and support of the police in maintaining law and order. The RABDF is the world's smallest military, consisting of only 245 people. It is much better equipped to fulfill its civil roles rather than to serve as a deterrent for would-be aggressors or in defending the nation during a war.

Overview of Religious Development

The original British settlers were affiliated with the **Church of England**. Anglican chaplains arrived with British occupation and settlement, and the Church of England became the Established Church after the first Anglican priest arrived in Antigua. The Anglican "Society for the Conversion, Religious Instruction and Education of the Negroes" (originally known as the **Christian Faith Society**, founded in 1691 from a bequest of Robert Boyle, a director of the East India Company in London, for "the advancement of the Christian religion amongst infidels") began work in Antigua in 1798, under the supervision of the Anglican Bishop of London, as a means of bringing Christianity to the slaves. The Society was renamed in 1836 as the "Society for Advancing the Christian Faith." **The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) in Foreign Parts**, founded in 1701, sent a catechist to Antigua in 1799.

After 1824, Antigua and Barbuda became part of the **Bishopric of Barbados**. The **Church Missionary Society** contributed greatly to the expansion of the Anglican Church in the West Indies. **The Bishopric of Antigua** was established in 1842 with responsibility for church matters in Antigua, Aruba, Barbuda, Dominica, Montserrat, Nevis, Saba, St. Barts, St. Eustatuis, St. Martin and St. Kitts. This geographical area is now part of the **Church in the Province of the West Indies** (created in 1883) and its Archbishop resides at Nassau in the Bahamas.

The Anglican Church is the largest denomination in Antigua and Barbuda, with an estimated 32,000 adherents in 2005. The Anglican Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, located in St. John's, is a large and impressive structure, particularly its tall twin spires. Two previous churches were located on the same site: the first was a wooden structure built in 1681, but it was replaced by a brick structure in 1720. The current stone cathedral was consecrated in 1848. Other Angli-

can churches include St. Paul's (Falmouth), St. Phillip's (Newfield), St. Peter's (Parham), and St. George's (Fitches Creek).

In the middle of the 18th century, both the **Moravians** (1756) and the **Methodists** (1760) initiated work on Antigua and Barbuda, and continue to enjoy a sizable following. The Methodist congregations are part of the **Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas**, headquartered in St. John's, Antigua. The Methodist Church is the nation's third-largest denomination, with an estimated 6,930 adherents in 2005.

Nathaniel Gilbert was a plantation owner on Antigua who was converted to Christianity in England through the preaching and teaching of the Rev. John Wesley, and he returned to Antigua in 1760 as a Wesleyan Methodist lay preacher. By 1774, Methodists in Antigua, who were primarily black, became affiliated with the anti-slavery movement. **The Wesleyan Methodist Church** officially began work in Antigua in 1786 by missionary William Warrener under the authority of Superintendent Thomas Coke in London.

The Moravians are part of the **East Indies Province of the Moravian Church**, also headquartered on Antigua at Cashew Hill. The Moravian Church has the fourth-largest constituency in the nation, with an estimated 5,270 adherents in 2005.

During the 20th century a variety of denominations initiated work in Antigua and Barbuda, including the **Roman Catholic Church** (now the second-largest denomination). Today, the *Catholic Diocese of St. John's-Basseterre* (erected in 1971), headquartered in St. John's, Antigua, has 10 parishes on the islands of Antigua-Barbuda, St. Kitts-Nevis, Montserrat, Anguilla and the British Virgin Islands. Only an estimated 11 percent of the total population of the Diocese is Roman Catholic, which accounts for the low number of priests and religious workers serving there. In 2004, there were a total of 17 priests serving in the Diocese: six diocesan and 11 religious priests, along with 11 male and 12 female religious workers. The Parish of Antigua currently has seven churches: Holy Family Cathedral, St. Anthony's, St. Martin de Porre's, Villa Chapel, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Good Shepherd, and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.

Other Protestant denominations include **African Methodist Episcopal Church, Baptist International Missions** in 1975, **Christian Brethren (Gospel Halls)**, **Church of God of Prophecy**, **Church of God World Missions (Cleveland, TN – New Testament Church of God)** in 1954, **Church of Christ in Christian Union** (three local churches), **Church of God (Seventh-Day)**, **Church of the Nazarene** (1968), **Eastern Caribbean Baptist Mission** (1991), **Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention** (1968), **General Association of Regular Baptists** (1960), **Independent Faith Mission** (1950, Baptist), **Leeward Islands Baptist Mission**, **Pilgrim Holiness Church/ Wesleyan Holiness Church in the Caribbean** (early 1900s), **Seventh-Day Adventist Church** (1944), **The Salvation Army** (1904), **Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod**, and the **United Pentecostal Church International**.

The beginning of **Pilgrim Holiness/Wesleyan Holiness Church** work in Antigua dates to the early 1900s when missionaries from Panama and some sister Caribbean islands, including Barbuda, came to Antigua and held revival services under the banner of the **International Holiness Church**. The first such missionary is reported to be the Rev. Penny.

After Rev. Penny's tour of duty, the Rev. Coon succeeded him and started a work in rented quarters on Nevis Street in St. Johns in a building that was used as a home, as well as a place of worship. The Rev. and Mrs. O. L. King were sent by the Foreign Missions Department of the Pilgrim Holiness Church in the USA to succeed Rev. Coon. The establishing of a local recruitment policy was carried out under the Kings when Mrs. King started a Bible School where as many as fifteen students were trained in Antigua.

It was under the Kings that land was purchased for a new church building on Bishopgate and Popeshead Streets in St. Johns. Additional churches were established at Willikies, Swetes, Urlings, Buckleys, Liberta, Bolans, New Winthorpes and Barbuda. The work at Freetown had been established in the early 1930's and the work at Willikies was started from Freetown. Unfortunately, the church at Freetown was closed, and in the early 1950s the work at Freetown was re-started from Willikies under the Rev. Herbert of Nevis, who rode on a donkey across the savannah to Freetown and back.

Antigua was used as a launching pad for mission work in several of the Caribbean islands, and eventually became the headquarters for what became the Northern Islands District of the Pilgrim Holiness Church. This district included Antigua and Barbuda, Montserrat, St. Kitts, Nevis, Saba, St. Thomas and St. Croix.

Following the departure of the Rev. and Mrs. O.L. King, several other missionaries served in Antigua under the Foreign Missions Department of the denomination in the USA. Until 1967, all the District Superintendents were missionaries. The Rev. Austin Gumbs became the first national district superintendent in 1967. It was an historic occasion, with the Antigua District being granted the status of provisional district conference under Gumbs' superintendency (1967-1988). He was succeeded by the Rev. and Mrs. Kenford Punter (1988-2000), and the Rev. and Mrs. Paul Edwards (2001-present).

In 1968, there was a merger between the Pilgrim Holiness Church and the Wesleyan Methodist Church in the USA, which resulted in the formation of **The Wesleyan Church of North America**. The affiliated churches in the Caribbean adopted the name **The Wesleyan Holiness Church**.

It was under the Rev. E. B. Nelson that the old St. John's Holiness Church, which is considered the mother church, was demolished and a new and impressive steel structure was erected. The Rev. and Mrs. Ira Taylor became the first national pastor (born on the island of Nevis) at that church. He was followed by the Rev. and Mrs. Spence and Rev. and Mrs. G. Colin West of Barbados, who was the last national pastor who served under the missionary superintendents.

Over the years, the Wesleyan Holiness Church in Antigua suffered splits and departures of both ministers and members. In 1975, for example, the Church of the Nazarene gained many of its members from St. John's Holiness Church during the pastorate of the Rev. Henry Lee. In 1990, the **Faith and Power Movement** (now Precision Centre) also received many members from the Wesleyan Holiness District. The congregations at St. John's, Swetes, Potters and Gray's Farm were all negatively affected.

For many years, The Wesleyan Holiness Church in Antigua had the largest number of congregations among the Evangelicals and other church groups. In 2004, there were 17 congregations on Antigua at St. John's, Gray Farm, Cedar Grove, New Winthorpes, Ottos, Jennings, Bolands, Urlings, Old Roads, Swetes, Liberta, Freetown, Willikies, Potters, Parham, Buckleys and Faith.

In 2004, the Antigua District included Antigua-Barbuda, Montserrat and Dominica, with 18 churches on the mainland of Antigua (the newest one being Faith Wesleyan Holiness Church in All Saints), one in Barbuda, two in Montserrat (one having been lost during the eruption of Soufrière volcano in April 1979) and two in Dominica. The Antigua District comprises 23 churches with a membership of about 1,500.

During 2004-2005, the Cathedral was under construction at Parham on six acres of land, with a seating capacity of 2,500. This new location houses conference facilities and a camp site in addition to the church auditorium and offices. On 12 September 2004, the new Ottos Church, which seats 750 persons, was dedicated.

The Seventh-Day Adventist Church, which arrived in Antigua and Barbuda in 1944, is part of the North Caribbean Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, Inc. There are about 5,500 Adventist adherents in the nation, or more than eight percent of the population. The Adventists operate eight churches nationally and the Antigua Seventh-day Adventist School in St. John's. A prominent local member of this denomination is the former Governor-General, Sir James Beethoven Carlisle, who was appointed by Queen Elizabeth in 1993 and served in this capacity until 2007.

The Church of God (7th Day) is related historically to the Church of God (Seventh Day), which split into two factions in 1933: the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Stanberry, MO (later moved to Denver, CO) and the Church of God (7th Day) in Salem, WV. Elder Dugger was affiliated with the Salem, WV, and moved to Israel in 1953 to establish its world headquarters and publish the *Mount Zion Reporter*. Many of the churches affiliated with this movement use the name "Mt. Zion Church of God (7th Day)." This denomination (headquarters in Jerusalem, Israel) reports affiliated churches in the USA, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean (USVI, Antigua, Dominica, French Guiana, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Martin, Trinidad-Tobago, St. Vincent), Central and South America, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, England and India. (Source: <http://www.cog7day.org/>)

The Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (FMBSBC) officially began work in 1968 and built on former efforts by the **General Association of Regular Baptists** (begun in 1960 but plagued by troubles and later disbanded) and an independent Southern Baptist missionary supported by the Clay Road Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. In 1969, missionaries Vernon and Carolyn Sydow arrived from Brazil and provided needed leadership for the renamed **Central Baptist Church** in St. John's. They were followed by missionaries Shelby and Frances Smith who were transferred from Trinidad-Tobago. In addition to building up the church membership and Sunday school attendance, the Smiths began several social service programs with an evangelistic purpose: medical clinics, agricultural conferences, and dental services. Hundreds of volunteers from the USA responded to the Smith's appeals for help, including medical doctors, dentists, construction teams, and retired pastors.

The ministry of Central Baptist Church flourished and expanded to other areas of Antigua and to the neighboring island of Barbuda, as well as improving its facilities to include an auditorium seating about 800 people and adequate educational space. In January 1978, the pastorate of Central Baptist Church was assumed by a native of St. Kitts, Lambert Mills, who was educated at New Orleans Theological Seminary in the USA. Mills and his associates established two Baptist missions in 1980, and the **Baptist Association of Churches** was formed with four organized churches and almost 500 members in the early 1990s. Outreach included work among Haitian immigrants who entered Antigua as refugees.

The Baptist International Missions (BIMI) owned and operated radio station, *Caribbean Radio Lighthouse*, located on the island of Antigua broadcasts the gospel throughout the West Indies. The station celebrated its 20th year of operation in 1996. The BIMI reported eight affiliated churches on Antigua.

The island of Antigua had its first contact with the **Church of the Nazarene** through a local layperson who had moved to the U.S. Virgin Islands to find employment. Mrs. Lorna James and her family were converted under the ministry of the Rev. Lyle Prescott and became vigorous supporters of opening work for the Nazarenes on their home island. In 1968, the James family moved back to Antigua to begin Nazarene ministry. The Rev. Louie Bustle visited Antigua in 1973 along with then Church of the Nazarene Mission Director, the Rev. William Porter from

Puerto Rico. They came to encourage and visit the two congregations that had been started during these early years. In June 1975, a Work & Witness Team from southern Florida constructed a large steel and concrete building to be used by the Beacon Light Church of the Nazarene. The second District Assembly, held in August 1975, reported five churches with only 105 members. Antigua is currently part of the Leeward/Virgin Islands District, which reported about 1,300 church members.

The Anglican, Methodist, Moravian, The Salvation Army and Roman Catholic denominations are affiliated with the **Antigua Christian Council**, founded in 1941, which is associated with the **Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC)** and the **World Council of Churches (WCC)**. In 1962, the Antigua Christian Council and the Antigua-Barbuda Democratic Movement sent a petition to the Queen pleading against the proposed introduction of casino gambling into Antigua, but to no avail.

The **United Evangelical Association (UEA) of Antigua and Barbuda**, founded in _____, is affiliated with the **World Evangelical Alliance (WEA)**. The UEA President is the Rev. Alister Jackson, pastor of the Lion of Judah Wesleyan Holiness Church located in Willikies. The Rev. Rudolph Harris of the Olivet Pentecostal Church (Liberta) and the Rev. Ivor Davis of the Zion Church of God (North Street) are the 1st and 2nd Vice Presidents, respectively.

Other Religions

There is a small population of **Arabs** (primarily of Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian descent), including some **Levantine Eastern Orthodox Christians**. The **Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church** was established in Antigua and Barbuda in 2008 among a small group of Afro-Antiguans and Barbudans as a mission of the *Archdiocese of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in the Caribbean and Latin America*, based in Trinidad-Tobago. This archdiocese is the mother church for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in the western hemisphere, outside of Jerusalem and Ethiopia.

Three **marginal Christian groups** also have a following: The **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints** (Mormons), the **Jehovah's Witnesses** and the **Christadelphians** (St. Johns Ecclesia).

Non-Christian religions included a small number of adherents to Judaism, more than 200 **Muslims (Middle Easterners)**, nearly 200 **Hindus (Asian Indians)**, and approximately 50 members of the **Baha'i Faith**.

The Jewish presence in Antigua and Barbuda is negligible today. There were a small number of **Sephardic Jews** in the 17th and 18th centuries, notably the Gideon Abudiente family, who traveled back and forth between Antigua and the island of Nevis. In 1694, the Leeward Island Council and Assembly passed an act against Jew's trading in commodities and slaves. Although the law was repealed in 1701, most Jews left Antigua and Barbuda to join Jewish congregations in the British colonies of North America.

Although most Antiguans and Barbudans are Christians, there is an outpost of the **Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement** in Antigua, supported by Ahmadiya missionaries from Pakistan who arrived in 1955. They established a mosque in St. John's: the **Antigua & Barbuda International Islamic Society (ABIIS)**. However, most Muslims in the country are Arabs of Syrian or Lebanese descent.

Freemasonry. The first record of a consecrated Masonic Lodge in the English-speaking Caribbean was *Parham Lodge No. 154 E.C.*, which was chartered in Antigua in 1738. Also around 1738, the *Mother Lodge No. 182 E.C.* was established in Jamaica. Other early Lodges

included *St. Christopher's Lodge No. 174 E.C.* on St. Kitts, established in 1739; and the *Great Lodge of St. John No. 192 E.C.* on Antigua, in 1744. In the next century, *St. John's Lodge No. 492 E.C.* was established at St. John's, Antigua, in 1843. The *Caribbee Lodge No. 2869 E.C.* was chartered between 1850 and 1900 in Antigua, and it is still active today.

Myalism and Obeah. Myalism is an African-derived system of beliefs and behavior that emerged during the slavery period in the British West Indies. Myal allowed disparate groups of African slaves to come together and create some sort of pan-African solidarity in the face of slave-master brutality, whereas Obeah is synonymous with black magic, sorcery and witchcraft practiced by clandestine specialists, called obeah men and women. Myalism-Obeah is a powerful part of the native culture that remains from slavery times, despite the cultural dominion of the British. As late as the first decade of the 20th century, Obeah was still considered by the British civil and religious authorities to be a threat to White society in Antigua and Barbuda, where a law was passed that prohibited its practice.

Provisions of the Obeah Act of August 1904 in Antigua and Barbuda (source: www.laws.gov.ag/acts/chapters/cap-298.pdf):

- (1) This Act may be cited as the Obeah Act.
- (2) In this Act, "instrument of obeah" means anything ordinarily used in the practice of obeah or intended to be so used in such practice, and anything used or intended to be used by a person and pretended by such person to be possessed of any occult or supernatural power; "obeah" means obeah as ordinarily understood and practised, and includes witchcraft and working or pretending to work by spells or by professed occult or supernatural power.
- (3) and (4) omitted by the author.
- (5) Any person who pretends or professes to tell fortunes or uses any subtle craft, means or device by palmistry or otherwise, or pretends to cure injuries or diseases or to intimidate or effect any purpose by means of any charm, incantation or other pretended supernatural practice, shall be liable to be imprisoned for any period not exceeding six months.
- (6) Every person practising, or in any way concerned in the practice of obeah, or using any subtle craft, means or device by obeah or otherwise shall be liable to be imprisoned for any period not exceeding twelve months.
- (7) Whosoever, for the purpose of effecting any object, or of bringing about any event, by the use of occult means or any supernatural power or knowledge, consults any person.
- (8) Whenever it is made to appear on oath that there is reasonable cause to suspect that any person is in possession of any instrument of obeah it shall be lawful for any District Magistrate or Justice of the Peace by warrant under his hand to authorize any member of the Police Force or any local constable to enter (and if necessary by force) and search any place, either in the day or in the night, and if any instrument of obeah is found in any place so searched, to seize and secure the same for the purpose of being produced in evidence in any proceeding before any Court of Justice in which the same may be required. And any person who hinders or molests any person acting under the authority of any warrant issued under this section, shall be liable to pay a fine not exceeding three thousand dollars or to be imprisoned for any period not exceeding twelve months.
- (9) Whenever upon any such search as in the last preceding section mentioned, any instrument of obeah is found the person in whose possession or on whose premises it is found shall be deemed, unless or until the contrary is proved, to be a person practising obeah within the meaning of this Act, at the time when such instrument of obeah was found.
- (10) It shall be lawful for any member of the Police Force or any local constable to arrest without warrant any person practising obeah, or reasonably suspected to be practising obeah.
- (11) Any person who shall compose, write, print, sell, distribute, publish or circulate any pamphlet or printed or written matter calculated to the superstition of obeah shall be guilty of an offence against this

Act and shall, on conviction thereof, be liable to pay a fine not exceeding three thousand dollars or in default to be imprisoned for any period not exceeding six months.

(12) Omitted by the author.

Rastafarianism. There are an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 **Rastafarians (Afro-Antiguans and Barbudans)**. In the 1960s, many residents of African heritage were attracted to the Jamaican **Rastafarian** movement with roots in Black Judaism, which instilled racial and cultural pride and called for the liberation of black people from white oppression. Rastafarians in Antigua and most of the other Caribbean islands are a direct offshoot of the larger and more established Rastafari community in Jamaica. The concept emerged in Antigua during the early 1970s after the start of the black power cultural revolution. Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, integral to their religious rituals, was prohibited by the government.

Compiled and Edited by Clifton L. Holland

Last updated on 24 January 2011

Sources

Anderson, Justice C. *An Evangelical Saga: Baptists and Their Precursors in Latin America*. Longwood FL: Xulon Press, 2005.

Augier, F. R. et al. *The Making of the West Indies*. Trinidad and Jamaica: Longman Caribbean Limited, 1960 (reprinted in 1976).

Brierly, Peter. *World Churches Handbook*. London, England: Christian Research, 1997.

Catholic Hierarchy website at: <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dstjb.html>

Dryfoot, Arthur Charles. *The Shaping of the West Indian Church, 1492-1962*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1999; published jointly with The Press University of the West Indies in Jamaica.

Dyde, Brian. *Out of Crowded Vagueness: A History of the Islands of St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla*. Northampton, MA: Interlink Publishing Group, 2006.

Fernández Olmos, Margarite y Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, editores. *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah and the Caribbean*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

Glazier, Stephen D. (editor). *Encyclopedia of African and African-American Religions*. New York City, NY: Routledge, 2001.

Holland, Clifton L., editor. *World Christianity: Central America and the Caribbean*. Monrovia, CA: MARC-World Vision International, 1981.

Horowitz, Michael M., editor. *Peoples and Cultures of the Caribbean: An Anthropological Reader*. Garden City, NY: The Natural History Press, 1971.

Lewis, Gordon K. *The Growth of the Modern West Indies*. New York and London: Modern Reader Paperbacks, 1968.

Parker, J. Fred. *Mission to the World: A History of Missions in the Church of the Nazarene through 1985*. Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1988.

Rogozinski, Jan. *A Brief History of the Caribbean, from the Arawak and Carib to the Present*. Revised Edition. New York City, NY: Plume Books – Penguin Group, 1999.

U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*. Washington, DC: 2008. Posted at http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/CIA_World_Fact_Book,_2004/Antigua_and_Barbuda.

U.S. Department of State. *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127375.htm>

Wesleyan Holiness Church website, “A History of the Barbados District,” available at: <http://vikratistos.com/abh.html>

Note: In addition, many denominational sources were consulted, which are too numerous to list here.

(about 6,958 words)