

MORAVIAN MOMENT #13.....

Breaking new grounds

The Church in the Eastern West Indies Province did survive in spite of the many challenges it had to face. The Mission Board was cognizant of the fact that if the Church was going to grow and impact the community, that local leadership had to be developed and trusted.

In 1879, a Conference was called by the Mission Board, to nominate a Directing Board for the Province and to work out a policy for moving in a systematic manner towards independence. The Conference was attended by the Superintendents and Wardens (Administrator) of all the Islands. Antigua was the only Island not represented due to the yellow fever epidemic which prevented travel into and out of the Island at the time. The Conference agreed that the Eastern West Indies Province would now be a Province in transition from Mission status to Synodal status, meaning that the leaders in the Province would have more direct control of the work than formerly. They would have authority to hold Mission Conferences, provided that the congregations paid the expenses. This body was expected to meet every five years where they would nominate three brethren who, on the approval of the Mission Board, would become the Provincial Elders Conference (PEC). The first PEC was formed in 1880 with Brother Benjamin Romig, President, Brother Samuel Warner, Treasurer, and Brother J. Ludwig Hastings, Secretary. The new Board faced trying and testing times, for the economic depression continued and as a result many of the best members migrated in search of better living conditions, thus seriously affecting the work of the Church. In addition, the staff was severely reduced by death and resignations, due to ill health.

In 1888, the Mission Board, recognizing the tremendous efforts of the west Indian people, under disheartening conditions, decided to recommend to the General synod that, in considering the fitness of the West Indian Church for independence, the financial aspect must be considered as secondary to the question of the Spiritual growth and efforts of the congregations, and therefore the amount of administrative control given to the local people, should not be reduced because hard conditions beyond their control, hindered them from becoming financially self supporting. This was indeed a significant acknowledgement by the Mission Board, that the Spiritual life of the congregation must take precedence. Jesus himself declared, *"seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all other things will be added unto you"*.

The Church was on the right footing.

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