



Central Luzon Conference headquarters.

Photo courtesy of Central Luzon Conference archives.

Central Luzon Conference

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The Central Luzon Conference is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Luzon, Philippines. It is part of North Philippine Union Conference in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. Central Luzon Conference covers the following territories: provinces of Aurora, Bataan, Bulacan, Pampanga, Rizal, and Zambales; the National Capital region; the cities of Cabanatuan, Palayan, San Jose, and 28 municipalities in the Nueva Ecija province; seven municipalities in Tarlac province; and the towns of Dinapigue and Palanan in Isabela

province. Its headquarters is in Potrero, Malabon city, Philippines.¹

Statistics as of June 30, 2018: churches 335, membership 156,196, population 27,069,156²

The Central Luzon Conference (CLC) is the largest conference in terms of area covered, number of churches, field workers, population, and income in the entire North Philippine Union Conference³

Origin of SDA Work in the Territory of the Central Luzon Conference

G. A. Irwin, president of the Australian Union Conference, is the first Adventist officer to visit Manila, Philippines, in 1904.⁴ On his way to the General Conference session in Washington, D.C., he included the Philippines as one of his side trips, maybe because he received instruction from the General Conference office that the Philippines was not yet part of the SDA territory. The Philippines was colonized by Americans, and that is when Protestant evangelization started. Irwin stopped by to investigate the possibility of the establishing an Adventist presence in the area. In his eight day stay, he surveyed and observed the place. According to his report to the 1904 General Conference Session, he noted that several religious denominations were operating in the Philippines and that they had divided the whole territory among themselves to avoid misunderstanding and confusion among residents.⁵ Irwin noted in his article that the Philippines has no law restricting the distribution of literature, which he thought was the best tool to begin work in the Philippines.⁶ He emphatically said, “a beginning should be made at the earliest possible moment. Each month of delay will make it more difficult.”

In 1905 the *Review and Herald* published the following statement from GC president, A. G. Daniells. He recommended that the Church “give new, earnest, intelligent study to the unentered territory in both the home and foreign fields, and arouse both ministers and people to press on into the places where this message has never been proclaimed. This is a vital feature of the movement with which we are connected, and it must be made prominent until our work is finished.”⁶ This statement moved them to consider the Philippines as a fertile ground for evangelism. In 1906 the territory of the Philippine Islands was included under the Australian Union Conference management and considered a new area for evangelization.⁹

Following the 1905 GC Session, the Australian Union Conference (AUC), sent R. A. Caldwell, a missionary colporteur from Singapore, to the Philippines to start canvassing work in Manila. Seventy copies of the book *Home Handbook* were first sold, with the idea that literature is the best tool to be used to introduce Adventism in a non-prejudicial way. R. A. Caldwell is considered the first SDA church missionary to the Philippines and he worked there until 1911.

Regino Villanueva was one of those who remembered Caldwell and his books. He, his parents, and nine siblings were converted to Adventism and they built a house of worship in their hometown, Tagudin, Ilocos Sur. Five of Regino’s children became regular workers of the church.¹⁰

In the latter part of 1905, E. H. Gates, field secretary of the Australian Union Conference, paid a visit to Caldwell in the Philippines to learn of his progress. As a result, Gates strongly recommended placing a minister in Manila. He said the “sooner we begin the better, the longer we wait, the more difficulty we shall find.”¹¹ The challenge was accepted by an American missionary couple by the name of J. L. McElhaneys, who arrived in Manila in the early part of 1906 with the instruction to first establish an American congregation.¹² The reasons for first starting with a core group of Americans were as follows:

1. Working for Americans would eliminate the tedious job of learning a new language.
2. The tremendous prestige of Americans would make an American congregation attractive to the natives. If American teachers were won, they could be significant instruments in reaching people in their communities.¹³

Nevertheless, the plan was unsuccessful after few years. The McElhaney couple did not stay long in the Philippines because the wife’s poor health forced them to return to their homeland.

The L. V. Finsters, an experienced missionary couple, took the place of the McElhaneys. They arrived in Manila on December 17, 1908.¹⁴ The Finsters were informed about the progress of the work in Manila, and they soon started sharing the good news about Jesus.

Sometime in 1910, Finster met two students—Bibiano Panis, who was an older brother of Maria, and Leon Roda. They began a group Bible study in the house of Mariano Arcangel, a public school teacher and member of the Methodist Church. They also invited Camilo and his wife, Ciriaca, the uncle and aunt of the Panis siblings. Later on, when the number of attendees grew in number, Bibiano volunteered to serve as the translator for Finster because he could not yet preach in Tagalog. Following a Bible study in 1911, Elder Finster introduced the visiting president of the Asiatic Division,¹⁵ I. H. Evans, to the fruit of his labor. The president was requested to baptize the first 12 Filipino converts on March 11, 1911. After the baptism they were organized as the first Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Philippines, with 22 members composed of 12 newly baptized members, six professions of faith, and the two missionary couples, Finster and Caldwell.¹⁶

Soon after, Emilio Manalaysay, a public school teacher and one of the 12 converts, went home to Malolos, Bulacan, and started sharing his new found faith with his relatives and friends. In December 1911, Elder Finster sent Panis and Manalo to conduct cottage meetings. Eventually, Panis was recalled to Manila to translate for Finster, and Manalo was left alone to continue the cottage meetings. After several months of working in the area of Malolos, a church was organized by Elder Adams, who headed the church in the Philippines while Elder Finster was on furlough. On August 25, 1913, Manalo left the church.¹⁷ At first there were heated arguments between Felix Manalo and other SDA ministers. Eventually, the church asserted Manalo did not resign from the church. However, there were circumstances that resulted in the church deciding to drop him from employment and finally from its membership roll.¹⁸

In the first three years of being an organized local congregation, evangelistic meetings were concentrated in the Tagalog region. As colporteurs who frequently travel, R. A. Caldwell and Floyd Ashbaugh tried to go beyond their home base. Caldwell traveled around Luzon and Floyd in Visayas. In 1914 Elder Finster returned from furlough and resumed the leadership and administrative work in Manila. He started a work among the Ilocanos. Fattebert and Steward were assigned to work in Cebu City. Adams was sent to work among the Ilongos.¹⁹

The effort of Finster and his converts continued to spread out in different places nearby Manila provinces until 1920.

Reyes noted that the growth rate of conversion into Adventism was impressive and remarkable after a decade of organization. It reached 521.8 percent up to 1930. One factor that contributed to the fast growth of church membership was the work of canvassing ministry.²⁰ Numerous branches of work were opened in different parts of Manila and outskirts places like in Caloocan, Rizal (now Caloocan City), Baliwag, Bulacan.

The Organizational History of the Conference

In 1916, Central Luzon Conference was organized with its territory composed of the following provinces: Zambales, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija, Bataan, Bulacan, Cavite, Rizal, Laguna, Batangas, Tayabas, Pampanga, Mindoro, and Marinduque.²¹ After 14 years, the Far Eastern Division, which included Central Luzon Conference, made a significant change in the organization of the SDA Church in the Philippines. The Central Luzon Conference, which administered the work of the churches in the Tagalog region of Luzon, was reverted to mission status and divided it into two missions, namely Central Luzon Mission and South Central Luzon Mission.²² Elder R. Figuhr became the first president of Central Luzon Mission while also being the president of the Philippine Union Mission.

Central Luzon Mission was then composed of the following: city of Manila, provinces of Tagalog like East and North of Manila, provinces of Pampanga, Zambales, Southern Tarlac, a large portion of Nueva Ecija, and some parts of Aurora, Quezon. In 1945, the province of Palawan island was separated from West Visayan Mission, due to difficult communication; it could not monitor the progress of the mission work and therefore became part of Central Luzon Mission. CLM sent a minister to continue the work in the island of Palawan. Pastor Lorenzo Yutuc conducted an evangelistic meeting in the northern part of Palawan, along with a volunteer elder by the name of Mike Bautista. In 1947 the first Seventh-day Adventist church in Coron, Palawan, was organized.

Southern Tagalog provinces like Laguna, Batangas, Quezon, Marinduque, and the whole island of Mindoro were under the supervision of the South Central Luzon Mission. During the following decades CLM was led by different spiritual leaders whose zeal influenced the brethren in fulfilling the mission of the church.²³

The following people became presidents of CLM: Flaviano Dalisay (1935-1938); Jose Emralino (1939-1940); Florentino Jabola (1941-1945); Gil de Guzman (1946-1951); Jose Bautista (1952-1955); Florentino Martin (1956-

1962); Potenciano Romulo (1963-1965); Benjamin Martin (1966-1973); Juanito Tulio (1974-1975); Avelino Canlas (1976-1981), Daniel Viloso (1981-1987); Albert C. Regoso Jr. (1987-1988); Dan R. Mora (1988-1990); Abner S. Roque (1990-1996).

Their leadership resulted in thousands of souls being baptized, local churches established, and companies organized, and publishing work that prospered,²⁴ while medical and educational institutions were also founded and built. Gradually they were able to stabilize the finances of CLM. The mission qualified for conference status in 1988 through the leadership of Pastor Dan Mora. The Far Eastern Division, (now Southern Asia-Pacific Division) during its yearend meeting in Singapore in 1989, approved the conference status of CLM, the first conference in the territory of North Philippines, the second in the Philippines, and the tenth in the Far East.²⁵ On May 1-4, 1990, the first constituency session of Central Luzon Conference was held at Word of Hope Chapel, Paramount Christian Center, West Avenue, Quezon City. The constituency elected the officers.

Pastor Abner S. Roque, elected as the first president of the Central Luzon Conference, was previously the Church Ministries, Communication, and Youth director, and executive secretary of the mission. Since CLC was not a new place for him, his experience inspired him to lead the membership into significant undertakings in areas of evangelism, church planting, strengthening the stewardship aspect of the church, and building projects. Two years later, CLC was registered with the Securities Exchange Commission of the Republic of the Philippines, granting it the legal right to own and sell properties and employ and remove workers as needed. The construction of a new building for CLC was started and on July 30, 1992, the basement and first floor were completed. On January 31, 1996, it was inaugurated and dedicated.

The whole territory of CLC was divided into ten areas for quick response to the needs of the membership and efficient, systematic, and effective management and supervision.

Pastor Abner S. Roque was re-elected on May 1, 1993, during the constituency meeting held at the Philippine International Church, Philippine Union College campus (now Adventist University of the Philippines), Silang Cavite.

Pastor Eliezer Lagabon was elected as a vice-president for Palawan and succeeded by Pastor Romeo T. Mangiliman from 1995 to 2000. By December 2001, Palawan was detached from CLC and became an attached district of the North Philippine Union Mission. In 2017 the province of Cavite, with the recommendation of the CLC constituency meeting in 2016 and the approval of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, became a mission under the leadership of Israel H. Bacdayan.

On June 12, 1917, the Philippine SDA Academy (in Pasay) was established. A decade later another school was born in Baesa, Caloocan, called Philippine Junior College; and in 1932 it was elevated to a senior college, Philippine Union College. The Palawan Adventist Academy was inaugurated in 1967. An academy was also established in 1971 called Baesa Adventist Academy, formerly part of Philippine Union College. In order to preserve the ideal school environment, the administration decided to transfer the campus to Putingkahoy,

Silang Cavite, while Baesa Adventist Academy remained in Baesa, Caloocan. In 1996, PUC was accredited and, in accordance with the Republic Act (RA) No. 7722 and by virtue of Resolution No, 12-96, Series of 1996, the Commission of Higher Education (CHED) granted the school university status with its new name, Adventist University of the Philippines (AUP).²⁶ The Central Luzon Adventist Academy was established in 1985 at Floridablanca, Pampanga.

In 1929, Manila Sanitarium and Hospital made its humble beginnings in Malate, Manila, when an American medical missionary, Dr. Horace A. Hall, opened a small dispensary. As the demand for services increased, the facilities were improved and a three-story building was constructed to meet the needs of the community. Later the hospital was incorporated and it is now known as Adventist Medical Center, Manila, offering medical and academic services through its newly recognized school of medical arts.

Palawan Adventist Hospital was conceived in the 1970s. In August 1982, Dr. Orvillo B. Varona, along with the Vilalbas and Sernio families, accepted the challenge to start a formal medical ministry in Puerto Princesa, Palawan. A medical clinic was first established in 1987 through the funding of Evangelische Zentrastelle fur Entwicklungshilfe E.V. (EZE). On June 16, 1988, the Palawan Medical Clinic became the Palawan Adventist Hospital (PAH).²⁷

Future Outlook

CLC is growing in all aspects of its ministry. To strengthen the mission of the church, in 2012 a church planting project was launched. It aims to saturate all unentered territory of CLC which still does not have an Adventist presence and congregation. From eight projects it grew to 60 sites or projects. Local churches were challenged by the initiative of the conference and now many local churches are sponsoring such projects in their respective communities. With the development and maturity of church members participating in church mission, a proposal is being discussed to totally separate metro Manila, which is the national capital region of the Philippines from Region 3, which is in the Central Luzon provinces, to make it a new mission.

The focus of the CLC administration is the "Roadmap to 'Total Member Involvement' through Sabbath School Care Group discipleship." It aims to reorganize the church into small groups to ensure the intentional, deliberate, systematic, integrated, and sustainable process of total member involvement.

CLM Presidents

Flaviano Dalisay (1935-1938); Jose Emralino (1939-1940); Florentino Jabola (1941-1945); Gil de Guzman (1946-1951); Jose Bautista (1952-1955); Florentino Martin (1956-1962); Potenciano Romulo (1963-1965); Benjamin Martin (1966-1973); Juanito Tulio (1974-1975); Avelino Canlas (1976-1981), Daniel Viloso (1981-1987); Albert C. Regoso Jr. (1987-1988); Dan R. Mora (1988-1990); Abner S. Roque (1990-1996); Pedrito G. Magallanes (1996-1999);

Guillermo H. Gucilatar (1999-April 2002); Robin A. Saban (May 2002-March 2004); Carmelito U. Galang Jr. (September 2004-April 2005); Romeo T. Mangiliman (May 2005- April 2008); Carmelito U. Galang Jr. (May 2008-January 2011); Romeo T. Mangiliman (January 2011-December 2015); Benjamin S. Casimiro (January 2016-June 2019); and Ephraim M. Parulan (June 2019-present).

SOURCES

ARH, June 1905; May 11, 1905; March 1, 1906.

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Rilloma, Nestor C., ed. *100 Years Back to the Future: Celebrating God's Goodness*. 2005.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook, 1910 and 1930. <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/>.

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NOTES

1. "Central Luzon Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2019), 350.
2. Ibid.
3. Central Luzon Conference Constitution and By-laws ratified May 2018, Central Luzon Conference archives, Potrero, Malabon City, Philippines.
4. Herminio Reyes, *Breaking Through: Why the Seventh-day Adventist Has Grown to Be the Largest Protestant Church in the Philippines* (Quezon City, Philippines: Kaunlaran Trading & Printing Co., 1981), 87.
5. *ARH*, June 1905, 13-14.
6. Ibid., 14.
7. Ibid.
8. *ARH*, May 11, 1905, 10.
9. Reyes, 87.
10. Ibid., 92.

11. *ARH*, March 1, 1906, 15.
12. Nestor C. Rilloma, ed., *100 Years Back to the Future: Celebrating God's Goodness* (2005), 20.
13. Reyes, 92.
14. Rilloma, 20.
15. According to the *SDA Yearbook* 1910, 133, the Philippines was transferred to the Asiatic Division of Seventh-day Adventists, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1910.pdf>.
16. Reyes, 97.
17. *Ibid.*, 102.
18. *Ibid.*, 103.
19. Rilloma, 23.
20. *Ibid.*, 28.
21. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1930), 77, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1930.pdf>.
22. The reversion of Central Luzon Conference to mission status was due to its failure to support itself financially. Henceforth, Central Luzon Mission composed the following city and provinces: the city of Manila, Pampanga, Zambales, South Tarlac, large portion of Nueva Ecija and sub province of Aurora, Quezon and the whole province of Palawan.
23. Reyes, 140-141.
24. Rilloma, 49.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, 71.
27. *Ibid.*, 92.

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