

St. Lucia

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By John Kolstoe

A SHORT ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

ST. LUCIA: Pop. 142,000 (1988), 238 sq. miles (27 x 14 miles). St. Lucia is located in the Windward Islands of the Eastern Caribbean. Her fabled beauty earned her the name "Helen of the West Indies."

PHYSICAL FEATURES: St Lucia is volcanic, rugged and mountainous. The highest peak, Mount Gimie, towers to 3,145 feet. However, the sheer majesty of the twin Pitons, which loom 2,619 and 2,461 feet from the blue waters of the Caribbean, makes them a major landmark and a symbol of the country, depicted on its flag. A nearby hot spring and broiling sulfur spring (called the world's only drive-in volcano) are feature attractions. The temperature varies from 70° to 95° F (21° to 35° C). There is a 4°F (2° C) average difference between summer and winter. Humidity is high with an average rainfall of 60". This varies from deserts on the north and east to 160" in the rain forest of the southwest. Constant trade winds contribute to a pleasant climate.

HISTORY: The first known human inhabitants were the Arawak Indians who were overrun by the Carib Indians. During the time of slave trading, it became a slave transfer station and both French and English settlers arrived to establish plantations using slave labor. When slavery was abolished (1837) there were already a large number of freemen of African descent. Since 1651, France and England alternated control 14 times with England ruling continuously from 1814 to 1967, when St. Lucia became a "State in voluntary association with Great Britain." In 1979 St. Lucia became an independent country of the British Commonwealth. The British Crown is the Head of State and is represented locally by a Governor General. The government has a two-house parliament headed by a Prime Minister. Elections are held every five

years. Its currency is the Eastern Caribbean Currency (EC\$), tied to the US dollar. Foreign revenue is generated more or less equally from agriculture (mainly bananas and coconut), tourism and light manufacturing. About 80% of the population is Roman Catholic and more than 80% is of African descent. The official language is English, but many people speak a patois called Kweyol. That is a language of French and African derivation.

EARLY BAHÁ'Í HISTORY: In the general letter of the "Tablets of the Divine Plan", dated April 8, 1916, 'Abdu'l-Baha' mentioned "the islands of the Lesser Antilles" which includes St. Lucia. No further mention has been noted until the launching of the Guardian's Ten Year Crusade in 1953. Two American pioneers, Esther Evans and Lillian Middlemast, arrived on 13 October 1953, earning the title, Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. Ill health forced Mrs. Middlemast to leave a year later. Esther Evans died at her post 36 years later, on 17 October 1989 at the age of 90. The first record of an enrollment was in May 1967 when a St. Lucian youth, Patsy Vincent, embraced the Cause. By 1968 there had been a number of enrollments and there was a sufficient number of Bahá'ís to start a formal Bahá'í group in Castries.

PIONEERS AND TRAVEL TEACHERS: From the arrival of Esther Evans and Lillian Middlemast in 1957 through the 20th century, there have been more than 50 pioneers to St. Lucia who stayed for varying lengths of time. During this same period, the island received over 100 travel teachers including seven Hands of the Cause. The first to visit was 'Amat'ul-Baha Ruhyyih Khanum in 1970. Dr. Muhajir was there twice, once in 1974 and again in 1979. Enoch Olinga and his wife, Elizabeth, visited in 1977. John Robarts and his wife, Audrey, were there in 1980. A year later, Dr. Varga arrived to inspire the friends. Zikrullah Khadem was the special representative of the Universal House of Justice for the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly in 1983. In March of 1984, Collis Featherstone and his wife, Madge, were on hand to break ground for construction of a National Hazíratu'l-Quds. The work of the Institutions of the Hands of the Cause has been augmented by at least 15 visits by members of the Continental Board of Counselors during that same period.

INSTITUTIONAL GROWTH: In 1967 St. Lucia was part of the newly formed Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Leeward, Windward and Virgin Islands. The first local Spiritual Assembly was formed in Roseau in 1968. There were more than 20 local Spiritual Assemblies by the time the first National Spiritual Assembly was elected in 1983. By 1990 there were 31. Sixty-four Spiritual Assembly areas have been identified. The first National Bahá'í Centre was purchased in 1990. Summer/Winter Schools, Institutes, Conferences, the St. Lucia Bahá'í News, correspondence courses and a popular radio program have been presented regularly. These have been important for teaching, consolidation and proclamation. The Core Activities and Institute Process have been more recent, and effective, developments.

OPPOSTION: Opposition has been sporadic and not organized. The first recorded incident was in Jacmel in 1968. A Catholic Priest told the Bahá'í families of that area that they must withdraw their children from his school. Bahá'ís have received harassment from clergymen, non-Bahá'í family members, and peers. The general stance of the Catholic clergy has been to ignore the Faith. The Bishop was asked for the use of a Catholic facility for a summer school and all he said was that he would do nothing to help the Bahá'ís. There have been isolated cases of opposition as well as isolated cases of support. Some protestant clergymen have preached against the Faith in sermons on the radio and television.

OFFICIAL RECOGNITION: Relations with the government have been friendly. There have been many formal presentations to highly placed officials. Of special note was the gift of a beautifully illuminated copy of "The Hidden Words" which was accepted by Queen Elizabeth during her visit in 1985. Following the publication of "The Promise of World Peace" in 1986, formal presentations were made to the Governor General, the Prime Minister, all the Ministers, Members of Parliament, Senators and other prominent officials. Incorporation was achieved through a special act of parliament in 1986. While Bahá'í marriages have not been officially recognized, the government appointed a Bahá'í with the authority to solemnize marriages. Naming ceremonies for children, in lieu of baptisms, are accepted by the government as the basis for issuing birth certificates.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY: The work in St. Lucia is characterized by the ease of teaching. It is not unusual for people who are not registered as Bahá'ís to claim they are. There is a general love for the Bahá'í Prayers and songs even among the non-Bahá'ís. Consolidating gains has proved more difficult. The launching of the Institute Process in the early years of the 21st century spurred on a new burst of activity, primarily by St. Lucian Bahá'ís.

STATUS OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY as of 1990:

General Population: 142,000

Enrolled Bahá'ís: 1,836

Percent of the population: 1.2%

REFERENCES

"Tablets of the Divine Plan"

Ten-Year-Crusade Goals

Unpublished chronology by Patricia Paccassi,

St. Lucia Tourist Board publications

Ministry of Trade publications

"A Brief History of St. Lucia"