



Caribbean countries, spending his last years in Jamaica. Dr. King was said to be of Jamaican background.

Shortly after the arrival of Dr. King, Mr. and Mrs. Backwell came from England in 1955 to live and work in Guyana and assist with the work of the Cause. The Backwells helped with the development of the first Local Spiritual Assembly in Georgetown and to share the teachings and principles of the Bahá'í Faith in many areas of Guyana.

#### Institutions Established

In 1955 the first institution of the Bahá'í Faith was established in Guyana. This institution was the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Georgetown referred to above. This step symbolised the permanent establishment of the Faith in Guyana. Since there are no ministers or clergy of any kind in the Bahá'í Faith, these institutions, each a body of nine adult members elected by the community annually, guide its affairs.

In the late 1960s a building was acquired at 220 Charlotte Street in Bourda, Georgetown which functioned as a meeting place and later became the Bahá'í National Centre. This was a large two-storey colonial style wooden structure that was later replaced by the attractive building which stands there today.

In 1970 the growing maturity of the community in the region was marked by the first election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Guyana, Surinam and French Guiana. This body administered the affairs of the Faith at the national level in these three countries.

In 1976 the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies had increased markedly and a National Spiritual Assembly for the Bahá'ís of Guyana was elected. This body, which is re-elected annually, represents the whole of the Bahá'í community in Guyana. Also in the same year the National Spiritual Assembly was incorporated by Special Act of Parliament. A few years later further recognition came with the appointment by Ministry of Home Affairs of Bahá'í marriage officers allowing Bahá'í marriages to be legal.

#### The Faith Expands and Consolidates

By the late 1990's Local Spiritual Assemblies were elected in communities from Georgetown to Lethem and from Corentyne to Essequibo. Bahá'í Centres were established in several communities across the country including Corentyne, Linden, Best and Lethem. In 2006 the Georgetown community gained its own Centre in Garnett Street.

Bahá'í community of Guyana had now come to reflect Guyana as a whole with good representation of all the major racial groups and regions of the country. In addition there was very good representation of women at all levels and of all ages.

Since the turn of the century there has been a marked strengthening of the educational processes within the Faith with the development of participatory learning methods capable of wide application. There has been gradual expansion

in many areas and also of programmes by individual Bahá'ís, aimed at helping the wider community in areas such as literacy and youth development.

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