



Mountain Provinces Mission

headquarters.

Photo courtesy of Mountain Provinces Mission

archives.

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MAX P. CADALIG

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Territory and Statistics

Mountain Provinces Mission (MPM) headquarters is located at Navy Base Road, Baguio City, Philippines. It covers the whole territory of Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, and Mountain Provinces. Included in the territory are some upland municipalities of Abra and Ilocos Sur Provinces. The name Mountain Provinces is most probably derived from the old name “Mountain Province” which covered most of the current Cordillera² region of northern Philippines. The name aptly describes the vast mountainous provinces at the heart of Northern Luzon. As of June 30, 2019, there are about 109 churches in the territory and 24,887 church members out of 3,207,946 total population.³

Origin of Adventist Work

Adventism started in the city of Baguio⁴ since it was the center of the region as early as the 1900s. The then Philippine Union Mission⁵ secured a piece of land in the city of Baguio and built cottages as vacation homes for missionaries as early as the 1920s.⁶ Adventist families were hired to take care of the property.⁷ But it was the work of an unnamed literature evangelist in the early 1920s that led to the baptism of Mr. Charles Pucay, probably the first Igorot⁸ to become Adventist.⁹ Mr. Charles Pucay invited his sister Marrieta and her husband Valentin Zarate to Bible study sessions. Both were later baptized in either 1924 or 1925.¹⁰ The family became the nucleus of Adventism in the Mountain Provinces.¹¹

In addition to the Zarate family of Baguio City, a group of young people from Besao, Mountain Province, who were related to one another, were baptized. Later, they became the first Adventist native workers and teachers from the Cordilleras. According to church records, Mr. Mariano Isilen was tasked to teach in Tamboan, Besao, Mt. Province in June 1926.¹² Three years later Mark Balaoas (also from Besao, baptized in 1928) was sent by the Philippine Union Mission to Shanghai, China for his nursing training at Shanghai Sanitarium, which he completed in 1932. He returned and worked as a mission nurse, then later as a pastor.¹³ Another convert from Besao was Remegio Atiteo who was assigned as a teacher at Tiking, Tubo, Abra, likely in 1928.¹⁴ As a result of his labor, a church was established that became the foundation for a strong Adventist presence in the area that continues to this day.

The early mission work in this territory, however, was also marked with a sad story. In the early 1930s a 32-year-old literature evangelist named Felipe Corcoro went canvassing in Sadanga, Mountain Province. He was beheaded and his body was found floating on the river. It was later identified as the body of Felipe Corcoro.¹⁵ Today, there is a bridge standing where he was murdered that was named Corcoro Bridge after the slain literature evangelist.

Historical Background

The growing number of Adventists in the region were part of the Northern Luzon Mission (NLM).¹⁶ But due to the vastness and great challenges of the territory, there were calls as early as 1932 to make the Mountain

Province a separate mission field under the Philippine Union Mission.¹⁷ Though church membership was scarce, during the biennial session of the Philippine Union Mission in 1936 Mr. E. N. Lugenbeal, director for Northern Luzon Mission, reported that there were nearly 100 members in Mountain Province.¹⁸

As the church membership was growing in the Mountain Province, the Philippine Union Mission approved the purchase of a lot in Baguio City for its first church building on December 25, 1938.¹⁹ The following day, December 26, 1938, the union decided to separate Mountain Province from Northern Luzon Mission effective January 1, 1939.²⁰ Despite being an unorganized territory, it was named Mountain Province Mission under the leadership of Victor Medina as the director and was supervised by the union.²¹

The leaders of the newly instituted mission believed that one of the best ways to reach out to the natives of the Cordilleras was through education. Thus, in 1939, the union approved the establishment of Tiking Elementary School in the hinterlands of Abra. It was a two-teacher school pioneered by Pastor Felipe Berto and Jaime Wandag. With the help of Tiwan Atiteo an intermediate school in Agawa, Besao, Mt. Province was the first church school established in the city of Baguio.²² Mrs. Blandina Medina, the wife of Pastor Victor Medina, served as the first teacher of the church school in Baguio city.

World War II disrupted the progress of the church in the Mountain Province. From 1940 to 1944, there is no available record as to how the work of the Mountain Province was administered and how it sustained its workers. It was known later that Mr. Jaime Wandag, one of the church school teachers was killed while being a mission worker.²³ After the war, schools were reopened. Also, one new school was opened at Cayus, Quirino, Ilocos Sur through the leadership of Mr. Felipe Berto, who became its first teacher.²⁴ The school was approved and recognized by the union on April 10, 1950.²⁵ The elementary school later led to the establishment of Tirad View Academy, the first complete academy in the Mountain Provinces Mission (MPM).

A few years after the second world war was over, on August 15, 1949, the 13th biennial session of the Philippine Union Mission was held and Pastor A. V. Dick, an American missionary, was chosen to lead the work in the Mountain Province as the director.²⁶ In addition to his role as the mission director, Pastor Dick served as the pastor of the Baguio Church.²⁷ According to the church records, the Mountain Province field at that time had five workers, three churches, and 244 members.²⁸

Mission Organization

On January 1, 1956, MPM was finally organized with Pastor R. E. Parks as the first president.²⁹ Assisting Pastor Parks was Alfredo Damocles, who was chosen to be the secretary.³⁰ At that time, the newly organized mission had "4 organized churches, 6 companies with a membership of 690, 7 mission schools with an enrollment of 248, and 1 health clinic. Mission workforce included - 1 ordained minister who served as a nurse as well, 5 licensed ministers, 1 bible worker, and 10 teachers."³¹

On September 11, 1958, Pastor R. E. Parks went on furlough and Pastor A. Damocles was appointed to serve as the acting president for MPM. He was later elected as president in 1960³² and became the first Filipino president to serve MPM. He served until 1963. Pastor Jeremias Medina became the next president in 1964. During his time, Tirad View Academy, the first Adventist academy in MPM, was established in Cayus, Quirino, Ilocos Sur. Also, on June 18, 1966, the one Mountain Province was divided into four provinces, namely Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga-Apayao, and Mountain Province.³³ This change necessitated the adding of the letter "S" at the end of the word *Province* to officially make the mission name Mountain Provinces Mission. The church was making progress; however, the financial resources were not enough to support the growing workforce and operational needs. This prompted the North Philippine Union Mission, in 1964, to recommend that MPM be fused with Northern Luzon Mission (NLM).³⁴ The recommendation, however, was not implemented before Pastor Medina's term ended in 1966.

Pastor Eduardo Dingoasen replaced Medina in 1967 as mission president. He was the first native Filipino president to serve MPM. He was characterized as an active evangelist³⁵ and served until 1970. When his term ended, Pastor Victor Cabansag assumed the leadership until 1972. During Cabansag's second year of presidency, the union recommended for the second time that MPM be fused with NLM. The recommendation this time was somewhat different than the recommendation in 1964. The suggestion was to fuse MPM with NLM, then divide the resources equally so that MPM could survive as a mission. However, this too was never implemented.³⁶

In 1972, Pastor William Pasiwen became leader of MPM. He was the second native Filipino president to assume the role of leadership after Dingoasen. He was one of the valiant workers in the territory.³⁷ His term ended in 1973 and Pastor Zineo Manalo led MPM in 1974. Since the establishment of MPM, it had faced a great financial need. To help the treasury of the mission, the MPM Executive Committee in 1974 approved a request that NLM gives MPM the province of Cagayan as part of its territory.³⁸ During that time, Cagayan province had 38 churches and 20 companies, many of whom desired to join MPM to support Pastor Manalo who himself was from Cagayan.³⁹ The action was not materialized. Despite the odds, in 1976, Concepcion Adventist Academy (CAA) at Gregorio del Pilar Ilocos Sur was established.⁴⁰ This second Adventist academy under MPM was established through the efforts of Pastor Simeon Rosete and Miss Thelma Pallasa, a former English professor at Philippine Union College who now resides at CAA helping out in the infrastructure projects of the school. While CAA progress was ongoing, Pastor Manalo's term ended in 1976.

Pastor Alejandro Corpuz was voted to lead MPM in 1976 after Manalo. He was the third native Filipino president to lead the mission. After a year, Pastor Eduardo Dingoasen was re-elected as president and held the office until 1979. Dingoasen was replaced by Pastor Simeon Rosete, Jr., the fourth native Filipino president and, at age 30, the youngest pastor to be elected president. During his time, Pines SDA Church and the mission office were built.⁴¹ It was during Rosete's stint as president that the province of Cagayan, though it belonged to NLM, became a publishing territory of MPM.⁴² As a result, in 1983, the MPM publishing ministries became a member

of the elite millionaire club of the publishing work. In the same year, MPM was one of the two missions in the North Philippine Union Mission to reach its annual sales goal.⁴³ However, due to some challenges, the publishing work in Cagayan province was returned to Northern Luzon Mission in 2002.⁴⁴ Pastor Petronilo Barayuga replaced Rosete when his term ended in 1984. Barayuga led MPM until 1986.

In 1986, Pastor Geronimo Calangan became president. Many churches in the territory were built during his time. Among other buildings built was the eight-unit apartment that housed six mission workers together with their families. His term ended in 1995 and Pastor Angel Biton Sr. replaced him in 1996. Pastor Biton, at the age of 60, was the oldest to become president. It was through his initiative that the MPM multi-purpose hall and conference room were built. He served MPM as president until the year 2000.

At the turn of the century in 2000, the membership of MPM reached 16,214, scattered in 96 churches and 57 companies.⁴⁵ In 2001, Pastor Maximo de los Reyes took the leadership. He initiated the construction of the four-story Liwag building that housed some workers on a build-operate-transfer scheme at the mission compound. When his term ended in 2003, Pastor Levi Payoyo became president. He was the longest-serving president of MPM since its establishment. His 12-year service, 2003 to 2015, brought many developments in the MPM's physical plant. A condominium that was built on a build-operate-transfer scheme can be found at the mission compound. Also, the conference room was renovated. A good number of churches and school buildings were added, including the Baguio Seventh-day Adventist Academy which is the third academy being operated by MPM.

In November 2015, Pastor Bruno K. Pollito assumed leadership. He was the fifth native Filipino president of MPM. There were many developments as the mission continued to expand its work in the territory. The mission continued to face very challenging situations as resources and membership could hardly support its operation. It is only through the grace of God and the support of the people from outside the territory that it continues to exist as an organization. As of July 2019, MPM operates three academies and six elementary schools. It hopes to bring good tidings to its mountainous territory – the cradle of many ethnic Filipino tribes.

List of Presidents

R. E. Parks (1956–1958); A. Damocles (1958–1963); J. Medina (1964–1966); E. Dingoasen (1967–1970; 1977–1979); V. Cabansag (1970–1972); W. Pasiwen (1972–1973); Z. Manalo (1974–1976); A. Corpuz (1976–1977); S. Rosete, Jr. (1979–1984); P. Barayuga (1984–1986); G. Calangan (1986–1995); A. Biton Sr. (1996–2000); M. de los Reyes (2001–2003); L. Payoyo (2003–2015); B.K. Pollito (2015–present).

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NOTES

1. http://nap.psa.gov.ph/rucar/fnf_mprov.htm. Mountain Province was made a special province in 1907 and was made of the sub-provinces of Bontoc-Lepanto, Amburayan, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, and Kalinga with Bontoc as its capital.
2. <https://www.cpaphils.org/cordillera.htm>. Cordillera is a row of great mountain ranges which covers about 17,500 square kilometers. It is the largest mass of mountains in the whole of the Philippines.

3. Mountain Provinces Mission. Retrieved on May 11, 2020 from <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13077>
4. <http://www.baguiogov.ph/about-baguiogov-city>. Baguio became a chartered city on September 1, 1909 under the American regime becoming the getaway of Americans during summer time to escape the sweltering lowland heat.
5. The only Union in the Philippines with headquarters located in Manila.
6. The earliest available EXCOM minutes of Philippine Union Mission is recorded in 1924. On May 25, 1924 an action was taken by the EXCOM that NLM will pay the Union PHP10.00 for using one cottage in Baguio as office effective May 15, 1924.
7. On June 4, 1925, the EXCOM decided to employ Mariano Tercero to take care of the Baguio property. In addition, Manuel Oliva was allowed to stay at the property garage with free rent and water as caretaker.
8. Igorot is the collective name for all the tribal groups found in the Cordilleras.
9. Based on an interview with John Zarate, one of the children of Mr. & Mrs. Valentin Zarate. Interview was on April 21, 2018, 10:15 AM at Baguio Central Seventh-day Adventist Church.
10. Mr. and Mrs Valentin Zarate became Adventist before the birth of Nena Zarate their eldest child who was born in 1925 according to their son John Zarate.
11. This fact is confirmed by other siblings of Mr. John Zarate.
12. The place Tamboan and the name Mariano Isilen are both mentioned in the EXCOM action in May 1926.
13. Action was taken by EXCOM of Philippine Union Mission on February 26, 1929. An interview with Mrs. Cristina Balao-as, wife of Mark Balao-as affirmed the Union action. Interview was done on September 24, 2019 at Masla, Tadian, Mt. Province.
14. In a report of Mr. E. N. Lugenbeal, director of Northern Luzon during the biennial session of Philippine Union Mission on December 26, 1932 - January 1, 1933, he mentioned that Brother Atiteo has been teaching at Tiking for over four years already with 34 pupils. Eight people were baptized as the first fruits in Tiking.
15. H. H. Hall, "Another Colporteur Martyred," *ARH*, October 5, 1933, 24.
16. Herman L. Reyes, "Breaking Through." p.126 in "The Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination", 1935. It lists Mountain Province as a part of Northern Luzon Mission which was organized in 1917.
17. Taken from the report of Mr. E. N. Lugenbeal during the 8th Biennial Council and Session on December 26, 1932 – January 1, 1933.

18. Report of Mr. E. N. Lugenbeal for Northern Luzon on December 16-23, 1936.
19. Executive Committee action 812 on December 25, 1938. Action states that the Union set aside PhP1,500.00 from the ingathering fund to buy a church lot in Baguio city.
20. Executive Committee action 826 on December 26, 1938.
21. Executive Committee action 826 on December 26, 1938
22. Executive Committee action 826 on December 26, 1938. Some old members of Baguio Central Seventh-day Adventist church claim that the elementary school in Baguio was started in 1936. The church might have started it that year but the official approval at the Union was in 1939.
23. The PUM EXCOM through its action on Feb. 7, 1946 (action # 134) voted to pay Jaime Wandag since he was a mission worker when he was killed during the war.
24. Leona Langwey, one of the early believers in Cayus, interview by the author, September 24, 2019.
25. Executive Committee action 50-164 on April 10, 1950.
26. Minutes of Biennial session on August 15, 1949.
27. EXCOM action on May 16, 1950, action 50-188.
28. Based on the report of the secretary as of December 31, 1948.
29. 1956 Biennial Session action number 51.
30. Acted by the PUM ExCom on May 15, 1956 with action number 248. Pastor Alfredo Damocles was a former school teacher who later was called to help in the departmental work.
31. Printed Report of Pastor RE Parks during the biennial session in 1958.
32. EXCOM action on September 11, 1958. Pastor Damocles was elected president during the Biennial session in 1960.
33. Province of Mount of Province official website, "History," accessed February 16, 2021, <http://mountainprovince.gov.ph/the-province/history/>. Republic Act 4695 signed by President Ferdinand Marcos on June 18, 1966 subdivided Mountain Province into 4 provinces.
34. North Philippine Union Mission recommendation was made on September 29, 1964 EXCOM meeting.
35. J. O. Bautista: "A Big Gathering in Northern Luzon," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, July 1962, 10.

36. ExCom meeting action on November 26, 1971.
37. T.C. Murdoch. "Church Light the Wilderness," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, March 1964, 7.
38. ExCom of MPM action on May 1, 1974.
39. Ibid.
40. Southern Asia Pacific Division official website, "Concepcion Adventist Academy," accessed February 16, 2021,
<http://www.adventist.asia/information/institutions/north-philippine-union-conference/concepcion-adventist-academy/>.
41. ExCom of MPM acted on July 17, 1980 to construct the office.
42. ExCom of MPM acted on February 23, 1981.
43. Publishing Ministries report of MPM during the 13th General Session on April 3-6, 1985.
44. The author's personal knowledge as publishing director of MPM during that time when Cagayan was turned over to NLM.
45. Secretariat report during the MPM Biennial Session at Baguio city on May 16-19, 2001.

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