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**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:
RELIGION IN BELIZE**

By Clifton L. Holland, Director of PROLADES

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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 Belize

Country Overview

Belize, known as **British Honduras** from 1862 until 1973, is located on the southeastern part of the Yucatan Peninsula on the Caribbean coast between Mexico to the north and Guatemala to the west and south. The terrain is largely flat, with a swampy coastline and low mountains in the southern interior. However, the Caribbean coastal waters of Belize contain one of the largest barrier reefs in the world, which is a major tourist attraction.

The capital of the country is Belmopan, built in 1970, following extensive damage to the former capital, Belize City, by Hurricane Hattie in 1961. Belmopan is located near the geographic center of the country, at an elevation of 250 feet above sea level, close to the Belize River Valley. It is about 80 km southwest of Belize City and serves as a hurricane refuge for Belizeans living near the coastline. Belmopan's population in 2000 was estimated at 8,305 and was increasing as more people relocate to the capital. However, Belize City, located on the Caribbean coast at near sea level, still remains the hub of commercial activity and one of the most urbanized areas of Belize (about 55,000 in 2000).

Initially, some foreign governments were reluctant to relocate their embassies to Belmopan because there was some doubt as to whether this inland area would really become the functioning capital of Belize. In February 2005, the U.S. Government finally broke ground and started building a new U.S. Embassy in Belmopan, 43 years after Belmopan was chosen as the new capital city.

In August 2007, Hurricane Dean (category 5) made landfall on the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico near Chetumal with high winds and driving rain and affected northern Belize with heavy rains, local flooding and large waves along the coast. It caused considerable damage in Corozal and Orange Walk districts to sugarcane fields, cornfields, fruit and vegetable crops as well as many buildings. As a precaution, government authorities evacuated Belize City's three hospitals and moved high-risk patients to the inland capital, Belmopan. However, Belizeans were able to breathe a sigh of relief that the storm did not cause more serious devastation in the whole country.

The area of the country is 8,867 square miles, and it had an estimated population of 312,000 in 2008. The growing *Mestizo* community now comprises 48.7 percent of the nation's population. The Creole community, composed of English-speaking persons of African or mixed African and European



ancestry, has declined to 24.9 percent. The Mayan community continues to be about 10 percent of the population. The Garinagu (singular *Garifuna*) community, also known historically as the Black Carib, constitutes about six percent. The remaining 10 percent of the population includes Europeans, East Indians (Hindus), Chinese, Middle Easterners (mainly Lebanese and Jews), and North Americans.

In November of 1997, the Garinagu celebrated the 200th anniversary of their arrival on the shores of Central America, after being forcibly removed by British forces from the eastern Caribbean island of St. Vincent in 1797. Soon after arriving in the Bay Islands of Honduras, the Garinagu were considered by the Spanish and British settlers to be "devil-worshippers, polygamists and speakers of a secret language." Such opposition strengthened the Garinagu's resolve to live apart in their own settlements, maintain their independence and conserve their cultural and religious heritage. The Garinagu are an Afro-Amerindian people (called Zambos by the Spanish) who have blended various traits of their ancestors to create a unique social system with a strong emphasis on music, dance and story-telling and with a unique brand of religion that consists of a mixture of Amerindian, African and Catholic beliefs and practices. The Garinagu Settlement Day Festival is held annually on November 19 in the southern area of the country to mark the first arrival of the Garinagu to Belize in 1832 at Dangriga town. The principal settlements of the Garinagu were established at Dangriga (Stann Creek District) and Punta Gorda (Toledo District).

The Euro-North American population of Belize includes many Mennonites who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s by way of Canada, the USA and Mexico. Also, there is a sizeable community of people who identify as East Indian, some of whose ancestors came to Belize from Jamaica in the 1850s, others from various Caribbean countries in the 1880s, and still others from India during the 1950s.

English is the nation's official language and the language of instruction in the public schools. However, English Creole (Kriol) is widely spoken and remains a distinctive part of everyday conversations for most Belizeans. Spanish is also widely spoken and is taught in primary and secondary schools in order to further develop bilingualism. In certain areas of the country, such as the Orange Walk and Corozal Districts in the north and the Cayo District in the west, Spanish is the mother tongue of the majority of the people. In the southern Districts of Stann Creek and Toledo, there are many people whose first language is Garifuna or Maya.

Current Religious Situation

Religiously, about 50 percent of the population claimed adherence to the Roman Catholic Church in 2000 (census), while Protestant groups accounted for about 36 percent; adherents to "other religions" were 4.6 percent; and those who reported "no religion" or provided "no answer" were listed as 10 percent. The government of Belize actively promotes a spirit of religious tolerance. The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The fact that Belize's literacy rate is 94 percent reflects the nation's commitment to providing its citizens with basic education (primary education is free and compulsory for all children between the ages of 5 and 14), and **the church-administered school is the foundation for the country's education system.** The government of Belize has relied heavily on foreign religious institutions for the maintenance and expansion of formal education. These institutions provided financing, staffing, curriculum, planning and higher education. The Belizean school system is a

loose aggregate of education subsystems. The system was based on British education and was divided into three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary.

This system of government-subsidized church-run schools dates to 1816 when the Anglican Church organized and managed the first public school. Historically, three denominations have administered most of the country's public schools (Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist churches), although today other denominations are also operating public schools with government subsidies, including the Mennonites, Seventh-day Adventists, Belize Baptist Association, Church of the Nazarene, Gospel Missionary Union, Assemblies of God, The Salvation Army, Christian Brethren, Church of God in Christ, and others. However, some of the public schools are operated directly by the government under the Ministry of Education. In 1989, only about 60 percent of primary school graduates went on to study in secondary schools, and there were limited opportunities in Belize for post-secondary education. There is one university in the whole country, the University of Belize. It is a private, national, autonomous and multi-location institution committed to excellence in higher education, research and service for national development. The University of Belize was established in August 2000 as an amalgamation of five tertiary-level institutions: Bliss School of Nursing, Belize Technical College, Belize Teachers' College, University College of Belize, and Belize School of Agriculture.

Historical Overview of the Political and Social Development

This small nation (about the size of Massachusetts) has more historical ties to the Caribbean than to the rest of Central America. Belize was settled by British buccaneers in the mid-1600s, who used its sheltered cays and coves as hideouts from which they could prey upon Spanish shipping. British influence continued to grow along the Caribbean coast of Central America, while the Spanish authorities neglected the region.

The first European settlers in the region of modern Belize were called **Baymen**, who settled in the Belize City area in the 1650's. They were mainly English buccaneers and pirates in the Bay of Honduras who were trying to outmaneuver the Spanish rulers in Mexico and Central America, and they discovered they could make a living cutting and selling logwood (used to make dye for the wool industry in England), and later mahogany, to their home country. Many of the first Baymen settled on what is now called the Northside of Belize City, where they controlled all affairs of municipal and national government through the Public Meeting.

It was the Baymen who established the slavery system in Belize in order to provide a work force for the logwood trade. The imported African slaves, acquired mainly from the British-controlled areas of the Caribbean, were not allowed to own land and had to depend on their slave masters for all their supplies, but they could associate with each other. Before the arrival of 2,207 slaves and freemen (former slaves) from the Misquito Coast in 1787, the Baymen of Belize numbered less than 800 and had fewer than 2,600 slaves.

The British government first appointed a superintendent over the area in 1786; prior to that time, the British government did not initially recognize the settlement of Belize as a colony for fear of provoking attacks by Spanish forces. This delay in governmental oversight allowed the early settlers to establish their own laws and forms of government. During this period a few wealthy British settlers gained control of the Public Meeting, as well as of most of the settlement's land, timber and other natural resources.

The British and Spanish engaged in frequent disputes over the territory of Belize even after the Treaty of Paris in 1763 established the former's rights to cut logwood in Belize. The Baymen were chased out of the territory by the Spaniards no less than four times between 1717 and 1780.

Treaties in 1783 and 1786 gave the Baymen more security; but only after the Battle of St. George's Caye in 1798, when the Baymen and their armed slaves defeated – with the help of several British naval commanders – a Spanish naval force from Mexico, did the Baymen have full control of their settlement, which was affirmed by its admission to British Colonial status in 1863 as the Colony of British Honduras. The anniversary of this famous battle is now a national holiday in Belize.

Although slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1838, this did little to change working conditions for laborers in the Belize settlement, who primarily worked in the logging industry. In order to ensure the continued presence of a viable labor force, the civil authorities established restrictions that limited the ability of individuals to obtain land (1838-1868), thereby creating a debt-peonage system to organize the newly-freed slaves. Because an elite controlled the settlement's land and commerce, the former slaves had to support themselves by subsistence agriculture and by working for wages in the mahogany logging trade.

After the independence of Central America from Spanish rule in 1821, the British government claimed the right to administer part of the Caribbean coast of Central America, from Belize in the north to Nicaragua in the south, where British colonies had previously been established. In 1862-1863, Great Britain formally declared Belize a Crown Colony, subordinate to the colonial government of Jamaica, and renamed it **British Honduras**.

From an early date the settlers had governed themselves under a system of primitive democracy by Public Meeting. A constitution based on this system was granted in 1765 and this, with some modification, continued until 1840 when an Executive Council was created. The Crown Colony system of Government was introduced in 1871, and the Legislative Assembly by its own vote was replaced by a nominated Legislative Council with an official majority presided over by the Lieutenant Governor. Further constitutional advances came in 1954 with the introduction of universal adult suffrage and an elected majority in the Legislature; the ministerial system was adopted in 1961.

The Colony's first official census took place in 1861, which listed 14 zones of settlement and reported 40 nationalities among the total population of 25,635. In those early days, 30.5 percent of the population was identified as **Creole** (Mulatto, Zambo or African). The Spanish-speaking **Mestizo** population represented 38.1 percent of the total population, compared to 18.2 percent **Maya-Kekchí**, 7.6 percent **Garifuna**, 4.5 percent **European** and 1 percent other, including the influential White population with ties to Europe and the USA.

During the period 1858 to 1861, the Honduras Land Titles Acts were passed to allow land in Belize to be sold without proven land title. The **British Honduras Company** began operations in 1858 -- its name was changed to the **Belize Estate and Produce Company** (known as BEC) in 1875 -- and became a major economic force in the country. In 1875, the BEC owned more than a million acres of land (one-fifth of Belize), which was 50 percent of the private land in the country. Except for a brief period in the 1870s when the BEC invested in sugar cultivation, its major activity has been forestry exploitation utilizing a cheap labor force. Its power was so great for a long time that the BEC controlled the government of Belize and manipulated the laws for its own economic advantage. This company's influence accounts in part for the colony's reliance on the mahogany trade throughout the rest of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

The Great Depression of the 1930s caused a near-collapse of the colonial economy as the demand for timber plummeted in Britain and elsewhere, which created widespread unemployment. The situation worsened after a devastating hurricane struck the colony in 1931. Perceptions that the government's relief effort was inadequate were aggravated by its refusal to legalize labor unions or to approve a minimum wage. A series of public demonstrations and riots in 1934

marked the beginning of an independence movement in Belize. In response, the government repealed criminal penalties for workers who broke their labor contracts and granted workers the right to join unions.

Economic conditions in Belize improved during World War II (1939-1945) when many Belizean men entered the British armed forces or were able to acquire jobs that contributed to the war effort. After 1945, the colony's economy again stagnated, especially after Britain devaluated the British Honduras currency in 1949. This situation led to the creation of the People's Committee that demanded independence from Great Britain.

In January 1964, British Honduras became a self-governing Colony and was renamed "Belize" on June 1, 1973; it was the United Kingdom of Great Britain's (UK) last colony on the American mainland. Full independence from the UK was achieved on September 21, 1981, after delays caused by territory disputes with the Republic of Guatemala, which did not formally recognize Belizean independence.

Belize is a constitutional monarchy and a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations. George C. Price became the new nation's first Prime Minister under the banner of the **People's United Party (PUP)**, founded in 1950 with a Christian Democrat ideology and devoted to achieving the political and economic dependence of the British colony. The other major political party today is the **United Democratic Party (UDP)**, created in 1973 with a Social Democrat ideology, under the leadership of Phillip Godson (formerly of the National Independence Party), Dean Lindo (formerly of the People's Development Movement) and Manuel Esquivel (formerly of the Liberal Party).

Under Price's leadership, the PUP won all elections until 1984; in that election the PUP was defeated by the UDP, and Manuel Esquivel became Prime Minister. Price returned to power after elections in 1989. The UDP regained power in the 1993 national elections, and Esquivel became Prime Minister for a second time. The PUP won a landslide victory in the 1998 national elections, and PUP leader Said Musa was named Prime Minister. In the 2003 elections, the PUP won a majority of the votes and Musa continued as Prime Minister. One of his campaign promises was to improve living conditions in the underdeveloped and largely inaccessible southern part of the country. By 2005, there was general discontent with the PUP government, including tax increases in the national budget. The UDP won the 2008 elections, and attorney Dean Oliver Barrow became the nation's first black Prime Minister.

Today, the nation's economy is less dependent on forestry products and more dependent on exports of sugar, citrus, bananas, mangoes, rice, honey and other agricultural and fishery products, as well as on the growth of the tourism and garment (sewn from imported textiles) industries. One-third of the work force is employed in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, which generate about half of the gross national product. Sugar accounts for 60 percent of Belize's agricultural exports. Most of the food consumed nationally is produced by small farmers. Medium-sized Mennonite farms supply the country with dairy products, poultry and vegetables, and subsistence farmers produce most of the hogs for the national market as well as some corn, rice and beans for local markets. Large farms are oriented to produce export crops and beef cattle.

Belizean society evolved as an English-speaking Caribbean cultural blend of various races and nationalities. Because of British influence, Belize is the only country in Central America where English is the national language and Protestantism has been the dominant religion. However, due to the large-scale immigration of Spanish-speaking peoples from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the size of the Spanish-

speaking population has notably increased to about half of the nation's total population in 2000 and the size of the Roman Catholic population has grown correspondingly.

The Roman Catholic Church

Although the **Roman Catholic Church** was not officially present in British Honduras until 1851, when the first Catholic missionaries arrived, by 1860 the Catholic community in Belize City accounted for 15 percent of the total population. However, the growth of the Catholic Church in Belize prior to 1900 occurred chiefly among the Amerindian, *Mestizo* and Garifuna peoples in rural areas, and not among the Creoles in Belize City. Even as the early Protestant denominations in Belize grew mainly from the influx of Afro-European immigrants (called West Indians or Creoles) from the British-controlled islands of the Caribbean, so also the Catholic Church there increased principally due to the influx of Mayan refugees from Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula who settled in the northern lowlands of Belize during the late 1840s, as well as from the immigration of other Amerindian and *Mestizo* peoples from Guatemala after 1850.

The missionary zeal of the early **Jesuits** (Society of Jesus) from Jamaica, England and Italy prior to the 1890s, and of the **American Jesuits** from the Society of Jesus' Missouri Province since 1893, has strengthened the position of the Roman Catholic Church in Belize, especially among the *Mestizo*, Amerindians and Garifuna. The Vicariate Apostolic of British Honduras was created in 1893, but it was not until 1956 that a Bishopric was organized there. The Jesuits, aided by other religious orders, established schools and social ministries, in addition to parish churches, throughout the country among the various ethnic groups.

There were few, if any, Roman Catholics among the early settlers of Belize. In 1837, British Honduras was named as part of the **new Vicariate of Jamaica, with the Very Rev. Benito Fernández**, a Spanish Franciscan, as its first vicar (1837-1855). During the 1840s, Yucatecan Catholic priests briefly fostered the faith among Spanish-speaking merchants in Belize City. In 1848 the mission received its first notable influx of Catholics, mainly from Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula; about 7,000 *Mestizo* took refuge in British Honduras to escape the so-called **Caste War of Yucatán** (1847–1901). This war was an uprising by ethnic Mayans against the population of European descent (called *Yucatecos*) for political and economic control of the Yucatán Peninsula, which was an ancient center of Mayan civilization (ca. 500-1546 A.C.E.). The war was rooted in the defense by Mayans of their communal lands against the expansion of private ownership by non-Mayans, and as a reaction to the economic and political power and the cultural bigotry of the *Yucatecos*, composed of *criollos* of Spanish descent and of the growing *Mestizo* population.

Some Jesuits who passed through the colony in 1850 were asked by the newly-arrived Catholics from Mexico to have priests sent to them; and, as a result of their intervention, the **Vicar Apostolic of Jamaica** (Bishop Benito Fernández) came in person and brought with him **Friar James Eustace DuPeyron** (a Jamaican Jesuit), who built the first Catholic church in 1851, which is considered the founding date of the Belize Catholic Mission. Very Rev. James Eustace DuPeyron, S.J., succeeded to the Vicariate of Jamaica on 27 September 1855, and several times visited the Belize Catholic Mission up to 1871, when he resigned his office, and was succeeded by Very Rev. Joseph Woollett, S.J., as pro-vicar Apostolic.

Later, because of the difficulty of communication between Jamaica and British Honduras, the latter territory was separated from the Vicariate of Jamaica. This led to the establishment of the Prefecture Apostolic of British Honduras in 1888, which was headed by the Rev. Salvatore di Pietro (a Sicilian Jesuit) from 1869, with various interruptions, until 1893, when he was

appointed the Vicar Apostolic of British Honduras. The Rev. Salvatore di Pietro was consecrated Bishop in April of that year, in Belize, and served in that capacity until his death in 1898. He was succeeded by the Rev. Frederick Charles Hopkins, an English Jesuit.

A few months after the consecration of **Bishop Salvatore di Pietro** in 1893, the Belize Catholic Mission was removed from the care of the English province of the Society of Jesus, and attached to the Missouri province. This resulted in more priests coming to serve in the Belize Mission, and new residences were established for them. Ten years previously, in January 1883, some Sisters of Mercy had come to Belize from New Orleans and had opened a convent for girls. A school for boys was established in 1887 by the Rev. Cassian Gillett, an English Jesuit; this institution was replaced nine years later by **St. John Berchmans' College**, established in 1896 with 61 pupils. In May 1898, the **Sisters of the Holy Family** (an Afro-American religious order) arrived from New Orleans and began a teaching ministry in Dangriga among the Garifuna.

The cathedral of the diocese is Holy Redeemer Catholic Church in Belize City (first built in 1858, rebuilt several times, and consecrated as a cathedral in 1894); and Our Lady of Guadalupe Cathedral in Belmopan is the co-cathedral of the diocese.

At the turn of the century, the Catholic population of the vicariate were mostly scattered over the territory in small villages. There were few roads at that time; communication was by boat via the waterways or on horseback through the dense tropical bush. The diversity of language presented another obstacle, as the population was (and still is) very heterogeneous. Poverty was the condition of most people.

In 1908, the work of the Roman Catholic Church in British Honduras was described as follows (*Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1910): the total population of the vicariate was estimated at 40,000, of which the Catholics numbered about 23,500; however, not more than 14,000 were ministered to with any regularity and frequency by the Vicar Apostolic and his assistants. There were eight churches served by six resident priests, assisted by four non-ordained clerics and four lay brothers (all Jesuits), and 55 chapels, in which, from time to time, the priests from the residences officiated at the Mass and administer the Holy Sacraments. The Vicariate Apostolic of British Honduras was administered by the Society of Jesus, under the immediate jurisdiction of the Jesuits' Missouri province. The material support of the vicariate, since the contributions of its own people are entirely inadequate, was derived from the outside world, principally via the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, and from various charities in the USA.

The diocese was erected as the **Prefecture Apostolic of British Honduras in 1888**, and elevated to an Apostolic Vicariate in 1893. Its name was changed to the Apostolic Vicariate of Belize in 1925, and was elevated to a Diocese in 1956. In 1983 the name of the Diocese was changed to its current form.

The **Diocese of Belize City-Belmopan** is a jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Kingston (Jamaica) and a member of the **Antilles Episcopal Conference**. Bishop Dorick M. Wright replaced Bishop O.P. Martin as head of the Diocese of Belize City- Belmopan; he was installed on January 21, 2007. In 2006, the Diocese had a total of only 18 parishes, served by 17 diocesan and 13 religious priests (total = 30), in addition to 16 religious brothers and 49 religious sisters (nuns) in Belize. The headquarters church is the Cathedral of the Holy Redeemer in Belize City. The Bishops of the Diocese have been the following:

- Salvatore di Pietro, S.J. (1888-1898)
- Frederick Charles Hopkins, S.J. (1899-1923)
- Joseph Aloysius Murphy, S.J. (1923-1938)
- William A. Rice, S.J. (1938-1946)

- David Francis Hickey, S.J. (1948-1957)
- Robert Louis Hodapp, S.J. (1958-1983)
- Osmond Peter Martin, (1983-2006, the first Belizean-born prelate)
- Dorick McGowan Wright, (2006 -)

Diverse tensions arose within the Roman Catholic Church in Central America during the 1960s and following years, which resulted from challenges posed by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Medellín (Colombia) in 1968, Latin American Liberation Theology, and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement. These powerful new currents polarized Catholic bishops, priests (diocesan and religious), lay brothers and sisters (members of religious orders), and the laity in general into various factions. *Traditionalists* wanted the Church to remain as it was prior to the reforms approved by the Second Vatican Council (mid-1960s), with an emphasis on apostolic authority, orthodox theology, the sacraments and personal piety. *Reformers* generally supported the Church's modern, post-Vatican II stance of modernization and toleration of diversity based on its official Social Doctrine. *Progressives*, inspired by reforms approved at the Vatican II and Medellín conferences, sought to implement the new vision for "a preferential option for the poor" through social and political action aimed at transforming society and establishing greater social justice through peaceful democratic means. *Radicals* adopted the Marxist-inspired Liberation Theology and advocated violent revolution by the people as a means of overthrowing Central American dictatorships and creating Socialist states that would serve the poor marginalized masses. *Charismatic agents* sought to transform the spiritual and communal life of Catholics by means of the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit (including the "baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues"), rather than by political and social activism.

The **Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR)** began in Belize during the early 1970s, but little is known about the circumstances of its origin and development. However, the national office of the CCR is at the Pallotti Convent on Princess Margaret Drive in Belize City (P.O. Box 180, Belize City, Belize; telephone [501] 223-0516 or 223-1949; e-mail: palconvent@btl.net).

Today, Catholics predominate in every administrative district, with the exception of the District of Belize, where 55 percent of the population is Protestant and largely Creole. As the *Mestizo* and Amerindian segments of the population increase during coming years, along with a corresponding decrease in the proportion that is Creole, the size of the Catholic Community will tend to increase as well.

The Protestant Movement

Protestant missionary efforts were first begun in British Honduras by the Anglican Church (also known as the **Church of England**), which is now part of the **Church of the Province of the West Indies**. This jurisdiction includes the Caribbean islands as well as Guyana and Surinam, with headquarters in Nassau, in the Bahamas. Anglican chaplains were first sent to the Colony of British Honduras, beginning in the 1770s, by the **Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts** to attend to the spiritual needs of the British colonists and the military garrison concentrated in Belize City, a former pirate enclave at the mouth of the Belize River, probably founded in 1638.

Until the 1860s the Anglican Church (financed by the British colonial government) dominated the religious life of the colonists, which was centered in St. John's Anglican Cathedral, built in 1815. The size of the Anglican community in Belize has gradually increased over the years,

mainly due to natural population growth. From about 12,000 adherents in 1936, the number of Anglicans increased to 17,783, according to the 1970 census. In 1980, there were about 16,894 adherents, scattered among 26 organized parishes and mission stations, and the Anglican Church operated 23 primary schools and two secondary schools in Belize. However, according to the 2000 census, there were a total of 12,386 Anglican adherents in Belize, which means that many former Anglicans may have joined other churches or reported “no religion.”

During the early 1800s, groups of English nonconformists, or dissenters (meaning non-Anglicans), began arriving in British Honduras, which led to a progressive erosion of Anglican influence even though it was the Established Church. English Baptist and Methodist missionaries were sent to the colony in 1822 and 1824, respectively, and **Scottish Presbyterians** began work in Belize City in 1825. **St. Andrews Presbyterian Church** was formally established in 1850 with public support from colonial authorities. This church affiliated with the (Presbyterian) Free Church of Scotland; its first pastor was the Rev. David Arthur from Scotland, who served for almost 25 years. For decades the church had an intermittent life; in 1905 it affiliated with the Church of Scotland (the State Presbyterian church). For long periods the church was pastored by Methodist (1914-1919, 1939-1953, 1955-1968) or Baptist ministers (1922-1923).

By 1856, the Protestant community of Belize City, where most of the inhabitants of the colony resided, included 2,500 Anglicans, 500 Methodists, 500 Baptists, and 200 Presbyterians, in addition to 1,000 Roman Catholics and 2,260 “others” in a total population of about 7,000 people.

The origin of **British Methodist** work in Belize is attributed to a British merchant, William Jeckel, who arrived in the early 1800s and was instrumental in organizing Methodist societies in Belize City, Burrell Boom, and Freetown. In 1824, Jeckel requested help from the **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society** in England, which soon sent three missionaries to the colony. In 1829 Methodist work consisted of one small chapel in Belize City and a few preaching points along the inland rivers. According to Kenneth Grubb (1937), the **British and Foreign Bible Society** began colportage work in the Colony in 1819 with the help of the Methodists.

Early Methodist missionary endeavors in Belize were plagued by sickness and death, storms and fires, staff shortages and financial hardships, and membership growth and decline for more than a century. In 1913, the British Methodist District of the Wesleyan Methodist Church consisted of 2,000 communicant members and was served by nine ministers, including three native Belizeans.

After the withdrawal of the Wesleyan Missionary Society from the Western Caribbean in 1930, the British Honduras District was under the supervision of the Methodist Church in Jamaica from 1932 to 1952. In 1967, the Belize-Honduras District became a founding member of the autonomous **Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas**, with headquarters in St. Johns, Antigua, in the West Indies. In 1960 there were 1,800 communicant members among the 15 Methodist congregations in Belize; in 1978, 22 churches were reported with about 1,700 communicant members; and in 2000 the situation was about the same.

The London-based Baptist Missionary Society began work in Belize City in 1822, with the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Bourne, not to serve the spiritual needs of the English colonists but to Christianize their slaves and freedmen, as former African slaves who had gained their freedom were called. In 1832, the population of the Colony of Belize totaled about 4,550, which included 2,100 slaves, 2,200 free African people, and fewer than 300 whites.

The Baptists in Belize shared a similar history of trials and tribulations with the Methodists, in an inhospitable climate that caused much sickness and death among the early missionaries. Bourne organized the First Baptist church in 1825 and served a small congregation of 20

members until leaving the Colony in 1834. Another Englishman, Alexander Henderson, arrived in late 1834 to continue the work of evangelism among slaves, soldiers, and discharged prisoners in the poorer sections of Belize City.

When the work of the Belize Baptist Mission began to expand into the interior among different ethnic groups, Henderson appealed to the Baptist Missionary Society in London for additional personnel. Henry Filpot arrived in 1838 but died in Belize only four months later. Two other missionary families also sailed for the Colony: the Wetheralls in 1839 and the Hoskens in 1841. However, Mr. Weatherall died aboard ship before reaching Belize, and the Hoskens left the Colony after only a few months due to health problems.

Henderson was assisted by other missionaries from England during the 1840s, but not without controversy. Because Henderson practiced "closed communion" (only baptized Baptists could receive the Lord's Supper), several new recruits from the Baptist Missionary Society refused to work with him. Henderson was forced to resign from the Mission in 1850, but he soon organized the **Independent Baptist Mission of Belize** with the support of most of his former members. Consequently, the Baptist Missionary Society decided to abandon Belize, recalled its missionaries and sold its properties, leaving Henderson as the uncontested leader of the Baptist movement. In 1850, Baptist work in Belize included two organized churches, seven preaching stations, three day schools, five Sunday schools, and about 230 baptized members. Henderson pioneered the founding of the Queen Street Baptist Church in 1850, which he pastored from 1850 to 1879.

During the late 1830s, a young Englishman immigrant, **Frederick Crowe** (born in 1819 to English parents while living in Belgium; see Crowe's *The Gospel in Central America*, published in London by Charles Gilpin in 1850), became interested in Henderson's work, was converted and joined the Baptist Church. Crowe, with some formal education in English and French, became a teacher in the Baptist school and, later, served as an evangelist and missionary with the Belize Baptist Mission. Between 1841 and 1846, Crowe was a traveling agent for the **British Honduran Bible Society** and in 1843 became the first Protestant missionary to work in Guatemala. Although Crowe was expelled from Guatemala by the government in April 1846, he and Henderson, together with other helpers, distributed at least 2,000 Spanish and 500 English New Testaments during the mid-1840s.

After his return to Guatemala in April 1846, Crowe was imprisoned for contempt of court in Belize City because he conscientiously refused to take an oath in a legal case (he believed that the Scriptures prohibited it), an attitude common among Dissenters. Crowe served an unprecedented five months (from 29 June to 4 December 1846) in a Belize prison. It was not until 1863 that the British Colonial Government passed an act that allowing an affirmation or declaration to be made instead of swearing an oath. Meanwhile, Baptists in Belize suffered occasional persecution because of their religious convictions.

Following Henderson's retirement in 1879 due to failing health, Baptist work was carried on by laypeople until the arrival of missionary David Waring from England in 1881. Waring continued the work begun by his predecessors, including outreach to the Yucatecan Maya in the north and the Garifuna in the south, as well as supporting Baptist work in the Bay Islands of Honduras, begun by Mr. and Mrs. John Warner in 1849. Waring sought assistance from the **Jamaican Baptist Missionary Society**, which sent James Bryant to Belize in 1886. When Waring returned to England in 1888, Bryant was placed in charge of the Belize Baptist Mission.

Encouraged by Bryant, the Jamaican Society was invited to assume responsibility for the Belize field. Soon thereafter, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Brown arrived from Jamaica along with their nephew, Robert Cleghorn, to administer the work in Belize, which began to prosper under the

new leadership. By 1901, the Baptist Mission reported 353 baptized members and 1,324 adherents among nine organized congregations, along with six schools and more than 600 children enrolled.

After Brown's retirement in 1901 due to poor health, Cleghorn became the chief pastor and superintendent of the Baptist Mission in a distinguished career that ended in 1939, after celebrating his fiftieth year of service in Belize. To commemorate the occasion, Cleghorn wrote *A Brief History of Baptist Missionary Work in British Honduras (1822-1939)*.

Two major events occurred that seriously affected Baptist Mission work, as well as that of all Protestant Churches in Belize. The first was World War I, from 1914-1918. Many young men from Belize served with British troops during the war, only to return home restless and unsettled to face unemployment and economic decline in the Colony. Consequently, many Belizeans emigrated to other countries, mainly the USA, hoping to improve their socio-economic status. This trend was accentuated by the combined impact of the Great Hurricane of 1931 that brought death and destruction and the Great Depression of the 1930s that created economic disaster in Belize.

Destruction from the hurricane was greatest in Belize City, where most buildings were either destroyed or seriously damaged. Three Baptist church buildings were completely destroyed, while two others were badly damaged, along with schools and other Mission properties. The Baptists made arrangements with **St. Andrews Presbyterian Church** to hold services in their brick building--one of the few buildings in Belize City to escape destruction--where the Baptists continued to meet until the end of 1933, when Queen Street Baptist Church was reconstructed. Over the next few years, other church and school buildings were repaired or rebuilt with assistance from government loans or contributions from abroad. However, some church buildings destroyed in the hurricane were simply abandoned, chiefly because these settlements were depopulated as the inhabitants moved to other localities on higher ground.

The Rev. Harry Brown was the last supervisor for the British Baptists in Belize. He served during the 1950s to 1960 when the **Conservative Baptist Home Mission Society** (from the USA) was invited to administer with the Belize Baptist Mission. The Rev. Arnold Pearson was the first Conservative Baptist to supervise the work. The N. T. Dellingers arrived shortly after the Pearsons to assist in rebuilding the ministry. In 1967, the Belize Baptist Association was formed to serve the existing churches; it was incorporated in 1976 as The Baptist Church of Belize. In 1972, the Bible Extension School was established to train local leaders. By 1978 there were six organized churches and 330 baptized members, mainly among the Creoles.

Several missionaries associated with the **Southern Baptist Convention** arrived in Belize in 1977 to begin work in the interior and to assist with Baptist work in Belize City. The Southern Baptists were invited to join the Belize Baptist Association in 1979, which added a new dimension to the people called "Belize Baptists," and the Association began a Spanish-speaking ministry in the 1980s. The independent **Big Falls Baptist Church** was organized in 1975 by missionary Mike Willis; and **Outreach For Belize** was established in 1977 by an independent Baptist missionary, John Collier. Missionaries associated with **Baptist Bible Fellowship** arrived in 1979 and began an independent ministry. In 2000, there were a total of twenty-five Baptist congregations in Belize with about 2,500 baptized members. According to the 2000 census, there were 8,077 Baptist adherents.

The **Seventh-day Adventist Church** entered Belize in early 1900s as an extension of their work in Honduras that began in 1887. The Adventist Mission in British Honduras was officially organized in 1922, and in 1930 the two countries were separated administratively. By 1960, the Adventist community in Belize numbered 1,050, grew to about 2,500 in 1970, and increased to

about 12,000 in 1978. Adventist work was centered in the Districts of Belize and Corozal. In 2000, the Adventists reported forty-eight congregations and 10,700 members, which made this the largest Protestant denomination in Belize in terms of communicant membership. The 2000 census reported 12,160 Adventist adherents.

The **Church of the Nazarene** began work in Belize in the 1930s as an extension of their work in Guatemala, after two Mayan Indian lay-preachers walked more than sixty miles from their home in the Petén of Guatemala to Benque Viejo on the border to evangelize and start new churches in British Honduras. In 1931 the Mission Council of the Church of the Nazarene decided to enter Belize as a new field of service, and eventually sent two veteran, elderly, single female missionaries to work in Benque Viejo, Cayo District. By 1955, 11 Nazarene missionaries were serving in Belize, assisted by 22 national workers, who served ten organized churches with about 450 members and 300 children enrolled in six Nazarene schools. In 1966, there were sixteen churches and eleven missions. During the 1960s work began among East Indians, Garífuna, Kekchí, and Mopan-Maya near Punta Gorda in the Toledo District.

The Fitkin Memorial Bible College was established in Benque Viejo in 1950. Nazarene High School, a separate entity, was established in Belize City in 1964, and the Bible College was closed in 1965. Also, the Nazarenes began a program of Theological Education by Extension (TEE) throughout Belize in several languages: English, Spanish, and various Indian dialects. In 2000, the Nazarenes reported twenty-eight congregations with 1,820 members (6,117 adherents according to the 2000 census). The 2008 Church of the Nazarene Annual District Assembly Journal recorded 41 churches and 19 missions, with a total membership (communicants) of 2,152.

The Church of the Nazarene. The missionary program of the Church of the Nazarene began to move out from Guatemala into surrounding countries. The first to be entered was the tiny British colony of British Honduras between Guatemala and the Caribbean coast. This country, self-governing since 1964, has been called Belize since 1973. It is only 174 miles long (north to south) and 68 miles across at its widest point with a total area of 8,866 square miles. Its population is about 150,000. English is still the official language of the country although Spanish is spoken in towns and villages near the Guatemala border.

In 1930, two Mayan Indians who had been converted in the Flores Church of the Nazarene in the Peten region of Guatemala felt the call of God to carry their witness into this neighboring country. Making their arduous way through the intervening 60 miles of jungle, Teodoro Tesucum and Encarnacion Banos reached the border town of Benque Viejo. Here they testified to the people and found encouraging responses. Their subsequent report to Field Superintendent Robert Ingram resulted in Rev. and Mrs. Ingram visiting the area in 1933 in the course of their trip to the Peten. In 1934, the Guatemala Mission Council appointed Leona Gardner, veteran of nearly 25 years in Cuba and 7 years in Guatemala, as the first missionary to that country. She was joined in 1936 by Augie Holland, the multi-talented missionary who had launched the highly successful printing program in Guatemala several years before.

These two elderly ladies carried on a beautiful, caring ministry in the Benque Viejo area until in 1938 Miss Gardner, then 75, returned to the United States. Other missionaries joined the Belize team through the years. Since British Honduras had no public schools, the Nazarene children were forced to attend Roman Catholic schools where they were constantly harassed and abused. The need for a Nazarene day school was pressing, and to organize one, the Ronald Bishops were sent, arriving in June 1944. Before long, nine schools were in operation, and eventually 7 more schools were added. Mary Lou Riggle arrived in 1965 and gave outstanding leadership to the school program.

Even before the country became self-governing in 1964, there had been increasing emphasis on public education and health programs which resulted in an eventual phasing out of the Nazarene day schools and a greatly reduced activity in the clinics which had been established. However, in recent years, the Belize government has honored Nazarene schools that meet the high standards of the government. When standards for buildings, personnel, etc., are met, the government will pay the teachers in our Nazarene elementary schools at the same rate as governmental schools. Today there are many Nazarene elementary schools and even a Nazarene High school in the largest city of the country, Belize City.

In 1970, Belize became a National-Mission District with the appointment of Rev. Alvin Young as the first district superintendent from Belize. In 1977, the Rev. Onesimo Pot was elected to the office. Currently, Rev. John Tzib is serving as the elected district superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene in Belize.

It was reported in 2002 there were over 2,200 Nazarenes worshipping and serving in 32 churches of the Nazarene in Belize.

Belize is often a country hit by devastating hurricanes, as was the case in 2001. Yet the strong, determined people of Belize have learned to re-build homes, churches, and schools. With the help of Nazarenes throughout the world - at times of great devastation - they have kept the message of holiness alive and flourishing in their country.

There are no missionaries in Belize today. The country is served by very competent local leadership from Belize.

Sources: 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; and the Church of the Nazarene website: <http://www.caribbeannazarene.org/wmcaribbean/Countries/Belize/tabid/72/Default.aspx>

In 1935, Kenneth Grubb, in *Religion in Central America* (1937:139-140), reported that British Honduras had a population of 54,744 and Belize City about 16,000. Religiously the population was classified as follows: Roman Catholic, 59 percent, Anglican, 22 percent; Methodist, 14 percent; Baptist 3 percent; and the remainder divided between various groups (Presbyterians, Adventist and Nazarenes). However, Grubb did not mention the Amerindian, Creole or Garifuna religions, which were also present in the Colony.

In 1961, Clyde W. Taylor and Wade T. Coggins (of the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association) reported a total of 6,467 Protestant church members, 85 organized churches, 24 mission stations, 42 foreign workers, 7 ordained national workers, 74 lay national workers, and a Protestant community of 28,238. The larger denominations reported the following statistics: Methodist Church with 17 churches, 1,801 members and a community of 14,505; Anglican Church with 22 churches, 3,000 members and a community of 10,000; Church of the Nazarene with 23 churches, 493 members and a community of 1,993; Seventh-day Adventist with 16 churches, 954 members and a community of 1,056; also mentioned were the Gospel Missionary Union, Christian Missions in Many Lands (Plymouth Brethren / Christian Brethren), Assemblies of God, Church of God (Cleveland, TN), and the Christian Literature Crusade. However, the Baptists, Presbyterians and Mennonites were not mentioned.

The Gospel Missionary Union (GMU), an independent Holiness mission that has been renamed **Avant Ministries** (Kansas City, MO), sent their first missionaries to Belize in 1955, the Gordon Lees, who established the Yarbrough Bible Church in Belize City in 1956. The GMU acquired a 20-acre tract of land about 30 miles from Belize City in 1956, where they opened a

camping-conference center and a Bible school, known as Carol Farm. Outreach began among the Yucatecan-Maya in 1960 in Orange Walk district, and a Christian bookstore was established in Belize City in 1962. In 2000, the GMU reported 17 congregations with about 940 members.

Several Anabaptist-Mennonite groups began arriving in Belize in the late 1950s from northern Mexico, and by 1978 there were at least a dozen Mennonite agricultural colonies in the country, mainly composed of Old Colony Mennonites (Reinlanders), *Kleinegemeinde* Mennonites (“The Little Brotherhood”) and Sommerfelders who spoke Low German. After Hurricane Hattie devastated parts of Belize in 1961, a number of Mennonite agencies arrived to offer disaster relief, including the **Beachy Amish** and the **Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities**. In 1969, the **Mennonite Central Committee** established the Mennonite Center in Belize City to assist the Mennonite colonies both economically and socially.

The Mennonites were looking for new tracts of land suitable for farming. Special arrangements were made with the Belize government permitting the Mennonites to settle there and establish agricultural colonies, which have since made a vital contribution to the Belizean economy and diet. The government of Belize granted certain exemptions and rights to the three Mennonite communities that immigrated to Belize in the late 1950s and early 1960s. An agreement or Privilegium (signed in December 1957 between the government and each community) spells out the exemptions, rights and responsibilities of the Mennonite communities. Under the Privilegium, the Mennonite communities have the right to run their own churches and schools using the Low German language, and their members are exempt from military service, any social security or compulsory insurance system, and the swearing of oaths. In return, the Privilegium commits the Mennonites to invest in the country, be self-supporting, produce food for both the local and export markets, conduct themselves as good citizens, and pay all normal duties and taxes established by law. The Mennonite communities tax themselves in order to make lump-sum property tax payments to the government and to finance schools, and public works and other internal operations. The communities legally register their land in the name of the community and restrict individual ownership of community land to members in good standing with the community’s Mennonite Church. Other Mennonites who live in Belize have no special arrangements with the government.

By 1978, the **Belize Evangelical Mennonite Church** had been organized with five congregations and 122 communicant members among the Creoles, *Mestizo*, Mayan and Garifuna. In addition, ten distinct Mennonite communities reported 37 organized congregations and about 1,900 communicant members. Overall, in 1978, the total Mennonite community in Belize numbered about 2,800, and most of them resided in agricultural colonies at Spanish Lookout, Blue Creek and Shipyard. In 1987, the total Mennonite membership was 2,236 in 37 congregations, with a total community of about 3,286 people. According to the 2000 census, the total Mennonite community in Belize numbered 9,497 adherents; however, the *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* only reported 3,575 members in 40 congregations in 2003.

Other non-Pentecostal groups in Belize include the **The Salvation Army** (1913), **Christian Brethren** (1949), **National Presbyterian Church of Mexico** (1958, mission work began among the Mayan population in northern Belize, which led to a merger with St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Belize City in 1987 to form the **National Presbyterian Church of Belize**; in 1988, ministry began among the Chinese population), independent **Christian Churches / Churches of Christ** (1969), **Friends / Quakers** (1975), **Congregational Methodist Church** (2002), **Gospel Outreach Ministry International** (1991), **Mission to the World / Presbyterian Church in America** (1996), the **Methodist Protestant Church**, and dozens of other small denominations and independent churches.

Although there were few **Pentecostal churches** in Belize in 1960 (the oldest are the **Pentecostal Christian Assembly in Roaring Creek Village**, founded in 1912; and **City Mission International Pentecostal Church in Belize City**, founded in 1938), since that time the Pentecostal movement has experienced substantial growth throughout the country. From five organized churches and about 200 members in 1960, the Pentecostals grew to 67 congregations and 1,656 baptized members in 1978. According to the 1980 census, Pentecostal adherents numbered 3,237 and represented 2.3 percent of the national population. According to the 2000 census, there were a total of 17,189 Pentecostal adherents in Belize, which represented 7.4 percent of the national population.

In 1978, the largest Pentecostal denomination in the country was the **Kekchí and Mayan Churches of Belize**, founded in 1968, which only reported 15 congregations and 750 members. The **Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee)** arrived in 1944 and by 1978 there were 22 churches and 610 members. In 2007 the National Overseer was the Rev. Juan Maria Barrios.

The **Assemblies of God of Jamaica** (Evangel Temple in Kingston) sent the Rev. and Mrs. Malchus B. Bennett to Belize in September 1946 to begin missionary work. By 1949, several small congregations had been established in Belize City, Sand Hill, Stann Creek and Corozal. The arrival in 1951 of the Rev. and Mrs. Walter Clifford, who previously had served as missionaries in India and Ceylon for 20 years with the **Assemblies of God (Springfield, Missouri)**, brought experience and encouragement to the work in Belize. Later in 1951, the Cliffords established a Bible Institute in Belize City to train Christian workers. The mother church in Belize City, Bethel Temple, opened a primary school in 1953 under the administration of the Cliffords.

In 1960, the Assemblies of God in Belize reported only three churches with a total of 90 baptized members. However, the work was hindered by internal controversies in 1955 with Malchus B. Bennett and in 1969 with Lloyd Wright that led to the formation of two rival groups with a combined membership in 1978 of only a few hundred members. These divisions led to demoralization and decline in the work of the Assemblies of God in Belize: some of the talented Belizean and Jamaican pastors went to the USA and others became separatists; the number of national workers declined from 11 in 1969 to four in 1971; and the number of adherents declined from 480 in 1969 to 149 in 1971.

In 1978, Missionary Edward Fairbanks, affiliated with the **Assemblies of God Division of Foreign Missions**, reported six organized churches and 17 preaching points, with a total of only 96 baptized members. The rival Bethel Assembly, pastored by Lloyd Wright, reported one church (formerly known as the Evangelistic Center, founded in 1951 and rebuilt in 1962) with less than 100 members. The independent Belize United Assembly, pastored by Ralph Clark, had one church (founded in 1976) with about 50 members. The later two groups are located in Belize City. The **Council of the Assemblies of God of Belize** was reorganized in 1980, under missionary superintendent Alver Rance who coordinated the work of the various churches in English and Spanish. At that time, there was only one ordained Belizean pastor, ten licensed preachers, and 15 lay preachers, for a total of 26. In 1985, the Assemblies of God reported 41 churches and 16 preaching points, but with only about 1,000 members; in 1998, there were a total of 47 churches served by 45 pastors and Christian workers; in 2001, there were 54 churches and 14 preaching points, served by 27 ordained pastors and 40 Christian workers.

In 2003, the Assemblies of God in Belize reported 81 churches, missions and preaching points, comprised of Creole, Hispanic, Chinese and Mayan believers. The ministry to Chinese in Belize began in 1994 when Assemblies of God missionaries Alton and Norma Smith opened their home for a Bible study. However, some of the Chinese believers

returned to Taiwan, leaving the church with few members. With no Chinese-speaking leadership, the work closed in 1999. In July 2000, an independent Chinese congregation, pastored by a student at the Assemblies of God Bible School in Belize, became part of the Belize Assemblies of God fellowship. Since then, the Holy Oil Assembly of God (Mandarin-speaking Chinese) in Belize City has grown to more than 100 believers and has established several outreach ministries, including Bible studies and prayer meetings in Chinese communities outside Belize City. Of the total population of Belize, nearly 20,000 are Chinese (mostly Taiwanese). In 2002, the Belize Assemblies of God established a camp and conference facility, Green Pastures Retreat Center, which has become a place of ethnic unity that depicts the uniqueness of its multicultural ministry in Belize.

The **Church of God in Christ (COGIC)** traces its origin in Belize to 1953-1955, when Malchus B. Bennett left the Assemblies of God and became affiliated with the COGIC, an Afro-American denomination with headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee. However, after 25 years of labor, only five churches and two missions had been established by the COGIC, with 540 members, by 1978. Most of the members of this group lived in the Districts of Belize (54 percent), Orange Walk (19 percent) and Cayo (17 percent). The mother church in Belize City, Calvary Temple, operates a large primary school under the supervision of Bishop Bennett.

Other smaller Pentecostal denominations include the **Pentecostal Church of God of America** (1956), **Church of the Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith Church** (1957), **Elim Fellowship** (1967), **Shield of Faith International Mission** (1983), **Calvary Commission** (1984), **United Pentecostal Church International** (1984), **Full Gospel Grace Fellowship** (1989), **Wesleyan Holiness Church** (1992), **International Pentecostal Holiness Church** (2000), **Church of God of Prophecy** (Cleveland, TN), **Church of God** (Anderson, IN), **Resurrection Churches and Ministries**, **Belizean International Church of Christ** (affiliated with the Boston Church of Christ), and **Youth With A Mission** (YWAM).

Many Christian groups have been associated with the **Protestant Council (PC)** that was established in 1957 by five denominations: Baptist, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian and The Salvation Army. Despite many attempts to close down the PC it survived, and in 1982 it was renamed the **Belize Association of Evangelical Churches (BAEC)**. By then, it also included other denominations: the Assemblies of God, Gospel Missionary Union and Methodist Protestant Church. The BAEC had over 30 members in November 2008, when its president was the Rev. Eugene Crawford, who is affiliated with the Central Assembly of God in Belize City. One of its main purposes is “to assist with both the spiritual needs of citizens and the social transformation that is needed to enhance the lives of all Belizeans, especially those living in poverty.”

The **Belize Council of Churches (BCC)**, which in turn is related to the **Caribbean Council of Churches** and the **World Council of Churches (WCC)**, was founded in 1978 as the **Belize Christian Council**; it became the BCC in 1981. Its mission statement is: “Being the prophetic voice to the nation through Jesus Christ.” The current members of the BCC are: the Anglican Church (Province of the West Indies), Black Cross Nurses, Chinese Church, Chinese Mission, Church of God in Christ, the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas, Presbyterian Church, Quakers/Friends, Roman Catholic Church and The Salvation Army.

The Belize Council of Churches and the Belize Association of Evangelical Churches function separately but cooperate on given occasions.

An Overview of Religious Growth Trends, 1970-2000

Historically, the majority of Protestants in Belize have been Anglicans and Methodists, although most are non-communicants, which reflects an attitude of religious indifference or nominalism. However, the proportional decline of Anglican and Methodist adherents in the total population was offset by the growth of other Protestant denominations between 1970 and 2000, based on an analysis of the corresponding census data.

In 1970, the Protestant community represented 27.8 percent of the total population of 119,935 (1970 census); the Anglican community had dropped to 14.3 percent; the Methodists had declined to 8.9 percent; and all other Protestant adherents represented 2.6 percent. Roman Catholic adherents represented 64.6 percent, which indicates that the Roman Catholic population had grown significantly between 1960 and 1970, mainly because of immigration from Mexico and Guatemala. Those listed in the categories of “other religions,” “no religion” or “not stated” totaled 7.6 percent of the national population.

In 1980, Roman Catholic adherents had declined slightly to 61.7 percent of the total population (1980 census); Protestant adherents had increased to 28.9 percent; those reporting “other religions” or “no religion” (or no answer) were 9.4 percent. Protestant adherents were listed as follows: Anglican, 11.8 percent; Methodist, 6.0 percent; Mennonite, 3.9 percent; Adventist, 3.0 percent; Pentecostal, 2.2 percent; Nazarene, 1.1 percent; and Baptist, 0.9 percent.

In 1991, Roman Catholic adherents were 57.7 percent of the total population of 192,877 (1991 census); Protestant adherents were 34.3 percent; “other religions” were 3.4 percent; and those listed in the categories of “no religion” or “not stated” totaled 6.0 percent of the national population. Protestant adherents were listed as follows: Anglican, 6.9 percent; Pentecostals, 6.3 percent; Methodists, 4.2 percent; Adventists, 4.1 percent; Mennonites, 4.0 percent; Nazarenes, 2.5 percent; all other Protestants, 2.5 percent.

Overall, according to the 2000 census, the largest group of Protestant adherents was Pentecostal (7.4 percent of the national population) followed by Anglican (5.3 percent), Adventist (5.2 percent), Mennonite (4.1 percent), Baptist (3.5 percent), Methodist (3.5 percent) and Nazarene (2.6 percent); all other Protestants adherents were 4.2 percent.

Other Religions

According to the 2000 census, “**Other religions**” in Belize had a total of 10,677 adherents (4.6 percent of the national population), among which were the following **non-Protestant Christian groups**: **Maronite Christians** (Eastern-Rite believers who recognize the authority of the Pope in Rome) among the Lebanese; a **Greek Orthodox Church** in Santa Elena, Cayo District; and a significant presence of **Jehovah’s Witnesses** (42 churches, 1,561 members and 3,366 adherents in 2005) and of the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** (Mormon missionary work began in 1980), which reported 12 churches and 3,430 adherents in 2008. There are small communities of **Christadelphians**, **Unity School of Christianity**, and **The Family** (formerly known as the Children of God).

Non-Christian religions (2000 census data) include **Hinduism** (367 among East Indians); **Islam** (243 adherents, including Black Muslims); **Garifuna religion**; **Myalism** (the old tribal religion of the Ashanti adapted to the Caribbean context), **Obeah** (witchcraft), and **Rastafarianism** among the Creole population.

Traditionally most of the **Asian Indian immigrants were Hindus, although some were Muslims**. Today, the Asian Indian heritage persons – whose ancestors arrived during the 19th

century – live in villages scattered all over Belize; their ancestors intermarried with the local people and lost their language and original religions during subsequent generations. However, they are still identifiable today because of their physiognomy and are known as “Hindus” in Belizean society, although some have converted to Christianity. They live in reasonably compact rural communities and number between 10,000 and 15,000, which is more than five percent of the population of Belize.

The newer **Asian Indian Diaspora** in Belize consists of “People of Indian Origin” (known as PIOs) who arrived in the country during the 1950s, when Belize was still a British colony. The PIO community is comprised almost entirely of **Sindhis** (a Sindhi-speaking ethnic group who originated in Sindh, now a province of Pakistan, and who are Hindus), so there are few differences among them. They are mostly retail traders who have been well accepted by the general population. Although they have little interest in local politics, their economic strength assures them an influential social position in Belize. The PIOs maintain close and regular contact with India through frequent trips to visit friends and relatives in their homeland.

The **Islamic community of Belize** is estimated at 2,794 (2008) and represents about one percent of the total population; the community is led by the **Islamic Mission of Belize** (IMB), headquartered in Belize City. As the only recognized Islamic organization in Belize, the IMB's Islamic center has a prayer hall and a primary school. There is a small Jewish community (less than 1,000) and a yet smaller **Baha’i Faith** community (205 adherents) that add to Belize’s pluralistic religious life.

Among practitioners of **Amerindian religions** and **Popular Catholicism** there are “specialists” who practice witchcraft (*brujería*), shamanism (*chamanismo*) and folk healing (*curanderismo*). Despite the multifaceted missionary efforts by various Christian groups from North America and Europe, many members of the surviving Amerindian population continue to adhere to their traditional animistic religious beliefs and practices that existed prior to the arrival of the Spanish explorers. Three of the Amerindian peoples in Central America that survived the ravages of colonization are the Kekchí, Mopán and Yucatán Maya in Belize, which today number around 25,000.

“**Popular religiosity**” (syncretistic) is practiced by a majority of the Roman Catholic population. Most Mayans (Amerindian) are nominal Roman Catholics who also maintain native animistic religious beliefs and practices. Most **Garifuna** (Afro-Amerindian) today are marginal Christians (many claim to be Roman Catholics or Protestants) who still maintain their traditional cultural and religious beliefs and practices based on animism.

Clifton L. Holland

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GLORY TO GOD FOR HIS HEALINGS

By Lorna Lisk
WUPC Founder-President
IN BELIZE, CENTRAL AMERICA

Last May 8 [2004], with God's grace, I conducted a healing service at the **National Rally of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Belize** in Central America. During our five-day stay in Belize City, I conducted seven healing services. Our Lord instantly healed six blind people, two of them in the national rally.

Three blind people were restored their sight at my healing service at **St. John Vianney Church** for its parishioners two days earlier. The eyelids of one old blind lady were shut. When I parted them she uttered she could see light. She also attended the national rally where her eyelids were already open and she could see my face and red dress. The other blind person healed was a young inmate at Hatieville Prison where I performed a healing service the same day before 400 inmates.

My other healing services were before the **Pallotti sisters**, two high schools and a large rosary group.

Among those instantly healed by our awesome Healer [were] three deaf people, one totally deaf. One lame person was able to walk. Paralyzed from his thighs down, a man was healed and walked normally. Four people with numbness in different parts of their bodies were relieved of this malady. Able to lift their hands normally were two people healed of bursitis and two others of frozen shoulders. Several with poor eyesight could see well. Close to 90 people were instantly healed of pain in various parts of their bodies. People gave oral testimonies when healed. One of these was an inmate healed of pain all over his body.

There were also spiritual healings. A young lady afflicted with depression for many years which got worse after her husband committed suicide was liberated ten hours after I prayed for her in proxy. **Glory to God for His healings and miracles. Through people's witness of these, we pray that many will realize that Jesus is a loving God of miracles and will be converted to Him for their salvation.**

My husband Thom assisted and gave brief talks in the above healing services. As a professional motivational and business speaker, he spoke before the **Rotary Club, Lions Club and the Business of Belize**. He and I appeared on three TV stations and on national radio regarding the national rally, healing service and business. One TV interviewer said he is a skeptic and wanted to see God's healing in action. Hence, we went to a street in front of the **Pallotti Convent** where we stayed. I approached one lady and asked if she wanted to be prayed with after I introduced myself as having an international healing ministry. She said "Yes" and she handed me her wrist for healing of pain and her fingers of numbness. After I uttered a short prayer, she said that her pain and numbness vanished. This episode was shown on TV four times. Praise God!

Source: <http://www.worldpray.org/News2004.htm>