

The Life of Elysée Joseph

March 24, 1946-January 12, 2010

By James M. Beaty¹

Early Life: 1946-1963

Birth and Childhood

Elysée Joseph was born on March 24, 1946 in Dame-Marie, Haiti, and did his elementary studies there. This is a small town on the northwest coast of the southern peninsula of that country. The economy of that town is based mainly on agriculture and fishing and, unlike the other towns in Haiti, most of its streets are paved. His father was a Baptist pastor and from childhood he traveled with his father, visiting churches in the district. When he was an adolescent his parents told him what had happened to him when he was just a child. He wrote,

When I was seven years old, I had a strong fever; and my father and mother prayed to God and said, “Lord, if our son, Elysée, will serve you, please heal him; but if he will not serve you, take him.” And immediately God healed me. God is so good for me and my family! They praised God for that miracle, but did not tell me about it until years later.

At the age of twelve he began teaching in the Sunday School. At age fourteen he taught a class for candidates for water baptism and he, himself, was baptized that same year.

Formation and Education: 1960-1977

Bible School and High School: 1960-1968

For the next three years (1960-1963) he was in the West Indies Bible School in Cayes² and the following year (1963-1964) he served as the principal of an elementary school. And then for the next five years (1964-1968) he continued with his secondary studies at Lycée Philippe-Guerrier, also in Cayes.

Port-au-Prince: University, Church of God, and Marriage: 1967-1973

After that, like many other young people, he moved to Port-au-Prince, the capital, in order to attend the University. There, while a student, he became acquainted with the Church of God by visiting the Poste-Marchand congregation, and joined that church in 1970.

¹ I have known Pasteur Elysée Joseph for over twelve years and taught him three courses in the MACM program at the Church of God Theological Seminary. The information in this article draws on photocopies of his application for Exhorter, Licensed Minister and Ordained Minister, his application to the Church of God Theological Seminary and the bio that he wrote at that time (1998).

² Ecole Biblique Lumière was and is run by the West Indies Mission.

He soon became a leader among the youth and a teacher in the Sunday School. In 1971 he was married to Marie-Camille Kersaint, who was the president of the young people's organization at the church and a graduate of the Church of God Biblical Seminary. In 1973 the Lord baptized him in the Holy Spirit and he became, in his own words "a fervent Pentecostal." After five years (1968-1973) he finished his University studies at the Faculté de Science, in the University of Haiti.

Early Ministry: 1973-75

Following that he served as the president of the Youth work at Poste-Marchand and secured employment by teaching at Canado-Haitian College in the area of the city where the Bi-centennial exhibition was later built. A "college" in Haiti is like a public school (K through twelve) plus an approximation of junior college. This school had been started in 1969 in order to offer three options for young people: an academic track, a commercial tract and a technical track; it is run by a Catholic order.

Studies and Ministry in Canada: 1975-1977

In the early part of 1975 his first son, Samuel, was born. That summer he and his family moved to Montreal, Canada, where he pursued a Masters degree in Electrical engineering at the University of Montreal (1975-1977) and his wife did a Bachelors of Arts in Theology. Two more sons were born while they were in Canada, Daniel in 1976 and Jean in 1977. Also while in Canada he and his wife did church work, parallel to their studies, in cooperation with Pasteur Flaureste Saint-Fleur; this was mostly door to door evangelism and meetings in homes. In June of 1975, while evangelizing from house to house in Outremont, just out from Montreal, they visited the home of a woman who was a widow and the mother of ten children. Soon after that she was converted and that became the beginning of the Church of God in Outremont, and grew rapidly.³ However, at that time Elysée had not been set forth and examined for the ministry. This was done in February of 1977 in the Outremont Church.

Return to Haiti and Ministry There: 1977-2010

Assistant Pastor: Poste-Marchand: 1978-1980

In the spring of 1977, he finished his studies in the university and returned to Haiti, where he became the Administrator for "World Vision" for 1977-1978 and worked at Poste-Marchand as Coordinator of Evangelism. In December of 1977 he became a

³ He mentioned this in his bio for the Seminary in Cleveland and it is also mentioned in the French website of the Church of God in Canada.

licensed minister and served as assistant pastor with Sister Rodrigue Sylvestre, the long-time pastor of that congregation.

Pastor of Poste-Marchand: 1980

In 1980 the twins, Elie and Elyse, Jr., were born.⁴ When Sister Sylvestre died in 1980, he became the head pastor of the church and the district pastor of that district. In 1982 he was ordained and continued as the pastor of the Poste-Marchand church. He organized the church into four departments: Evangelization, Youth, Ladies, Christian Education.

In Addition: Pastor of Rue du Centre, 1987-1996

In 1987 he was appointed head pastor of the “Rue du Centre” congregation, the largest congregation of the Church of God in Haiti (in 2010 it has over 9,000 members), but continued his duties at Poste-Marchand and thus was pastor of both congregations for some time. He organized the Port-au-Prince church and placed an assistant pastor over each department. He described his function as “I administered, coordinated the matters, and fed the church by teaching and preaching.” The church prospered and sent teams to do evangelization even outside the capital.

The remarkable part is that, at the same time, he carried on an academic career in teaching. He wrote,

While I undertook those activities, I taught either as Director at the Hadem College,⁵ or as a teacher at the Canado College or Assistant teacher at the Montreal University, either as Mathematics and Physics teacher at the Faculty of Science or at the upper Normal School of the Haitian State University, either too (*sic*) as the Dean at the Industrious Sciences Faculty, Centre of Calculation and Scientific Searches, Rue Capois, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.⁶

National Overseer of the Church of God in Haiti: 1996-2002

In 1996 he was appointed National Overseer of the Church of God in Haiti⁷ and reappointed in 1998⁸ and 2000.⁹ During all that time

⁴ The names are French for Elijah and Elisha.

⁵ HADEM had been started by the Church of God in Haiti and was named HaDem as a contraction for “Haïti Demain” (Haiti Tomorrow), but due to problems of administration had been turn over to Pasteur Elysée Joseph to function as a private school.

⁶ Elysée Joseph, *Autobiography of Elysée Joseph*, March, 1998. This was the short bio of his life submitted to the Church of God Theological Seminary as he began his M.A. in Church Ministries, along with eighteen other teachers and prospective teachers of the Séminaire Théologique de l’Eglise de Dieu en Haiti. His teaching at Canado was before he went to Canada and that at the University of Montreal was while he was there and the rest was after his return.

⁷ *Church of God General Assembly Minutes*, 1996, p. 291.

he remained Head Pastor at Rue du Centre. As Overseer he always had a drive to improve the Church of God in Haiti (and the country itself) through education. He was the one, along with Fred Bourdeau, the Director of Séminaire Biblique, who arranged with the Seminary in Cleveland, through Dr. James M. Beaty, to initiate the M.A.C.M. degree offering for the teachers and prospective teachers of the Seminary in Haiti. On the completing of this program in 2001, the seminary in Haiti, under the leadership of Gerard Guiteau, was able to receive certification from the Haitian Government, the Church of God General Board of Education¹⁰ and the Caribbean Evangelical Theological Association (CETA).¹¹

In describing his work as Overseer he mentions: (1) visiting in the various districts and provinces (with his wife and sometimes with departmental leaders) in order to encourage the people, to teach, to preach and to do whatever was necessary, (2) attending conventions, (3) receiving workers in difficulty situations (and giving them counsel and aid, (4) coordinating the business of the various districts and (5) convoking the members of the executive committee for the important matters of the Church in Haiti.

At the same time he taught Eschatology and Administration of the Church in the Church of God Seminary in Haiti, while continuing to serve as Administrator and Dean and instructor at HADEM College. His wife, Marie-Camille, died on February 28, 2002.

Pastor of Rue du Centre: 2002-2008

From 2002 to 2008, while Fred Bourdeau served as overseer, Joseph continued as pastor at Rue du Centre.

National Overseer: 2008-2010

In 2008 he was again appointed overseer¹² and served as such until his tragic death on January 12, 2010. He had made plans for the annual Workers Conference, which was to begin on Thursday, January 14 and was being preceded by two days of fasting and prayer. Lloyd Frazier, a former missionary supervisor and long-term missionary, along with Lovell Cary, a former General Director of World Mission, and his wife, Giny, arrived at 3:50

⁸ *Church of God General Assembly Minutes*, 1998, p. 301.

⁹ *Church of God General Assembly Minutes*, 2000, p. 310.

¹⁰ The Séminaire Théologique de l'Église de Dieu en Haiti was certified by the Church of God General Board of Education as a degree granting institution on February 21, 2007 (information from the office of Lynn Stone). See H. Lynn Stone, ed., 2008 Education Handbook (Cleveland: Pathway, 2008), p. 51.

¹¹ See the website CETA.

¹² Journal 2008, Containing the Minutes of the Church of God 72nd International General Assembly, p. 159.

P.M. on the Tuesday, January 12, less than an hour before the 7.0 earthquake occurred. They had been met by Pasteur Joseph and others, loaded their baggage in the mission vehicle and started for the hotel. The chauffeur and Pasteur Joseph were in the front seat. On the way to the hotel the earthquake hit as they were going by a high retaining wall, some twenty feet tall. It collapsed on top of the auto, pan-caking the vehicle. Pasteur Joseph was killed instantly; and the back seat, where the visitors were seated, was left with very little height and they were all squashed down. Someone somehow opened the back door and the three were able to slide out of the vehicle. Of the three, Sister Cary was the most seriously injured.

With no way to extricate Pasteur Joseph and after 90 minutes trying to do so, they started walking toward the campus of the Seminary, where the national offices are located, carrying their luggage. When the Cary's became exhausted and could not proceed, the Lord provided a pick-up truck to take them the rest of the way.¹³ The sons of Pasteur Joseph were not able to retrieve the body until the following day and the top of the vehicle had to cut open in order to do it then.¹⁴

The Man: Elysée Joseph

Elysée Joseph was a complex man. He was one of the greatest mathematicians and electrical engineers in Haiti. From his earliest days, as the son of a Baptist pastor, he grew up seeing the need of, and feeling the burden to help, Haiti's masses. His primary educational formation was at the Lycée of Philippe Guerrier in Cayes.¹⁵ On February 8, 1905, on the 60th anniversary of the

¹³ After much difficulty, the three American visitors were able to catch a flight to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, where Sister Cary was put in a hospital and received medical attention until they were able to return to the States on Saturday.

¹⁴ As of January 21, 2010, I understand that a funeral service is planned for Friday, the twenty-second.

¹⁵ The lycée was named for Philippe Guerrier, the fourth president of Haiti, who was born in Port-au-Prince, December 19, 1757, and died in Saint-Marc, April 15, 1845. During Haiti's revolution for independence (1791-1803) he was a career soldier and a respected general. After independence, he retired from the military and became a plantation owner, on whom King Christophe conferred the title of Duke.

By 1844 the economic conditions in the country provoked discontent among those who lived on agriculture. Bands of brigands, that came to be called "Piquets," were formed and began to unite and to disrupt governmental control in the South. Another motive behind the movement was the desire to dismantle mulatto control of the government and return to black rule.

The negotiations concluded with the exile of Charles Rivière Hérard, the president in power, and the installation on May 3, 1844, of Philippe Guerrier, the respected black general who was nearly eighty-year-old. He proved not to be

founding of the Lysée, Duraciné Vaval, the professor of French, Latin and Greek, gave a discourse that lifted up the high ideals of the school, the full text of which is, even today, on the internet (in French). Among other things, he said, “The fathers of families, who are concerned for the future of their children, bring them to us to be taught to reflect, to reason, to feel the poetry of things and the particular beauty of the native sun.” On the same occasion he said to the students,

Young people, honor our Lysée by your commitment to study and by the nobility of your conduct...The liberal education that you receive here will make you the privileged ones in our democracy...You see how much we take an interest in your life, your thought, your games, in the least manifestation of your intimate being. That is why you let us lead you where we want to take you, towards the good, towards the paths that lead up, towards the summits, where the twilight appears to be the dawn. The intellect is only made free by being led to the summits. The supreme purpose of the education we give is to make of you just and sincere souls...Sincerity is a virtue of the strong. Be assured of this, that if we demand so much, through both literary and a scientific discipline, in order to assure you of the perfection which is latent within, it is that you may one day become citizens who, no matter what post or place may fall your lot, will serve our Republic with uprightness and unselfishness, as did the august founder of our Lysée!

As we look back over the life of our dear Pasteur Elysée Joseph, it is clear that he made these his goal. He wanted to help Haiti through the education of its youth. And this was set in a new context and given a new motivation after he was baptized in the Holy Spirit and became, as already mentioned, a “fervent Pentecostal.”

a puppet for the mulatto power structure. And on March 28, 1845, the former president Charles Rivière, returned from Kingston, but the masses refused to accept him, so he was forced to accept exile. There was a lot of unrest in connection with this and reprisals. A state of siege was declared on April 12, 1845.

Weakened by sickness, old age and the stress of national affairs, President Philippe Guerrier finally died in power on April 15, 1845, less than a year after his election. But during his administration, the Postal Service was either established or reestablished, although the first stamp was not printed until later; and many schools were created including the Lycées of Cap-Haitian and Les Cayes, under his government.

[Written from information on the internet: from “Leaders of Haiti” by Max Manigat, Wikipedia and HASENET, “Haitian-American Sports and Education Network.”]

In the days and years ahead, may the seed that he sowed bear much fruit for Haiti and for the Church in Haiti.