

GUYANA-LAND OF MANY WATERS

Charles Bichel, Lutheran Pastor and retired Navy Chaplain, became acquainted with students from Guyana, South America at a seminary school and accepted their invitation to visit their country. Bichel explained that Guyana is about the size of Minnesota and about 8% of the land area is water, although in a tropical region. Guyana is unique as the only English speaking country in South America. It was settled by the Dutch, but taken over by the English and called British Guiana. Guyana became independent from England in 1966 and became a republic in 1970. Bichel explained Guyana is located on the Atlantic Ocean north of Brazil and east of Venezuela and the climate is generally hot and humid. Sugar has long been the main export and basis of commerce for Guyana, although the value of the extensive biodiversity in the expansive rain forests is becoming more apparent. Over 80% of the country is covered by forests with over a thousand species of trees. Mineral mining and logging has depleted the natural resources of some areas of the country. Bichel noted the population is very ethnically mixed, and Christian, Islam, and Hindu religions are so prominent that the government has holidays for each. There has been a recovery of economic conditions in recent years, although there is a lack of expertise and shortage of capital for development and business growth. Last year the government replaced the old taxing system with a value added tax for more efficient collection of revenue. There is great potential for eco-tourism in Guyana, Bichel explained, but the accommodations are not yet to the standard compared to other locations.