



Southern Luzon Mission

Photo courtesy of Southern Asia-Pacific Division Archives.

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Joven B. Hitosis is Ministerial Secretary and Executive Secretary of Southern Luzon Mission. He went to Naga View Adventist College, then to Adventist University of the Philippines where he finished his ministerial course in 1991. He started denomination work in Southern Luzon Mission as ministerial intern and was ordained as a minister. He served as the Stewardship and Adventist Mission director and ministerial secretary of the same mission. He also served as a Bible teacher in Naga View Adventist College, Naga, City, Philippines. He served as the Ministerial and Stewardship Director of Southern Luzon Mission prior to his election as the Executive Secretary.

Southern Luzon Mission is located in Bicol Region 5, Philippines. It is made up of the provinces of Albay, Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, Catanduanes, and Sorsogon. According to the June 30, 2018 statistics Southern Luzon Mission has 187 churches, membership of 31, 289, and a total population of 5,716,911!

Origin of SDA Work in the Territory of Southern Luzon Mission

Ninety years ago, the Southern Luzon Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was born into the family of Philippine Union Mission. It started with Milchiadez Guevarra, who went to America on board a ship, learned the Adventist message, and was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist faith while working at Portland Sanitarium and Hospital. After five years of working in America, he went home with an intense desire to share the gospel with his loved ones, relatives, and countrymen.

His work prospered, and when the leadership of the Philippine Union Mission heard about him and the progress he had made, they helped him get a formal education in secondary school as well as in Bible and Theology at Pasay Academy. When he finished his studies, he was sent back to Bicol as the first Filipino Adventist missionary. He first served in his hometown, Matnog, Sorsogon, where he established the first SDA church in the Southern Luzon Mission in 1912. From there the truth spread and resulted in the conversion of many in different parts of Bicol under the administration of the Central Luzon Conference.²

In 1924, the three churches of Matnog, Bulan, and Magarao, consisting of only 80 members, separated from Central Luzon Conference to become another mission. The pioneers accepted the challenge of establishing a strong and dedicated group of believers in Southern Luzon, and with God's help, they were successful.³

Organizational History of Mission

On February 2, 1926, Southern Luzon Mission became a member of the family of Philippine Union Mission. Elder W. B. Riffel was the first mission president, while Pastor Parlan was the first ordained Bicolano pastor and the first Bicolano translator.⁴

The work was challenging and never easy at the start. The area was remote and industrial and economic progress had not yet dawned in the Bicol Region, despite its abundance of natural resources. There were no paved roads, let alone modern transportation and communication. Cars and other vehicles were unknown then, and ALATCO⁵ was only transportation occasionally seen on the roads. There were no motorcycles, and bicycles were only for the well-to-do. There were no telephones. The pioneers had to travel long distances by foot or, at times if they were lucky, rode on animals like horses or carabaos.⁶

Groundbreaking for the gospel was made even harder by the prejudices of the people, as a majority of them were devoted Roman Catholics. Old teachings were so deeply rooted in their hearts that they resisted and even hated new teachings. No evangelistic meeting was held without the usual rain of stones, pieces of wood, mud, and other objects hurled at the tents. In some cases, human excreta were thrown on the benches or beside the tents to serve as "perfume" while the meetings were going on.⁷

But no amount of difficulty could hinder the progress of the work of God. For every stone that hit the tent, a seed of truth was planted and the light of God's Word shone. For every tear shed, for every prayer uttered by

our faithful fathers, a soul was won to the Lord and the truth kept marching on.

In 1929, three years after SLM's organization, the progress of the work became evident. Membership rose by 427 percent (from 80 to 350 members) and the number of churches by 366 percent (from 3 to 11).

Because there were few paid workers in the 1930s, laymen were trained to shepherd churches and also to preach the gospel and lead in soul-winning activities. In 1933-1934, the laymen's effort resulted in 72 out of 100 baptisms. In the same period, the colporteurs were one of the strongest forces that the churches used to evangelize people in Cagmanaba, Pili, and Tigaon.

When World War II broke out,⁸ the work of the Lord marvelously continued amid confusion, fear, and uncertainty. The Japanese soldiers destroyed the mission headquarters in Legaspi during their attack on December 1, 1941. Thus, it was temporarily moved to Tuburan, Ligao, Albay, and stayed there until the war was over.

According to Pastor Benjamin Guevara, one of the SLM presidents, the church remained intact and the believers continued serving and worshipping God faithfully even during the war.⁹ This made our church different from all other congregational churches at that time, he added. The life and work of the church continued through its local leaders. It was amazing that even during the war the members faithfully returned their tithes and gave their offerings in cash or in kind, which they regularly sent to the mission at the end of every month. Because of this, the workers continued to receive support. When the war ended and a census was taken, our churches were the first to report to the government, "We are still here, intact, and truly organized."

The work continued in peace and the fast progress of the work became evident again. The number of churches increased to 44, with 1,397 members. At that time one district covered the whole province, an arrangement that remained until the time of Pastor Teofilo Barizo. In 1967 the present mission headquarters was built.

Under the leadership of Pastor Vicente Napod of Baligang, Camalig, Albay, district provinces were subdivided and new workers were added to nurture the churches and hasten the Lord's work. During the time of Pastor Ephraim V. Palmero of Baler, Quezon, pastors and several workers were given the privilege to upgrade their education in the seminary and the graduate school. Several church buildings of the same style were erected through his initiative.

With Pastor Adolfo Valenzuela leading out, several workers were encouraged to own vehicles to facilitate their services to the churches. Likewise, seminars that trained church leaders and pastors from the districts and churches grew in number under the leadership of Pastor Apolonio Panganiban in 1999⁰ and Pastor Eliseo Garrado. Workers were trained on how to initiate spiritual programs and make strategic plans for the church, with the goal of improving the spiritual condition of the members and drawing them to a much closer walk with God.

Now the old soldiers of the cross are gone, but the footprints of their calloused feet remain and will never fade. Our Lord God has been guiding our leaders and founders, and up to this moment is leading the work in Bicolandia, blessing His people with strength, courage, and faith, providing guidance, and sustaining them at all times.¹¹ According to the statistics of June 30, 2018, Southern Luzon Mission has a membership of 31,289 and 187 churches.¹²

List of Presidents

Southern Luzon Mission Presidents: W. B. Riffel (1926-1931); E. A. Adams (1931); Wiedemann (1932-1934); J. B. Emralino (1934-1937); Pedro R. Diaz (1938-1942); Lorenzo A. Yutuc (1943-1947); Apolonio Somoso (1948-1949); V. D. Cristobal (1950-1954); Apolonio Somoso (1955-1957); G. De Guzman (1958-1962); F. D. Martin (1963-1965); J. Acosta (1965-1966); T. Barizo, Sr. (1967-1971); Vicente Napod (1972-1977); B. Guevarra (1978-1980); V. Napod (1981); I. Hernando (1982); E. Palmero (1982-1988); A. Valenzuela (1988-1995); A. Panganiban (1996-2008); Nestor D. Dayson (2009-2014); P. Panaglima (2014-2015); E. R. Garrado (2016-present).

SOURCES

100 Years, Back to the Future, Celebrating God's Goodness Unpublished document, Southern Luzon Mission.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing, 1999.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2019.

"World War II." *Wikipedia*. Accessed June 27, 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II.

NOTES

1. "Southern Luzon Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2019), 352.

2. Pastor Benjamin Guevara, interview by author, Southern Luzon Mission office, May 19, 2016.

3. *100 Years, Back to the Future, Celebrating God's Goodness*, (unpublished document, Southern Luzon Mission), 61.

4. Ibid.

5. Transportation Company which operated passenger buses.

6. Pastor Benjamin Guevara, interview by author, Southern Luzon Mission office, May 19, 2016.

7. *100 Years, Back to the Future, Celebrating God's Goodness*, 63.

8. "World War II," *Wikipedia*, accessed June 27, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II.
 9. Pastor Benjamin Guevara, interview by author, Southern Luzon Mission Office, May 19, 2016.
 10. "Southern Luzon Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing, 1999), 335.
 11. *100 Years, Back to the Future, Celebrating God's Goodness*, 63.
 12. "Southern Luzon Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2019), 352.
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