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# North Colombian Union Conference

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## **ENOC IGLESIAS ORTEGA**

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North Colombian Union Conference is part of the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

## Territory and Statistics

The territory of the North Colombian Union Conference covers the north and eastern portions of Colombia; comprising the Atlantic Colombian, Caribbean Colombian, East Central Colombian, East Colombian, Northeast Colombian, and West Central Colombian Conferences; and the Colombian Islands and Southwest Colombian Missions.<sup>1</sup>

The headquarters of this union is at 33AA-169 Highway 84, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia, 050032.

Statistics (June 30, 2019): Churches, 1,002; membership, 127,840; population, 21,751,493.

## Organizational History

The Colombia-Venezuela Union Mission was organized in 1927 and then was reorganized in 1989 as the Colombia Union Mission as a result of creating the Venezuela-Antilles Union Mission. In 1993 the status of the Colombian Union Mission was upgraded to union conference. The territory of the Colombian Union Conference was divided and reorganized, and in 2010 the North Colombian Union Conference was created. In this way the country of Colombia was divided into two unions: the South Colombian Union Conference and the North Colombian Union Conference.<sup>2</sup>

The process of organizing the North Colombian Union Conference took into consideration the growth of the Adventist Church in Colombia, as it already had 1,169 churches, 275,272 members and 11 conference missions.<sup>3</sup> On March 10, 2005, the Inter-American Division approved the request of the Colombian Union Conference to reorganize and create a new union in Colombia. The final decision was made some time later, after all the procedures of the General Conference were followed.<sup>4</sup>

The membership of the 1,000 conference churches in operation had climbed to 235,527, while the country of Colombia had a population of 46,772,000.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, at the year-end meetings of the Inter-American Division on November 3, 2008, a vote was taken to ask the General Conference to reactivate the request of the Colombian Union Conference to evaluate and see whether it met the requirements for reorganization of its territory.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of the growth in membership of the Colombian Union Conference, there were many towns without an Adventist presence. The creation of two unions in the country would allow strategic evangelistic programs to be more accessible to the population, which would facilitate a more efficient implementation of mission. With two unions in place, the existing leaders would be motivated to train new leaders to meet the challenge of church growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In addition, Colombia is made up of several regions with a variety of cultural customs, climates, ethnic groups, and languages, which makes it important to approach people within their own cultural context.<sup>7</sup> The creation of two unions would facilitate working within cultural realities and adapting programs to meet the ethnic and geographical realities of each region of Colombia, in turn making the church more efficient in fulfilling its mission.

The growth of the Colombian Union Conference by 2009 showed that there were 1,169 churches with 275,272 members within a national population of 45,065,000.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, on March 3, 2009, the Inter-American Division created a committee to study this matter. Pardon K. Mwansa was the president and Agustín Galicia was secretary. Other members included Israel Leito, Juan O. Perla, and Filiberto M. Verduzco-Avila.<sup>9</sup>

At the Spring Council Session of the General Conference on April 7, 2010, the reorganization of the Colombian Union Conference was recommended; at that time it included the following fields: Atlantic Colombian Conference, Caribbean Colombian Mission, Colombian Islands Mission, East Colombian Conference, Northeast Colombian Conference, and West Central Colombian Mission. The headquarters was in Medellín.<sup>10</sup>

On June 24, 2010, the General Conference decided to recognize and register the reorganization of the Colombian Union Conference, subject to the organizational meetings set for July 11-14, 2010.<sup>11</sup>

In this way, the North Colombian Union Conference was born and took its place in the global community of unions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was organized with 684 churches and 153,730 members in a territory with a population of 18,590,018. The designated leaders were Edgar J. Redondo, president; Mario Villega, secretary; and Dubiel Quintero, treasurer.<sup>12</sup>

The mission of the North Colombian Union Conference is the following: "To glorify God, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, to guide each believer to a personal and transforming relationship with Christ that will enable him or her as a disciple to share the eternal gospel with every person."<sup>13</sup>

The relationship of the union with the Inter-American Division has been positive and consistent, and it has provided much appreciated help to the union, especially because of unusual circumstances—such as the internal national conflict—which have affected the lives of Colombia's citizens.<sup>14</sup>

## Growth of the North Colombian Union Conference

In 2010, the year of its creation, the new North Colombian Union Conference included the Atlantic Conference, the

East Colombian Conference, the Northeast Colombian Conference, the West Central Colombian Conference, the Caribbean Colombian Mission, and the Colombian Island Mission—four conferences and two missions. As a result of adjustment in the records, in 2014 and 2016 the register showed for awhile a reduction in the number of members.<sup>15</sup>

In 2018 the North Colombian Union Conference had six conferences: West Central Colombian Conference, East Central Colombian Conference, Atlantic Colombian Conference, Caribbean Colombian Conference, East Colombian Conference, and Northeast Colombian Conference. It also had two missions: Southwest Colombian Mission and Colombia Island Mission. It had 934 churches and a membership of 109,683 in a territory with a population of 21,284,286. It is significant that the North Colombia Union Conference that started with 684 churches, by 2017 had 934 churches.<sup>16</sup>

The national and continent-wide political developments have impacted the union significantly, especially in governance, economy, and social stability. But in the midst of all these conflicts, one of the great achievements of the union—after overcoming many obstacles—was to create a radio station. Pastor Edgar Redondo, as soon as he became president of the union, set this as a goal, as well as setting a goal of acquiring television possibilities in order to preach the gospel in a more effective way. The dream of a radio station has come true with *Esperanza Colombia Radio* (Colombia Hope Radio), 1470 AM, the first Adventist radio station in the country.<sup>17</sup> It began its operation on October 26, 2019, under the leadership of Gabriel Moreno, coordinated by Henry Salgado, and produced by Camilo Rodriguez and Daniela Arrieta. They reaped the fruits of the groundwork laid by Ezequiel Rueda, Shirley Rueda, and Alessandro Simoes.<sup>18</sup>

“Twenty-five Years ADRA Colombia, changing Colombia one life at a time,” sums up what the spirit of ADRA is in Colombia. One example of the kind of efficient work of ADRA Colombia was the response to the crisis that took place when heavy rains affected Colombia during 2010 and 2011. ADRA Colombia did a great work in cooperation with the government and donors from other countries.

There have been historic moments that show clearly the fulfilling of the mission, such as the Caravans of Hope, that were a resounding success. There have also been difficult periods, such as the prohibition of evangelism in some towns or territories because of the presence of hostile groups.<sup>19</sup>

The Caribbean Colombian Mission became a conference in 2015 due to its growth.<sup>20</sup> The North Colombian Union Conference encouraged the creation of the West Central Colombian Conference and the East Central Colombian Conference respectively, a result of the synergy between the Inter-American Division, the North Colombian Union Conference, and the local fields.<sup>21</sup>

The positive relationship of the North Colombian Union Conference with the Inter-American Division aids the fulfilling of the mission of the church, and at the same time, the support of the union for the local churches contributes to carrying the gospel to the different areas of the seven conferences and the mission that operates in this territory. The change of status from union mission to union conference shows that the links between the entities are strong, which in turn creates good results for the work of evangelization of the territory and other organizational tasks.

## Future

The mission of the North Colombian Union Conference is true to the spirit of the founders of the Colombia-Venezuelan Union, as it continues to be rooted in the Biblical gospel message—to continue to make disciples and to motivate them to share the Word of God.<sup>22</sup> The reason for the existence of the Adventist church is the fulfillment of the commission to preach the gospel, just as our Savior commanded. For this reason, the strategic planning of evangelism is a constant in the North Colombian Union Conference. The training programs for pastors, ministers, and elders in the evangelization activities, including new and old methods, are important. For this reason it is necessary to create the needed materials and to facilitate the acquiring of tools. Evangelistic campaigns are carried out throughout the whole North Colombian Union Conference.<sup>23</sup>

It is necessary to work closely with the department of Global Mission in order to enter new places. On the other hand, maintaining a record of growth is a reference point for new planning. In the same way, projections for the future include an integrated evangelism, as well as taking care to promote Sunday evening evangelistic worship services and baptismal Bible classes. Technology and information and communication media are tools that the union needs to use, with the goal of supporting, organizing, and carrying out evangelism by satellite, not excluding social networks and television.

## Challenges for the Future

In 1977, R. H. Maury suggested: “one of the best ways of celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the organization of the Colombia-Venezuelan Union would be to reinforce plans for the growth and development of its education facilities...”<sup>24</sup> In 2020 the evangelization of the ethnic indigenous groups requires special strategies that take into account the ethnography of these communities, which are found in Chocó, Antioquía, La Guajira, and Córdoba. The North Colombian Union Conference and the Adventist University Corporation are thinking of creating a clinic, as well as offering a medical degree program, areas in which they have already taken initial steps. The conference looks forward to taking action in each of these areas.

## List of Presidents

Edgar J. Redondo, (2011-Present).

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