



South Pacific Mission headquarters.

Photo courtesy of Danilo Céspedes Rodriguez.

## South Pacific Mission

### DANILO CÉSPEDES

Danilo Céspedes Rodriguez is president of South Pacific Mission, Colombia. Céspedes has served the church for 27 years as district pastor, departmental director, and executive secretary. He is currently studying for a Master's degree in Family Relations at Peruvian Union University. He is married to Xiomara Aguilar and they have four daughters.

The South Pacific Mission is located at the extreme south west of Colombia forming part of the Andean region and the Colombian massif.<sup>1</sup> The territory of the South Pacific Mission covers a population of 3,584,342 and is

composed of the departments of Cauca, Nariño and Putumayo. It is part of the South Colombian Union Conference and is located within the territory of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists – Inter-American Division.<sup>2</sup> The South Pacific Mission is composed of 64 churches and 9,804 members and has six ordained pastors and five licensed pastors. The offices are located in the Sana Life Center of the city of Popayán, Km. 6. Route to Timbío.

## Origins of Work in Territory

In the late 1890s, self-supporting missionary Frank C. Kelly arrived in Colombia, determined to introduce Adventism in Colombia. He was only able to stay in the country for three years because his wife became ill and they had to return to his country. He worked selling photographic equipment and teaching English. Unfortunately, "after two decades there was no one to continue the pioneering work of Kelly" and the seed that he had sown could not germinate and bear fruit.<sup>3</sup>

That was the first attempt to preach the Adventist message in Colombia. It was not until 1913 that missionary B. E. Connerly volunteered to try to break the "proverbial ice of Colombia" through publications. In 1915, he and his family settled in Barranquilla, and the following year, 1916, in Medellin. There he wrote: "This is the most delightful and hardest field that I have ever worked in."<sup>4</sup> G. A. Schwerin took on the work that Connerly had left unfinished in 1917, and at that time E. M. Trummer visited Colombia for the first time. Less than two years later, when he moved to Bogota, he used his expertise as a canvasser to distribute Adventist books to prepare Colombia for active evangelism. It was during his years of service that the Adventist work in Colombia had its true beginning.<sup>5</sup>

In 1921, Mr. Max Trummer arrived in Bogotá to strengthen the missionary work already begun. There he contacted the Kelley and Cleves families to join forces in preaching.<sup>6</sup> In 1921, Mr. Max Trummer wrote, "Several canvassers from the United States have recently come to lead this important work to convey the message in this Latin field. We already have two native canvassers, and we are confident that there will soon be ninety believers among the six million people in need of the gospel in Colombia."<sup>7</sup> As part of this missionary strategy, one of these canvassers arrived in Cali in 1923.<sup>8</sup> From the city of Cali the gospel was preached throughout the department of Valle del Cauca, and the department of Cauca, headquarters of the South Pacific Mission.

In the early 1950s, brother Efraín Pérez, newly baptized in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tuluá, Valle del Cauca, invited husband and wife Roberto Herrera and Elena Muñoz to settle in the city of Popayán, with the purpose of introducing the Adventist message to that city. They lived in the gallery area of 13th Street, where they began formal meetings on Saturday, Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday nights. Each meeting was a challenge due to the opposition to a new "religious sect." Since they were not allowed to rent a place for their meetings, they were forced to meet for a time in a paddock, in front of the train station, in the sector of the Bolívar neighborhood. The tithes and offerings that were collected were sent to Cali, the then Pacific Mission

headquarters.

Over time, three canvassers arrived and several families, including the Murillo family, met in the small congregation. One Saturday, a commission from the Cali Pacific Mission paid a surprise visit to the meeting site to confirm what was going on in Popayán, since there was no official report of an Adventist presence there. Brother Roberto Herrera was authorized to manage the acquisition of a house in the 6 # 11 – 46 el Empedrado neighborhood. The property was negotiated for eighteen thousand pesos. When the owner realized the purpose for the property, she wanted to halt the negotiation, but it was very advanced, so the property was secured without further mishap and still exists there as the Seventh-day Adventist Church – Central de Popayán.<sup>9</sup>

These were the beginnings of the Adventist work in Popayán and the department of Cauca, where today there are 18 congregations.<sup>10</sup>

"Mr. Celestino Sinza and his wife María Lastenia Pachajoa were baptized into the Adventist Church in 1942, where they continually attended and took their children. Pastor Quiñones was in charge of the church that was composed of three families, including the Gelpud family and the Sinza family. The pastor and his wife organized a school in their home, where Celestino's three eldest children attended. These children grew up and became leaders of the early church. By 1960, the church met in the sector of Santiago. The congregation was growing; there were already about seven families, in addition to the canvassers who constantly transited through the region. Pastor Luis Barbosa and his wife Lina were next to pastor this congregation."<sup>11</sup>

Among the first Adventists in the city of Pasto was Moses Gelpud. His son, Eli Gelpud, recounts what those beginnings were: "My father in his youth professed religion and also participated in some sects. In one of those meetings he incidentally opened the Bible to a verse that spoke of the Sabbath. He began to wonder and question why the Sabbath day. Moses was a young person who knew many people, and had many friends and acquaintances including an Adventist friend named Gerardo Bucheli. Gerardo contacted an Adventist pastor who came to visit, studied with Moses and eventually baptized him. This happened in 1952, and soon, there was a group of 11 people who gathered on Saturdays to worship, study, sing, and share the gospel."<sup>12</sup> Thus, the work grew and from there the gospel was preached, reaching the populations of Ipiales, Cumbal, Panan and Tumaco in the department of Nariño and Sibundoy in the upper Putumayo.

In 1953, the first canvasser arrived to Puerto Tejada, Cauca. He took with him Bible books to sell to the inhabitants. He shared the gospel with Ignacio Mina, Ana Julia Mina, Fredigna Mina, and a man named Zamora. This group constituted the first Adventists in the town, and they were baptized by Pastor Luis Casimiro Carasaba. The first pastor appointed to Puerto Tejada was Sixto Tulio González in 1957.<sup>13</sup>

The preaching of the gospel came to Putumayo through Gerardo Antonio, a man who lived in Salento Quindío. He left home in 1960, at the age of 35, and travelled until he reached the city of Cali, where he learned of the Adventist gospel and was baptized. In 1969, he decided to go with his wife to Putumayo. With his projector in

hand, and after three days of travel, the Antonios arrived in Puerto Umbria, Putumayo. There they leased a house from Mrs. Rosa Palacios, where they presented "free cinema" watching the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation and other biblical themes. Despite the strong opposition they faced, Pastors Clímaco Joya and Luis Eduardo Barbosa arrived to perform the first eight baptisms in 1970. In November 1971, Gerardo and his family moved to Orito, Putumayo and then in 1972, to Puerto Asis, Putumayo continuing to share the gospel of salvation.<sup>14</sup> Thanks to God and the work of this missionary, the Putumayo department today has 20 congregations and 1,990 members.<sup>15</sup>

## Events Leading to Organization of Mission

Colombia Mission was organized in 1922, and its first president was Pastor E. M. Trummer.<sup>16</sup> The address of the mission office was: Section 599, Bogota, Republic of Colombia. The members of the executive board were M. E. Trummer (chairman), L. V. Cleaves, Fred Brower, F. C. Kelley, and Antonio Redondo.<sup>17</sup> In 1926, it was reorganized into four missions: Antioqueña Mission based in Medellin, Atlantic Mission based in Barranquilla, Central Mission based in Bogotá, and the Pacific Mission based in Cali.<sup>18</sup>

In 1926, the territory of the Pacific Mission comprised the territories of Putumayo, Choco, Cauca Valley, Cauca, and Nariño.<sup>19</sup> This was maintained until November 23, 2011, when in a special session of the Pacific Mission held in Santiago de Cali with the administrators of South Colombian Union Conference, it was approved to request the union to create the South Pacific Region, comprising the departments of Cauca, Nariño and Putumayo. On December 1, 2011, the executive committee of the South Colombian Union Conference approved the restructuring of the Pacific Mission and creation of the new South Pacific Region.<sup>20</sup>

On December 12, 2011, at a meeting of the executive committee of the South Colombian Union Conference, Pastor Juan Carlos Cabrera was appointed as coordinator of the new Region.<sup>21</sup> On August 26, 2014, Pastor Danilo Céspedes was appointed as coordinator, effective September 01, 2014.<sup>22</sup>

On November 5, 2014, the change of status from region to mission took place, in a ceremony presided over by the president of the Inter-American Division, Pastor Israel Leito. Pastor Danilo Céspedes was appointed as president, and Mario Enrique Ariza Mora as secretary/treasurer.

## Institutions

Puerto Tejada Adventist Secondary School is located in Carrera 17 s 16-45 El Centro, in the municipality of Puerto Tejada, department of Cauca. It began operations in 1954, under the name Bethel Adventist School, with five grades of elementary school. The founding professors were Herminia Martínez, Yolima and Bertha Guerrero. On June 10, 2009, the name was changed to Puerto Tejada Adventist Secondary School. It currently offers all grades.<sup>23</sup>

The South Pacific Mission has experienced significant growth in financial resources, and in the unity and teamwork of the administration, pastors, and members. A property of forty-three hectares was acquired at Hacienda Buenavista. It is about five kilometers from Popayán, where the Adventist Healthy Life Center operates. The offices of the mission are being built on the same grounds. Significant money has been invested in the construction of churches in the districts of Mocoa, in Pasto and in the municipality of Guapi.<sup>24</sup>

## Fulfilling the Mission

Three fundamental pillars informed the strategic plan of the South Colombian Union Conference: I draw near to God; We draw near to God; We get them to draw near to God.

The first pillar, "I draw near to God," aims to help each church member to develop a personal relationship with God, through programs that involve him/her in a consistent devotional life through daily bible study, constant prayer, study of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs, the prophetic gift as manifested in Ellen White and the final events of human history in the light of God's Word.

The second fundamental pillar, "We draw near to God," aims to develop the unity and growth of the church through programs that educate every Adventist believer in living together as Christians in love and service, both in the family environment and in the church. Through the various ministries that the church offers, members will be empowered to develop their talents for spiritual growth and fulfillment of the mission.

The third pillar, "We get them to draw near to God," seeks to develop community impact evangelization programs. These include the "I Want To Live Healthy" initiative; turning churches into Centers of Influence, for social services and training families and the community; educating in preventive health care; creating couples clubs to actively engage them and promote family unity in the community; increasing the distribution of the missionary book of the year; and accessing territories of the mission that have not been reached with the gospel.<sup>25</sup>

## Perspectives for Future of Mission

Through numerous evangelism campaigns with the participation of all ministries, through the work of small groups, missionary teams and community health programs, we are fulfilling the mission. The biggest challenge is the lack of commitment of a high percentage of members. Those involved in "Total Member Involvement" are a minority. We also lack resources to build and complete churches as a result of the unfaithfulness in stewardship of many members.

However, there are some lessons we must learn from the past: to commit to finishing the missionary and construction projects that we initiated and train new leaders at the local church level.

# Presidents

Danilo Céspedes Rodríguez (2014 – ).

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## NOTES

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