

# RELIGION ON GRAND BAHAMA

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I first visited Grand Bahama in 1943. At that time, Baptist churches were predominant on Grand Bahama as they were (and still are) throughout the Bahamas. The Anglican Church was well represented, principally at Eight Mile Rock and West End. It was at that time that St. Vincent dePaul Catholic Parish was established at Hunter. Later, in the 1950's, the Parish school at Hunter was established under the direction of the Sisters of St. Benedict.

With the development of Freeport, other Church schools were founded, with the encouragement of the newly-formed Port Authority which provided active financial support as well as buildings. These included St. Paul's Methodist School and Mary Star of the Sea Catholic School, and, later, Sunland Lutheran School.

In the early 1960's, Freeport High School was started under the direction of the Port Authority, which again manifested its concern that the community have good schools. In 1975, this high school was turned over to the Anglican Church. Meanwhile, Grand Bahama Catholic High was established at Hawksbill.

From the very earliest days, the community of Freeport was strongly religion-oriented. In a relatively few years, attractive church buildings were among the impressive edifices to be constructed. The first was the Anglican-Spiscopal Church of Christ the King.

According to the BAHAMAS HANDBOOK, eleven other denominations have established churches in Freeport; namely, Assembly of God-Calvary Temple, First Baptist Church, Freeport Hebrew Congregation, Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Church, Our Saviour Lutheran Church, St. Paul's Methodist Church, Lucaya Presbyterian Kirk, Seventh-Day Adventists, Assemblies of Brethren in the Bahamas, the Church of God World Missions, and the Christian Science Society of Freeport. Within the last few years, several other denominations have erected church buildings.

The spirit of ecumenism and mutual cooperation between the people of all denominations was evidenced. In 1965, the Grand Bahama Clergy Association was formed of clerical representatives from all the churches on the Island. This Association is headed today by Rev. George Cumberbatch of the First Baptist Church of Freeport as President, and Rev. John Silverstone of St. David's Methodist Church, Sea Grape, as Secretary. Regular ecumenic features in the life of Freeport and Grand Bahama include "Octave of Prayer" Services in January, a united "Witness to Calvary," with the carrying of a wooden cross through the streets of Freeport on Good Friday. On other occasions, united services are usually held on Labor Day, Remembrance Sunday, Goombay Festival, Discovery Day, Independence Day, and other important days. For several years, an ecumenic "Day of Recollection" for all Ministers has been held annually.

In the mid-1960's, the Grand Bahama Christian Council was formed, comprising not only the clergy, but also lay members of the various churches. Today, this Association is headed by Rev. Peter Pinder of the Baptist Church as President, with Rev. James "Ing" Opsal of Our Saviour Lutheran Church as Secretary-Treasurer. This Association sponsors "Out-Reach" and Extension Programmes, Counselling, Radio, Seminar and Lecture, and other Programmes.

The spirit of cooperation between the various religious congregations on Grand Bahama always manifests itself by active participation of the entire public in the annual Bazaars and church fetes sponsored by the various churches.

While the schools offer excellent opportunities for the development of athletic and sports events, all cooperate with the highly esteemed programme of the YMCA. The YMCA operates in Freeport and Eight Mile Rock with excellent facilities for the moral training of the young provided by the general public and the Port Authority. The various Service Clubs habitually offer valued assistance in furthering religious and educational causes. All in all, Grand Bahama offers a splendid example of cooperation in any effort that will advance the welfare of the Island and the Commonwealth.