



Palenque Mission headquarters.

Photo courtesy of Chiapas Mexican Union.

Palenque Mission

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Roberto Morales Mendoza, M.A. (Montemorelos University, Nuevo León, Mexico), has served the church as a district pastor in several conferences in Mexico as well as department director, secretary, and president with his most recent position being the secretary of Palenque Mission. He is married to María Dolores García Vázquez and has three children.

Palenque Mission is a part of Chiapas Mexican Union Conference in the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Territory and Statistics

Palenque Mission has as its territory the municipalities of Chilón, Marqués de Comillas, Nuevo Benemérito, Ocosingo, Palenque, Playas de Catazajá, Sabanilla, Salto de Agua, Tila, Tumbalá, and Yajalón in Chiapas state. This territory shares southern borders with Guatemala and eastern borders with the state of Tabasco. As of 2020 it had 94 churches and 17,357 members in a population of 597,962. Its main office is located at Carretera Palenque a Pakalna Km. 24+250, Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. It is a part of Chiapas Mexican Union Conference.¹ The mission has nine ordained ministers and nine licensed ministers.

One of the great riches of this part of Chiapas is its ethnic diversity, which can be seen in its history, customs, language, festivals, dress, and traditions.² Spanish is the official language in the Palenque zone. However, each ethnic group has its own language, characterizing and distinguishing each group. One example is the Choles, whose language is *chol*, a Mayan language. They call themselves the *winik*, a Mayan word that means “man” or “male.” They are excellent farmers located in the northeast territory of the Palenque zone.³ Their lifestyle and customs are very well defined. The male outfit consists of a white, long-sleeved, coarse, cotton shirt, pants fastened with a long cloth cord, straw hat, and sandals. Women wear a white, coarse, cotton blouse with yarn embroidery at the chest level; they combine this blouse with long, blue skirts adorned with a band made of different-colored ribbons about eight inches below the waist.⁴

Another example of people who speak a unique Mayan language is the indigenous Lacandon people, who speak *lacandón*, live in the Lacandon Jungle, and inhabit the communities of Nahá, Metzaboc, and Lacanja Chan Sayab. The Lacandon, who call themselves the *hach winik* (true men), are descendants of a people who migrated from Yucatán to settle in this territory. It is estimated that the original *Lacandón* people disappeared in the 18th century after resisting conquest, followed by persecution for more than one hundred years. Their dress consists of a white tunic and they keep their hair long. They live near the Bonampak and Yaxchilán ruins, with the belief that their gods lived there in the past.⁵

Due to its topography, the state of Chiapas is rich with flora and fauna. It contains untold natural beauty as well as archeological sites and beautiful colonial cities. The terrain is mountainous, which allows for a great concentration of humidity that produces a temperate, humid climate, with rains during most of the year. This fosters a lush vegetation and a rainforest in which grow very tall pines and precious woods, which are still preserved in this part of Chiapas.⁶

Origin of Adventist Work in Mission Territory

The message of the Adventist Church arrived in the Palenque Mission territory through colporteurs who distributed Adventist literature beginning early in the 20th century and others who settled in that area. Otilio de la Cruz García and his wife, Adolfinia Sanz Reyes, arrived in the state of Tabasco and settled on a nearby farm near the city of Palenque. His sisters, Zoila de la Cruz García and Aida Nieto Reyes, also arrived with their respective families. They all strengthened the small group of Sabbath-keeping Adventists who already existed in

Palenque.

Years prior, Juan Riveros, a colporteur who arrived in that area distributing Adventist books and magazines, shared the Adventist message with Otilio de la Cruz. Years later, Faustino de los Santos Marín and Jeremías, both colporteurs, arrived at the house of Otilio de la Cruz. The colporteurs settled in Palenque and strengthened the work of the church in that area. Faustino de los Santos had great success giving Bible studies and handing out literature through house-to-house visitation in Palenque. This was the beginning of the Adventist work in Palenque.

With help from Faustino de los Santos, the members of the Adventist group in Palenque soon had the opportunity to acquire a plot of land where the *Iglesia Central de Palenque* now stands. The address is Calle Aldama No. 35-A, corner of Nicolás Bravo, Colonia Centro in Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. In 1974 Daniel Cabrera Fuentes, a humble man from Oaxaca, arrived in Palenque. He was of great help in the growth of the Palenque Adventist church.

The group's outreach efforts soon extended from Palenque to other places and formed new churches in places such as Nuevo Sonora, Belisario Domínguez, La Aurora, Las Joyas, Rabasa, Catazajá, and San Joaquín, which now form part of Palenque Mission.⁷

After the Adventist Church was established in the Palenque area, the group began to make contact with the people of the Lacandon area. One of the first to establish official contact was Pastor Irel Acosta. Between the years of 1976 and 1980, he entered the Lacandon Jungle through Marqués de Comillas, a municipality on the outskirts of the forest. At that time the Adventist Church only had a presence in Palenque. Soon, South Mexican Conference, whose headquarters was located far to the southwest of Palenque in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, decided to form a new district in Chancalá, slightly southeast of Palenque. South Mexican Conference managed to enter the Lacandon Jungle through various methods, such as medical brigades and the work of laymen.

This is when the pilot known as Captain Norton began traveling throughout the Lacandon region in his small aircraft, bringing medicine, food, and missionaries with him. Soon, South Mexican Conference hired a teacher who spoke *lacandón* named Hernán Roblero. Since he could communicate with the Lacandon people easily, Roblero settled deep in the jungle and became a spiritual mentor to the Lacandon people, who built a hut for him in Metzaboc.

The first Lacandons who accepted the Adventist message were Enrique Mayorga and Joaquín Trujillo, chiefs of tribes within the Lacandon people. At that time the governor of Chiapas, Manuel Velasco Suárez, visited the jungle, and teacher Roblero met with him and introduced him to the group of Adventist Lacandon people. The governor promised to build them a church, and it became the first Adventist church in that region.

Unfortunately, differences arose within the tribe and the Adventist group was expelled. They fled further into the jungle, where they built another church that they named *Betel Lacanjá Chasayá*. In 2015 the church that the

state governor had built for the Adventists, which had been taken from the Adventists sometime prior, was legally recovered as a Seventh-day Adventist church in the Lacandon region.⁸

Events that Led to Mission Organization

Before Palenque Mission was organized, the preaching of the gospel in the Mayan region was promoted and led directly by North Chiapas Conference, located in the city of Pichucalco, Chiapas, Mexico.

North Chiapas Conference held a constituency assembly in Pichucalco, Chiapas, on March 20, 2016, with 241 delegates present. The constituents requested that Chiapas Mexican Union Conference consider forming a mission in the Palenque region with the following districts as its territory: Benemérito, Chancalá, El Limar, La Siria, Nuevo Chihuahua, Nuevo Limar, Palenque 1, Palenque 2, Palenque 3, Palestina, and Playas de Catazajá.⁹ Likewise, Upper Chiapas Conference held a constituency assembly on May 2, 2016, with 193 delegates present. They voted to cede five districts to the new mission: Sabanilla 1, Sabanilla 2, Sabanilla 3, Tila, and Yajalón.¹⁰

Palenque Mission was officially organized and began operation in January 2017. Chiapas Mexican Union Conference conducted three separate meetings during which the administrators and directors of the new mission were selected:

On November 15, 2016, CPA Roldán Gallegos Castro was elected secretary-treasurer.¹¹

On December 20, 2016, Pastor Omar Armando Rodríguez López was elected president.¹²

On January 8, 2017, Pastor José Enrique Jiménez Blandón and Karina Acosta Cartagena were elected department directors.¹³

Shortly after, Chiapas Mexican Union Conference elected Pastor Omar Armando Rodríguez López as its director of stewardship to better serve the churches and members. Chiapas Mexican Union Conference then elected Pastor René Flores Bello to replace Pastor Rodríguez López as president of Palenque Mission, with Pastor Roberto Morales Mendoza as secretary and Pastor Isidro Hernández Pérez as ministerial secretary and director of publications. Lesly Guzmán del Toro was elected director of women's and children's ministries.¹⁴

Pastors and members worked diligently for the creation of two new districts—Nuevo Orizaba and Naranjo.¹⁵ With this, Palenque Mission now has 18 districts.

Plans to Fulfill Mission

Palenque Mission tries to fulfill its mission by:

Uniting the work of pastors and members in a permanent manner by equipping, inspiring, and instructing them.

Preparing and empowering each church member to be involved in the preaching of the gospel.

Establishing mechanisms to fulfill the church mission in areas that have not yet been reached.

Organizing front-line groups to cover territories where there is no Adventist presence.

Assigning Bible workers as preachers to help in the spreading of the gospel.

Translating training materials to preach the gospel to the communities in their own languages, facilitating communication and breaking down barriers.

Organizing preaching groups to preach the gospel in the different regional languages.

Continuing with the medical brigade project (mobile clinics) to produce a positive impact in the communities.

Organizing community services in marginalized and extremely impoverished regions.

List of Presidents

Omar Rodríguez López (2017-2018); René Flores Bello (2018-present).

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