

LATIN AMERICAN SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROGRAM -  
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(PROLADES)

**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN  
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:  
RELIGION IN SANTA LUCIA**

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## Religion in St. Lucia

### Country Overview

St. Lucia, one of the Windward Islands of the Lesser Antilles, is located at the western edge of the Caribbean Sea between Martinique and St. Vincent. It was originally valued for the fine harbor at its capital, Castries. It has 238 square miles of territory and a population of 160,000 people, the majority of African descent.



### Current Status of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The country has an area of 238 square miles and a population of 165,000. Christianity is the dominant religion. The 2010 Population and Housing Census reported that Roman Catholics accounted for approximately 61.1 percent of the population; Seventh-day Adventists, 10.4 percent; Pentecostals, 8.8 percent; Evangelicals, 2.2 percent; Baptists, 2.1 percent; and Rastafarians, 2 percent. Other groups together constituting less than 5 percent of the population included Anglicans, Church of God (various denominations), Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, Muslims and Baha'is. Nearly 8.4 percent of the population claimed no religious affiliation or gave no response.

## Overview of Social and Political Development

St. Lucia was originally settled by the Arawak people, who around 800 C.E. were conquered and replaced by the Carib people. The latter group inhabited the island when Christopher Columbus arrived in 1502 and gave it its present name. Both the British and Spanish vied for the island, but neither could defeat the local resistance to their settlement.

Then, in 1660, the French settled on the island, and it became one object in the ongoing British-French conflict over the course of the next century. Finally, in 1814, the British received control as one item in the Treaty of Paris. The British quickly developed the sugar cane industry on a set of plantations built upon slave labor. The present population largely derived from the mixing of the former master/slave population. St. Lucia was incorporated into the Colony of the Windward Islands. It was included in the West Indies Federation (1959–1962) and received the right of self-government as one of the Federated States of the Antilles in 1967. It became a fully independent country in 1979, though it remains part of the British Commonwealth.

## Overview of Religious Development

The **Roman Catholic Church** came to St. Lucia with the French and became fully established in 1719. The Diocese of Castries, initially erected in 1956, was elevated to an archdiocese in 1974. Serving more than 90 percent of the population, it remains by far the largest religious grouping on the island. Retired Archbishop Kelvin Edward Felix (born 15 Feb 1933), Archbishop Emeritus of Castries, was named Cardinal by Pope Francis on 12 Jan 2014 (installed on 22 February 2014). Archbishop Felix had served as head of the Archdiocese of Castries from 1981 until his retirement in 2008. The current Archbishop of Castries is Monsignor Robert Rivas O.P. (born in 1946).

As of 2006, there were 22 parishes served by 18 diocesan priests and 13 religious priests who were assisted by 13 permanent deacons, 20 male religious (brothers) and 33 female religious (nuns). The Roman Catholic Church administers three secondary schools, particularly St. Mary's College for Boys, St. Joseph's Convent (run by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny), and a Vocational School for Girls (run by the Corpus Christi Carmelites). It also administers the Marian Home for senior citizens in Castries and the St. Jude's Hospital in Vieux Fort. In addition, there are over forty Catholic Primary Schools located throughout St. Lucia.

The **Anglican Church (Church of England)** entered with the British and claims the largest percentage of the non-Catholic community. The churches were under the Diocese of Barbados prior to the creation of the Diocese of the Windward Islands in 1878. That diocese, headquartered on St. Vincent, is now part of the **Church of the Province of the West Indies**. The **Anglican Diocese of the Windward Islands** is one of eight dioceses within the Province of the West Indies. The current bishop is the Rt Revd Calvert Leopold Friday with headquarters on the Island of St. Vincent.

**Methodists** first arrived in St. Lucia in 1809 as part of the early expansion of British Methodism through the Caribbean following the American Revolution. The Methodist work is now part of the **Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the America**. Currently, there are only four

organized Methodist churches on St. Lucia at the following locations: Castries, Forresstierre, Ciceron and Gros islet.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the **Moravians**, who also had been expanding through the Caribbean with a mission devoted to the plantation laborers, arrived on St. Lucia. Their work is now incorporated into the **Moravian Church, Eastern West Indies Province**, headquartered on Antigua.

**Over the course of the twentieth century, a spectrum of churches representative of Evangelical, Holiness, and Pentecostal perspectives arrived on St. Lucia, primarily from the USA.** Each has had modest success. Among the more successful have been the **Seventh-day Adventist Church** arrived in 1926 and reported 48 churches with 17,374 members in 2013; the **Pentecostal Assemblies of the West Indies**, with 34 churches and 3,070 members in 2010; and the **New Testament Church of God** (affiliated with the Church of God, Cleveland, TN), with 50 churches and about 2,000 members in 2010.

The fundamentalist Baptist Mid-Missions arrived in 1946, the Evangelical Church of the West Indies (founded by the West Indies Mission, now called WorldTeam) arrived in 1949, the Church of the Nazarene in 1972, and the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in 1983. Also present are the Christian Brethren (also known as Plymouth Brethren), the Mennonite Church, the Salvation Army, Association of Regular Baptists of Canada, Southwide Baptist Fellowship, Baptist International Missions, Macedonian World Baptist Missions, Church of God Holiness, Wesleyan Holiness Church, Christian Churches & Churches of Christ, the Worldwide Church of God (now known as Grace Communion International), Church of God 7<sup>th</sup> Day (Jerusalem), Mount Zion Church of God 7<sup>th</sup> Day (UK International Conference), Apostolic Faith Church, United Pentecostal Church International, Full Gospel Tabernacle, Outreach Worship Centre, Born Again Revival Tabernacle Church, Castries Evangelical Church, and Streams of Power ministry.

**The St. Lucia Christian Council**, an organization consisting of representatives of the Catholic Church and mainstream Protestant denominations, conducted various activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith, and to coordinate emergency relief and social welfare programs.

### **Other Religions**

The **Jehovah's Witnesses** arrived in 1963; the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)**, **United Church of God International Association** (sabbatical), and the **Church of Christ, Scientist (Christian Science)** are also present.

**The total number of non-Christians is very small.** Several movements that have arisen in the Caribbean and subsequently spread through the islands have found their way to St. Lucia. The **Rastafarian** movement spread from Jamaica in the 1950s and 1960s. Rastafarians numbered approximately 3,500 members. In like measure, the **Spiritual Baptists** have arisen as a popular indigenous church, and the **Yoruban Religion**, also known as **Santeria**, has gained some degree of popularity. Adherents of **Myalism-Obeah** are also present, which had its origin in the British West Indies. However, **Kélé** is an Afro-Lucian religion, originated from the Djiné families of the

Babonneau region of St. Lucia. Kelé is a religious ritual in which homage is paid to the African ancestors and to spiritual powers or spirits. It is based around the deities Ogun, Shango and Eshu. Kelé ceremonies include the drumming of the *tanbou manman* (mother drum) and the *tanbou ich* (child drum).

There are an estimated 350 **Muslims**; while some are immigrants from other Caribbean countries, the Middle East, and South Asia, most Muslims are local converts. The **Baha'i Faith** has a small following on St. Lucia. Most of the Indo-St. Lucian community has converted to Christianity. Only 325 people were reported as **Hindus** in the 2001 census (0.2 percent of the total population). Most of them were recent immigrants. Of the original East Indian community, only 1-2 percent retains Hinduism. Also present are adherents of the **International Sri Sathya Sai Baba Organization** and **Transcendental Meditation (TM)**, which are Hindu-related. The **Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis (AMORC)** has followers on St. Lucia, as well.

**Freemasonry.** The *Lodge Les Freres Unis* was founded in 1795, and was forced to find another base of operations in Trinidad and Tobago in 1798. Between 1851 and 1900, the Abercrombie Lodge No. 2788 E.C. was established on St. Lucia. Prince Hall Lodges in Guyana are closely aligned to those in Barbados and were together originally aligned to the *Prince Hall Grand Lodge of New York*. These Lodges now belong to the **Prince Hall Grand Lodge of the Caribbean**, which was inaugurated in 1993, with headquarters in Barbados. Lodges in St. Maarten, Martinique, St. Lucia and Antigua are also affiliated with the Prince Hall Grand Lodge. There is no official relationship between The Prince Hall Grand Lodges of New York or the Caribbean and the *United Grand Lodge of England*.

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