

Chapter 21

Jamaica

— By David Wilson —

Jamaica was my first experience of planting an overseas branch. In 1981, after spending the night at the airport terminal in Lima, Peru, I flew on a Russian jet to Kingston. I was visiting Jamaica to see if there was potential for an OAC branch. I knew no one but had been given some names to contact. There was torrential rain from a hurricane, but as I walked downtown, people approached the “rich white foreigner,” and I found it was easy to witness to them. Soon, I was being summoned by “Hey, preacher!” Even the vendor in the Straw Market said, “I can’t charge you this much.” Suddenly, I was jumped from behind and robbed! Returning to the cheap hotel I was staying at, my Bible fell open to Acts 18:9-10, and I read God’s promise, “Do not be afraid …go on…no man will attack you…I have many people in this city.” The owners of the hotel told me that I could have been stabbed in the robbery and kindly invited me to stay in their home.

Only the final contact that I had been given proved to be an open door. It was the Jamaica Theological Seminary, where I was invited to stay in the president’s home. It had just been broken into by thieves while he had been away in the US. A seminar for the students was arranged for a return visit. After returning for the seminar, I went back to downtown Kingston, where I had been robbed and held the first open-air meeting. Rain was threatening, and the students were skeptical, having never seen this method but only open-air church services. The crowd built and jammed off the area, and many surged forward to trust Christ as Savior. The students were overwhelmed with those to be counseled and were ecstatic about doing it themselves. After two more days of training, they were successful. One wrote, “Firstly, I must admit I was extremely surprised by the response of the crowd. I was impressed by the effectiveness of the use of the sketchboard. In a Jamaican context, it is highly effective.” Later, a pastor, who was also a counselor in the high schools, took me to several schools where all the students were assembled for devotions. Sometimes, the number of students was over 1000, and they listened with respect to the preaching of the gospel. Even the principals welcomed me. There was complete religious liberty. I now saw that the potential for an OAC branch was tremendous!





DAVID WILSON PREACHING TO FIELDS WHITE FOR HARVEST

I looked for a Jamaican whom God might be calling to be our full-time OAC evangelist. Unknown to me, God was already preparing him at Prairie Bible Institute (PBI) in Canada. His name was Keith Phillips. After his conversion in the Bahamas, he had dreamed of having a van with a PA system and returning to his homeland to preach the gospel. At PBI, he had come in contact with OAC Canada, and to his amazement, saw the vans like the one he had dreamed of having. He received some training from OAC, and after graduating and working two years at PBI, he attended the OACI Conference held in the US, accompanied by the Canadian Director. I was introduced to him (and his wife, Bev) and soon knew that they were sent by God for OAC Jamaica.

They continued on to Jamaica, taking their van with them. A few months later, I visited Jamaica for the fourth time and did open-air and school meetings with Keith. OAC Canada evangelist Ross Conwell asked if he could come along, as it was very cold in Canada for ministry. We were introduced at a large evangelistic meeting by Barry Moore, a well-known evangelist. The Governor-General was



BEV & KEITH PHILLIPS



SHARON & EDDIE SMITH



FIRST TRAINING MEETINGS WITH KEITH PHILIPS IN 1984



FORTIETH CELEBRATION OF OAC JAMAICA IN 2024



EDDIE AT A SCHOOL ASSEMBLY



MANY RESPONDING TO CHRIST IN EDDIE'S MEETINGS

attending (the representative of the Queen of England, as Jamaica is a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations), and he noted that an organization such as OAC was needed in the city. The ministry was soon firmly established and registered with the government. Over the years, God provided six vans, and principals continued to invite Keith and his staff into the schools. The main hospital opened its doors for morning devotions, and the prison opened for gospel presentations.

In March 1996, OAC Americas Zone (US, Canada, and Jamaica) met in Kingston. During the week, the OAC staff had the joy of preaching to approximately 15,000 students in school assemblies. Many prayed to trust Christ as Savior. Other services were held in the open air, a hospital, and 14 churches.

Children, who were reached in earlier days, now have children being reached today in the school assemblies. Some have become teachers and preachers. Keith has remained faithful to his call and has been greatly helped by his wife and family. As he drives the OAC van through Kingston, over and over again, he is recognized, and a voice calls out, "Hello, Uncle Keith!"

It has always been a joy to preach with OAC Jamaica over these many years. It taught me how to focus on finding and training national evangelists to pioneer the ministry of OAC in their own countries.

In 2016, Keith and his team reached over 134,000 people with the gospel, many of whom prayed to trust Christ as their Savior.

