

West Guatemala Conference

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West Guatemala Conference is part of the Guatemala Union, which belongs to the territory of the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Territory and Statistics

West Guatemala Conference covers the departments of Huehuetenango (the second-largest and most populated department in Guatemala),¹ part of Quetzaltenango, and part of San Marcos.²

The western part of Guatemala is a very colorful and multicultural region, as it is inhabited by persons of mixed blood and of Maya origin. Although the official language is Spanish, other languages such as Mam, Akateco, Chuj, Poptí, Q'anjob'al, Tektiteo, and K'che' are spoken. Despite these and other obstacles, men and women decided to work to establish the Adventist Church in this place.

The West Guatemala Conference consists of 49,941 members in 155 churches³ within a population of approximately 2,540,483 persons.⁴ It has 15 pastors with ministerial credentials, four with ministerial licenses, six who are contracted workers, four who have missionary credentials, and one with a missionary license. The headquarters of the conference is located at 0-35 37th Avenue, Zone 8 of Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.

Institutions

Moisés Tahay School opened on January 2, 1976, offering a morning session at the elementary school level. In 1975, an enterprising group of members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zone 3 of Quetzaltenango felt the need to establish an Adventist school. With the help of Mariano Tahay, the necessary steps were taken to obtain the authorization for this school to function. The name Moisés Tahay was chosen due to that man's commitment to the service of God and because he was the first indigenous Mayan pastor in Guatemala. In 2019, the school had more than 320 students and 24 teachers. The Moisés Tahay School has stood out in the denominational environment because it was accredited with the highest possible accreditation score given by the AAA, five years without an interim follow-up visit. This institution is committed to promoting the holistic

development of the students for useful, happy lives in this world and the one to come.

Valparaíso School opened after the teachers Juana Maida Bautista Ramírez, Victoria Aguilar Cisneros, and Julia Rosalina Hidalgo González took the initial steps to submit a request to create and operate the school in April 1998. It was named the Valparaíso Co-Educational Adventist School because of the place where it was located. It began to function in January 1999. In 2000, a typing class was added to the curriculum. In 2019, it offered the levels of preschool, elementary, secondary, and higher education.

The Orión Stereo radio station is heard on 102.7 FM and on 96.5 FM for Huehuetenango. It began when Guatemala was a mission. Afterward, it was part of the Southwest Guatemala Mission, then continued being operated by the West Guatemala Mission. Now it is run by the Altiplano Mission, which was organized in 2018. Its radio waves extend as far as the main city of Quetzaltenango.

Agape Medical Clinic came into being when Román Monroy was president of the West Guatemala Mission. He took the initiative to build an Adventist medical clinic to benefit the Adventist members and the general community. Then the plan was that the clinic would be subsidized with funds gathered by ADRA so that the office visits, medicines, and laboratory tests could be provided at a low cost. So it was that on June 2, 2013, the Adventist medical clinic called Agape was opened. It offers family medicine, pediatrics, and gynecology. The clinic began to provide laboratory services in 2014. In 2019, the clinic offered family medicine, general basic laboratory services, spirometer studies, electrocardiograms, and ultrasound.

The West Guatemala Conference executive committee, under the leadership of Irving Calderón, purchased a property of about 6,555 square meters (1.5 acres) at the cost of \$233,590.00, registered on December 3, 2015⁵. The deed to the property was made out to the West Guatemala Mission on March 13, 2016⁶. Later the plans for an auditorium with a capacity to seat 2,500 persons were approved. In a separate meeting, the conference board of directors approved a budget of \$720,940 for the construction of the building.⁷

Origins of the Seventh-day Adventist Work in the Territory

In 1924, John Luizner tried to preach the gospel for the first time in the main city of Quetzaltenango.⁸ He was not received well. Some of the local citizens, because of religious prejudice, evicted him by throwing stones. During that same year, amid political and economic tensions due to the building of the Panama Canal and the unstable price of coffee, a pastor and a book salesman named Adrián Alcantara held the first evangelistic campaign in Quetzaltenango at the Zarco Theater in Zone 1 of this municipality. During the meetings, 13 persons were baptized and formed the nucleus of the first Adventist congregation.

At that time, the United Fruit Company (UFCO) controlled up to 40 percent of the land in Guatemala. The region was inhabited by Creoles, Spanish-speaking natives, and natives, and it belonged to the Guatemala-Salvador Mission, which formed part of the old Aztec Union.⁹ Around that time, the first attempt was made to preach the

Adventist message in Sololá. Soon a property was purchased for the equivalent of US\$333.33 on which to build the headquarters for the Guatemala Mission.¹⁰ The president of the mission was E. P. Howard. One reason for establishing the headquarters of the mission in this place was to evangelize the indigenous peoples of the western region of Guatemala, who made up the majority of the population. The Boehnes—who were a great help to Howard—lived in an adobe house for several weeks before moving to the purchased property.¹¹

In the late 1920s, all of Central America was in the Central American Union Mission,¹² and the Guatemala Mission was being reorganized. In 1928, the first Adventist mission to the indigenous peoples was started in Sololá.¹³ Local workers were designated to carry out the missionary work. Among these were Mr. and Mrs. Lima. That year another property was bought, where the natives of Sololá could be taught about crop rotation and fruit cultivation and where the truth could be preached to them. Mr. and Mrs. Boehne lived on this property.¹⁴ The property purchased in Sololá was approximately five hectares (12 acres) and had abundant natural resources, such as sufficient wood for the majority of the needs of the mission for several years.¹⁵ Sadly, this property was confiscated by the Army of Guatemala during the internal armed conflict that started in 1960.

In 1928, the Guatemala Mission was offered US\$1,000.00 from the Missions Extension Fund to build a small medical dispensary on the property of the mission.¹⁶

In 1931, the missionary Orley Ford and his wife, who had worked with the people of Peru, arrived in Guatemala. They helped in the campaigns that took place in Quetzaltenango, where the baptism of 17 persons was reported.¹⁷ The first church that is recorded in western Guatemala was that of Génova, Costa Cuca, Quetzaltenango. It was started with the persons converted through the work of Timoteo Vázquez in 1933. In 1935, the Guatemala Mission reported having three churches: Puerto Barrios, Capital, and Génova; the mission had 327 members.¹⁸

In 1941 there was a lot of political tension. Nevertheless, evangelization did not stop, and new churches continued to grow. In San José Ojetenam and San Marcos, the Adventist message came through an Adventist brother who learned the message in Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico. Upon returning to San José, he shared it with the community, and Adrián Alcántara confirmed this message for the believers through the literature he sold. In this way, the Adventist work began in San Marcos.

José Canjura, aided by two Bible workers, Emilio García and Justiniano Castillo, held large evangelistic meetings in Quetzaltenango in 1943. Each night, 500 people attended. After three months of meetings in the Quetzal Theater in Zone 1 of Xela (a commonly used name for the main city of Quetzaltenango), 32 persons were baptized. This group, plus the one mentioned before, met at the house of Canjura Aguilar, which was located on Avenue 15, 1-62 of Zone 1 of Xela.

Aguilar continued his missionary work, and though insecurity reigned in the country, evangelistic meetings were held in Totonicapán (1944–1946). The meetings resulted in the first baptized Adventist in this department, which led to the establishment of the Palín Church, the first church in that place. During 1945, the brothers and sisters

who met in Pastor Canjura's house moved to 14A-62 Rodolfo Robles Street, Zone 3 of Xela, and became an organized church. As the church grew very rapidly, they bought, with the help of the Guatemala Mission, their own property, where a church building was built for the fledgling church.

Later, in 1948, La Escuela de Entrenamiento Indígena (the Indian training school) was established, located at Momostenango, Totonicapán. That school is today known as the Native Cultural Center. Moisés Tahay led out, and Bible classes were taught in Spanish and in Quiche. The young people were also taught classes in evangelism and health.

Moisés Tahay baptized about 212 students at the school between 1949 and 1951. The old school has become the El Alba Adventist Co-Educational School. The next year, several persons were baptized in Cantel, Quetzaltenango, as a result of the work done by Adrián Alcántara, who sold Adventist literature. Nevertheless, many years went by before the first church was organized in that place. In that same year, 1952, in San José Ojetenam, an important and interesting event occurred. At the request of the Adventists there, among them Magdaleno Cifuentes, the day called "market day" or "plaza day" in that town was changed from Sabbath to another day. In 2019, the small municipality of San José Ojetenam had 14 congregations.

In 1960, despite the Guatemalan Civil War, the medical missionary work of H. L. Graves and his wife was unstoppable. They visited several places in the west, such as Huehuetenango, Valparaíso, Los Huistas, La Democracia, and El Chalum. This couple saw more than 2,500 patients.¹⁹

In the western part of Guatemala, as in other parts of the country, Mayan witchcraft has been practiced, and it creates great opposition to the Adventist message. Even so, a witch was converted by Moisés Tahay's preaching and Bible studies.²⁰ In addition to this, a Western Guatemala and Maya descendent, Albino Ixcot, was sent to evangelize the natives of Costa Rica. Ixcot was a book salesman who later became a pastor.²¹ In that year, a property along the Inter-American highway in San Cristobal, Totonicapán, was purchased to establish a small clinic there. The Adventist doctor Antonio Solares, together with his wife and three children, moved from the capital to San Cristobal to open the medical clinic for the inhabitants of the area.²²

In 1965, the members of the growing church in the city of Xela bought some land located on 20th Avenue 0'65 in Zone 4. There they built the framework for a building, and then the construction of a church was begun. Francisco Arroyo (plan designer), Rogelio Campillo (oversight of the construction), and Salvador Monzón (continued construction) led out in the construction. Today this church is known as the Central Church.

Because a large number of children attended the church in Zone 3, it was decided to start building a church school on the church property. The church for Zone 3 of Quetzaltenango, after great effort, was dedicated in 1987, and Brother Misael Cifuentes was named head elder.

In summary, during the period from 1950 to 2002, many social, political, and economic changes occurred in Guatemala. Hurricane Mitch also impacted the area during this time. In spite of all this, there was a missionary

awakening in the western area of the country through the project Small Groups. In departments and municipalities of the southwestern area of the country, missionary work also proceeded uninterrupted, and new churches were started in Coatepeque (1952), Nuevo Palmar (1953), Concepción Chiquirichapa (1956), Palestina (1962), San Martín (1968), Duraznales (1971), Corrales (1973), Lintepeque (1975), La Esperanza (1981), Almolonga (1990), and Cantel (1999).

Because of the spread of the Adventist message through the departments of Huehuetenango, San Marcos, Totonicapán, Quiché, Sololá, Tecún Humán, Retalhuleu, Suchitepéquez, and other departments and municipalities, the Southwest Guatemala Mission was created in the year 1999.

In the Quetzaltenango region, the Central Church of Zone 3 proposed to plant more churches in the area around Xela. In that way, churches came into existence in Zone 4 (1984), Llano del Pinal Village (1985), Zone 8 (1990), Zone 6 (1993), Zone 7 (1997), San Antonio or the Sixth Street Church (1997), Justo Rufino Barrios Village (2001), and Zone 1 (2002). In 2019, there were 15 congregations in the Quetzaltenango main city alone.

Significant Events That Led to the Organization of West Guatemala Conference

The rapid growth of the work in the whole country of Guatemala forced the leaders to reorganize into four local fields where before there had been only one. So it is that from Southwest Guatemala Mission came West Guatemala Mission, with Guenther García as its first president.²³ This was made official on Wednesday, August 18, 2004, at the first Quadrennial Session of the Southwest Guatemala Mission led by Sergio Moctezuma and attended by 322 delegates.²⁴

West Guatemala Mission, because of its rapid and solid growth in membership and finances, was elevated to the conference level²⁵ in 2014. For this, there was a special meeting, called a Change of Status Session. This meeting was held on Monday, August 4, 2014, with 162 delegates from the departments of Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, and San Marcos. Israel Leito supervised the nominating committee, which was run by Guenther García.

Since then, West Guatemala Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has been in operation. Its elected president was Irving Calderón, and Enrique Menéndez was elected secretary-treasurer.

From 2014 to 2020, West Guatemala Conference gained 6.3 churches and more than 2,600 baptisms per year:²⁶ Concerning the conference's institutions, the following events stand out: the remodeling of the Moisés Tahay Adventist Co-Educational School on June 6, 2012, and the creation of the Agape Medical Clinic in mid-2013. Both of these projects were started by Román Monroy and continued by Irving Calderón.

The Valparaíso Adventist Co-Educational School was expanded by the purchase of a property next to the school where administrative offices, a computer laboratory, and five classrooms were built. The project was started at

the end of 2015 and finished by the end of 2016. A 16-hectare (39.5-acre) property was purchased with the intent to build a meeting place for the large conferences of the field, a work started by Calderón.

In the evangelism area, this field has set itself high goals, above all, in the main city of Quetzaltenango, as it is the second most important city in this country. For that reason, from 2014 to 2016, there were integrated efforts to hold urban evangelistic meetings in large halls to reach a large number of people. It is worthwhile to emphasize what occurred June 12–18, 2016, when Calderón carried out a large project with the name “Salvation Caravan.” The church rented five stadiums in Tacaná, San Marcos, La Democracia, Huehuetenango, and Xelajú. The stadium in Xelajú holds more than 12,000 persons. This was totally filled. The speaker for this event was Alejandro Bullón.

With the passing of the years, the work has advanced considerably. In 2019, there was an Adventist presence in all 18 municipalities of San Marcos, the 19 municipalities of Quetzaltenango, and in 23 of the 33 municipalities of Huehuetenango.

Mission and Strategic Plans of the Conference

The conference mission is to glorify God and guide each believer into a personal and transforming relationship with Christ, who will enable them as disciples to share the eternal gospel with others. The conference vision is for each member of the body of Christ to be prepared as a disciple for the kingdom of God.

Per the ideals here mentioned, it is considered necessary to do the following:

1. Fulfill the two mission-focused axes of the New Testament: (a) the Great Commission that was given by Christ—to make disciples—and (2) preach the present truth.
2. Carry out the Total Member Involvement (TMI) plan of the General Conference.
3. Reorganize the small groups, which are the basis for all successful missionary endeavors. As a part of this reorganization, they will be called Groups of Hope.
4. Finish the construction of the conference auditorium as soon as possible.
5. Establish an Adventist presence in the 10 municipalities of the department of Huehuetenango in which there were none in 2019.²⁷
6. Motivate, instruct, train, and equip in an environment of unity all those who are ready to help finish the work of evangelism.

List of Presidents

Armando Reyes (1999–2001); Héctor Sánchez (2001–2004); Guenther García (2004–2005); Ramiro Hernández (2005–2010); Román Monroy (2011–2014); Irving Calderón (2014–).

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