



Libertador Academy Camaguan

Photo courtesy of Libertador Academy Camaguan.

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Libertador Academy Camaguan was the first Seventh-day Adventist Church educational institution in Venezuela. It was established in 1982.

Institution Foundation and Important Events

Many Venezuelan members had the desire to provide Adventist education for their children. José Antonio Lamas, an Adventist from Camagüán, requested the Venezuela Adventist Mission to build a school with his own resources. In January 1922, the mission answered the request by sending Richard Greenidge and his wife Rebecca as full-time teachers to start formal education in the country.¹

On February 2, 1922, the school began offering elementary education to two students; but enrollment quickly increased to 50, and during the rest of the year it continued increasing due to the demand for admission by young Adventists from all over the country.² The Greenidge family established a boarding school due to the need for lodging. The campus was named Libertador Academy Camaguan. Obtaining an elementary primary education in those days was highly valued.

From 1925 to 1926 the school was closed.³ After reopening, the first graduation ceremony was held in 1930. Several young people who graduated that day were employed by the Venezuela Adventist Church to be missionaries in the national territory.⁴ In 1935, Richard Greenidge passed away and his son Luis was assigned to manage the school for a short period of time, but it was closed again around 1937 or 1938.⁵ Educational institutions were located in Caracas, Barquisimeto, Maracay, Nirgua, and Colombia. José Antonio Lamas made donations for scholarships, paid teachers, and donated properties to establish new schools. Those events led to the closure of the Libertador Academy Camaguan from 1938 to 1981. A small kindergarten called *Los Amiguitos* reopened in 1981 in the school classrooms, with an enrollment of 12 students. In 1993, primary to third grade education was offered. That year the name was changed from kindergarten *Los Amiguitos* to Educational Unit Libertador Adventist Academy, offering up to sixth grade in 1996.⁶ On September 2007 the high school program was approved according to the country's educational laws with an enrollment of 44 students.⁷

Recent History

Reopening the school was due to the conviction and initiative of teachers like Elena de Blanco and Zenaida de Correa. Beginning in 2007, teacher Zenaida Bolívar de Correa directed the elementary school until her retirement, and Professor Infante directed the high school, as well as the new school construction project, with a generous donation from Pastor Abraao Vergasta. In 2010 the construction was completed and the administration moved to the new building. High school curriculum was offered and it is still in operation today.⁸ The school was originally located close to Camagüán Central Seventh-day Adventist Church where it still remains. There is a two-story structure where elementary and primary education is offered. Secondary and high school education is offered in a different building (still under construction), where there are six classrooms on the first story where classes are taught and where the entire educational process is developed under the educational principle "Hand-Mind-Heart."

School's Historic Role

The establishment of the Adventist school in Camagüán is of historical and administrative importance for the Adventist Church in Venezuela, since it represents the beginning of Adventist education in the country. Adventist education teaches “hand, mind, and heart.” This principle has been reflected since the beginning of the Camaguey Adventist School and it was the basis for opening other schools in the country.

In 2005, the Ministry of Education provided professional staff to the institution through Estado Guárico educational zone, maintaining the private Adventist school category. In 2014 that category was at risk when the Ministry of Education tried to assign a public school code to the Adventist school. Despite the risk it represented to remove the Ministry of Education staff and the financial consequences it brought, leaders and members assumed the challenge of keeping it as Educational Unit Libertador Adventist Academy, preserving the Adventist Christian education. Enrollment was maintained and it even increased. That helped the school to face economic challenges in later years.⁹ By June 2019, it had 30 pre-elementary students, 170 in elementary school, and 268 high school students, for a total of 468. It also has 15 teachers, nine office employees, and four additional workers. Their motto has always been: “Give Glory to God.”¹⁰ According to the first Venezuela Cultural Heritage Census of the Camagüán Municipality, Estado Guárico, Educational Unit Libertador Academy Camagüán as well as the Camagüán Central Adventist Church, were considered Venezuela Cultural Heritage sites.¹¹

Trying to Fulfill Its Mission

The institution celebrates weeks of prayer and evangelism every year, which results in the baptism of approximately 20 students per year. Teachers have the firm conviction that fulfilling a formal curriculum is not enough to produce good citizens. It is also necessary to provide an education based on the Bible principle: To restore God’s image in man. “To Educate is to Redeem” is the day-to-day motto.

Students, along with teachers and even family members, have participated in social work, which is so needed in the community. Vacation Bible Schools are offered during school vacation and food is donated and distributed to the most needy people in the community.

Still Needed to Fulfill Its Mission

Since the school is the only private school in the area, it is not large enough to cover the constant demand of prospective students. The plan is to expand the physical plant to accommodate 400 students, and to build more classrooms and an auditorium to provide opportunity for new students to enroll.

Children of well-known government employees attend the school, so it becomes possible to reach that sector of society with the Adventist message.

Another challenge is to attain a 100 percent Adventist teaching staff; therefore, spiritual needs are taken care of by the chaplain, who serves as the campus spiritual guide.

List of Directors

Richard Greenidge (1922-1935); Elena Blanco (1981-1989); Zenaida de Correa (1989-2016); Efraím Infantes (2007-2019).

SOURCES

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Schupnik, Carlos. *Aquí obró Dios*. Nirgua: Artes Gráficas del Instituto Universitario Adventista de Venezuela, 2010.

NOTES

1. Carlos Schupnik, *Aquí obró Dios* (Nirgua: Artes Gráficas del Instituto Universitario Adventista de Venezuela, 2010), 59.
2. Luis Greenidge, "Comienzos y Desarrollo de la Obra de la Iglesia Adventista en Venezuela," Escrito para el curso de Historia Denominacional, Colegio del Caribe, Trinidad, W.I., 1934 (traducido al español por Lucia Bdez de Molina, Caracas, 1986), 140.
3. *Ibid.*, 142.
4. Natanael García, *Sin Temor al Futuro* (Caracas: Talleres Gráficos Litobrit C.A. Venezuela, 1990), 39.
5. (Schupnik, 2010, 60).
6. Professor Zenaida Bolívar de Correa, director of Libertador Primary Academy Camaguan (UECAL), interview by the author, 2018.
7. Professor Efraín Infante, director of Libertador Academy Camaguan (UECAL) of Central Llanos Venezuela Mission, interview by the author, 2019.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*

11. Catálogo del Patrimonio Cultural Venezolano 2004-2006. Caracas 2006.

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