



East Los Llanos Conference headquarters

Photo courtesy of Inti Raul Cuadros Caguas.

## East Los Llanos Conference

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### INTI RAÚL CUADROS

Inti Raúl Cuadros Cagua currently (2020) serves as district pastor in the Llanos Conference. He has ministered for 23 years as a district pastor and is currently a biblical doctoral student with an emphasis on New Testament at the Universidad Adventista del Plata, in Argentina. He is married to Lucy S. Angulo and is the father of Isabella and Luciana.

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The East Los Llanos Conference is part of the Southern Colombian Union, located within the territory of the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

The East Los Llanos Conference covers a population of 1,596,437, and includes the Colombian departments of Meta, Casanare, Guaviare, and Guainía. It has 102 churches, 19,866 members, 17 ordained pastors, and six licensed pastors. The conference office is located at Street 33, No. 38-94 in the city of Villavicencio, department of Meta, Colombia.

## Institutions of the East Los Llanos Conference

Adventist College of Villavicencio is located at 33A 38-38 Street, in the city of Villavicencio, Meta. In 1959 the school began with grades 1 and 2 of primary basic. The first teachers were the husband and wife, Jorge González and Gladys Mendoza. The school was named Colegio Voluntad.<sup>1</sup> In 1968 the name was changed to Colegio Libertad. In 1991 it was changed to its current name, SDA College of Villavicencio. The school now teaches the levels from preschool through secondary basic.

Adventist College of Granada is located on 19th Street 1-02, in the city of Granada, Meta. This institution has been operating since 1962. On April 26, 2000, the school moved to its current site. The school now has 392 students from preschool through secondary basic.<sup>2</sup>

Colegio San José del Guaviare is located in the Race 18 11-53 in the city of San José. This institution has been operating since 1973. It currently has 376 students from preschool through secondary basic.<sup>3</sup>

## Origin of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Territory of the East Los Llanos Conference

In the late 1890s, self-supporting missionary Frank C. Kelly arrived in Colombia. He supported himself by selling photographic equipment and teaching English, but he was determined to also introduce Adventism to the country. He was forced to return home after three years because of his wife's illness. For the next two decades there was no one to continue the pioneering work of Kelly, so the seed he had sown could not germinate and bear fruit.<sup>4</sup>

In 1915 he and his family settled in Barranquilla, and the following year in Medellin. There he wrote, "This is the most delightful and hardest field I have ever worked on."<sup>5</sup> G. A. Schwerin took the work that Connerly had left unfinished in 1917, but for that time E. M. Trummer visited Colombia for the first time. Less than two years later, when he moved to Bogota, he distributed Adventist books as a canvasser to prepare Colombia for active evangelism. It was during his years of service that the Adventist work in Colombia had its true beginning.<sup>6</sup> In 1921, Max Trummer arrived in Bogota to strengthen the missionary work already begun. There the Kelley and Cleves families joined forces in preaching the gospel.<sup>5</sup> From Bogotá the preaching of the gospel extended to the city of Villavicencio, Meta. This city, known as "the gate of the plain" of Colombia, opened its doors to the Adventist message.<sup>6</sup>

José Antonio Herrera Céspedes recounts that the Adventist work began in the city of Villavicencio in 1957 and that he was baptized when it was still a fledgling church. The members of this church met at Eva Molano's house where a Colombian state entity called "Malaria" operated. Herrera says that Eli Tobias Beltrán was the first missionary to have contact with him, giving him SDA literature, a fact that encouraged him to travel to the Central Church of Bogotá on October 6, 1958, in order to buy Bibles. Together with Beltrán, brothers Galvis and Carlos Gutierrez worked, the latter as director of the SDA group.

The first minister was Jorge González. During the time of his ministry, the first baptisms were performed by Pastor Tirso Escandón. Pastor Sixto Tulio González led the process of buying the land where they would later build the Central Church of Villavicencio and the Adventist school. In May 1968 the first stone was laid and on the final Sabbath of September of that year, the first meeting was held.<sup>7</sup>

Paz de Ariporo, Casanare department, was one of the first municipalities to which the Adventist message came. It was around the 1960s and due to the influence of the Hostein family who came from abroad, and also by the influence of missionaries who came from Sogamoso, Boyacá. Among the first Adventists in this place were Pablo García, his wife María Tarache, and the Cortés and Guarín families, among others.<sup>8</sup>

The Adventist work began in El Yopal around the beginning of the 1960s and through the influence of Miguel Gutiérrez and Angel María Pérez, and Angel's wife Eva who came from Sogamoso, the gospel was brought to that city. Other pioneers include Rosa de Pulido, her husband Jorge, and their children, the family that donated the lot where the Central Church operates today. Other families were those of Jesus Gutierrez and his wife, Antonia Parada, and their children, Fruto Fernández, his wife Josefina, and children, and Eduardo Castro and his wife.

The place where these members met was in Rosa Pulido's house, near the Presentation College. The SDA prime minister was Gerardo Calle. The work in La Chaparrera was directed by Efraín Martínez.<sup>9</sup>

Felix Roberto Daza arrived in San José del Guaviare in 1964, when he was 35 years old. However, the Adventist work in this capital was officially established in 1970.<sup>10</sup> There lived the Escobar family, soon after came the Patiño family from Granada, Meta, and by the grace of God came the Escobar family, says Daza. They began to contemplate the possibility of making a small *cambuche*<sup>11</sup> where the Central Church is currently located. By 1973 a group was meeting and it was necessary to expand the chapel. Over time a better chapel was built, but it was still not enough and then the church was built by Pastor Alejandro Gómez. The missionary Quintero Valencia collaborated in the establishment of several groups.<sup>12</sup> The educational work was begun in San José del Guaviare with the founding of the school by teachers Gladys Torres and Nelcy Carvajal who taught grades 1 to 4.

David Antonio Quebrada argues that the exact date of entry of the gospel to the municipality of Mesetas, Meta, is not known; but that by 1996 more than 30 years had passed. When David arrived at the municipality, he learned that there were two Adventists: Brother Guevara and Bernardo Alarcón. Their first pastor was Sixto Tulio González who pastored them from Villavicencio.<sup>13</sup> Arnoldo Díaz contributed to the opening of the Adventist

school of Mesetas. This school started with 15 students and operated for five years in Diaz's home. The school contributed significantly to the strengthening of missionary work in the municipality.<sup>17</sup> In 1998 the church pastor, Jair Serrano Camelo, was murdered in the rural area of this municipality.

In 1968 the husband and wife, Marcos Cortés and Elena Ovalle, and their daughter Dora, were members of the Central Church of Bogotá; Luz Marina Prieto was a member of the church of Luna Park of Bogotá, and Manuel Muñoz de Guateque (Boyacá) decided to travel to a hamlet made up of settlers and indigenous people called Puerto Inírida, Guainía. It was a territory located in the Colombian jungles, and there he began to spread the Adventist message in the midst of great religious opposition.<sup>14</sup> In 1975 Alicia Buitrago arrived by the river. In July 1977, Rosa Esmeralda Hernández and María Esperanza Hernández arrived from Bogota to work. Later came their parents, David Hernández Báez and Rosa Martínez, with their three young children. In 1978 they rented a place in the Berlin neighborhood from which the group of Adventists could operate.

Hernández Martínez moved to Caño Jota by the Orinoco River in 1979 and some of the people there accepted the gospel. By 1980 a church had been built on a lot in Inírida that was donated by Rosa Esmeralda Hernández. In 1981 María Esperanza Hernández and her husband Arlex Tovar evangelized the indigenous hamlet of Curripaca on the banks of the Guainía River.<sup>15</sup>

In the municipality of Lejanías the work was started in 1972 by Gilberto Loaiza. He was assisted by Ricaurte Yate and Julio and Nepomuceno Sánchez. His first church was inaugurated in 1976.<sup>16</sup> Also outstanding is the great missionary work of José Otoniel Muñoz Rodríguez as a pioneer of the Adventist work in the Ariari region in the Department of Meta.

Adventist work began in 1978 in the rural area of the municipality of El Guamal, in the house of Jiménez Caviedes. The pioneer of the work was Jesus Garcia.<sup>17</sup> Year after year the church has grown in this region of Colombia.

## Training Events that Led to the Organization of the East Los Llanos Conference

The Colombian Mission was organized in 1922, and its first president was Pastor E. M. Trummer.<sup>18</sup> The address of the mission office was: Section 599, Bogota, Republic of Colombia. The members of the executive board were: E. M. Trummer (chair), L. V. Cleaves, Fred Brower, F. C. Kelley, and Antonio Redondo.<sup>19</sup>

In 1926 the mission was reorganized into four missions: Medellín-based on Antioqueña Mission, with president Max Trummer; an Atlantic Mission based on Barranquilla, the Cali-based Pacific Mission, and the Bogota-based Central Mission, and the president of these was Pastor G. C. Nickle. The territory of the Central Mission served the provinces of Cundinamarca, Tolima, Huila, Caquetá, Boyacá, Santander, Norte de Santander, Arauca, Vichada, Vaupés, and Meta.<sup>20</sup>

For several decades the territory of the plains was served from the city of Bogotá by the Central Mission and then by the High Magdalena Conference. Due to the long distances between the city of Bogotá and the new churches born in the departments of the eastern plains and Boyacá, and with the aim of offering better attention to congregations and more expedited evangelization to this vast region of Colombia, it was proposed to divide the territory of this local field.

To this end, at the beginning of 2007, the Alto Magdalena Conference voted to appoint as its vice-president, Pastor Germán Darío Pérez Cruz, to serve as coordinator of the 12 districts<sup>21</sup> of East Llanos and Boyacá, establishing it as an experimental field belonging to the conference. In July 2007, Pastor Abraham Cuevas Sepúlveda was appointed as director of the department of personal ministries. On June 2, 2009, the Llanos Orientales and Boyacá Mission was officially organized.<sup>22</sup> On this date the three administrators, Jaime Perilla (president), Abraham Cuevas (secretary), and Oscar Amado (treasurer) were appointed, as were departmental directors Joel Hernández and Gloria Suárez de Perilla.

On November 27, 2012, the Llanos Orientales Mission delivered to the new Northwestern Bogota and Boyacá regions the three pastoral districts of the department of Boyacá.

On November 2, 2014, the senior organizations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church confirmed the change in status and name of the local field, which went from mission to conference. The following officials were appointed: Abraham Cuevas (president), Joel Hernandez (secretary), and Deivy Vega (treasurer).

## East Los Llanos Conference is Trying to Fulfill its Mission

In order to fulfill the mission more effectively in cities, the conference has set out to build representative houses of worship for church members and to serve as centers of influence for the non-SDA community around them. It also promotes the opening of Adventist work in new places, both urban and rural, that lead to the formation of new congregations that are then organized into churches.

The conference communication department is developing programs that allow the spread of the gospel on the Internet and through social networks.

## Recent Events Experienced by the Conference

The administration of this conference has been characterized by its fidelity to God, its dedication to brotherhood, and its loyalty to the higher entities of the church, especially the South Colombian Union, and to civil authorities.

During its brief history, this local field has encouraged both formal and non-formal education of its ministerial staff, supporting several pastors and ministers in master's and doctoral studies. In September 2007, the conference voted to purchase a house worth more than US\$67,000, where the administrative offices of the new



experimental field of Llanos Orientales and Boyacá could operate. In November 2010 a new house was purchased that was properly suited for the operation of the headquarters of the new mission and the acquisition of 30 hectares of land for the camp.

In order to build representative churches in this city, the Metropolitan Fund of Villavicencio was created. To date, churches have been erected in Renacer, Maranatha, and Shalom. In addition, it was voted to build a country church for the upper class on the Vanguard side of the city starting in 2018.

## Fulfilling Your Mission

The conference is fulfilling its mission as is reflected in the organization of new churches and in the mass preaching of the gospel throughout the territory of the conference. The use of the “I want to live healthy” methodology has been useful in making the church known in different communities and, through it, the message of salvation. Another important factor is missionary work in small groups which has become part of the church lifestyle in several places. In recent years the conference has distributed thousands of missionary books to communities.

A major challenge is the economic crisis that has been raging in the region and the whole country. This worrying factor does not allow the development of the established work or the penetration into new missionary fields.

## List of Presidents

Jaime Oswaldo Perilla Moreno (2009-2014); Abraham Cuevas Sepúlveda (2014-2018); Joel David Hernández Campos (2018-present).

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### SOURCES

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### NOTES

1. Enoc Iglesias Ortega, *Adventist Presence in Colombia* (Medellin: Corporación Universitaria Adventista, 1996), 229.
2. Adventist College of Granada, "Manual of Coexistence."
3. Enoch Iglesias Ortega, *Adventist Presence in Colombia*. (Medellin: Adventist University Corporation, 1996), 225-227.
4. Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Carriers. History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, (Buenos Aires: Association South American Publisher House, 2002), 220; Floyd Greenleaf, *The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Latin American and the Caribbean*, vol. 1 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1972), vol. 1, 173-174.
5. Yerko Samuel Viana Moreno, *History of Adventism in Bogotá D.C. 1921-2011* (Bogotá: Upper Magdalena Conference, Communication Department), 28.
6. *Diario El Tiempo*, August 22, 2002. <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1319813>.
7. Ortega, 46-47.
8. Luis Felipe Cortés Guarín, member of one of the pioneering families in Paz de Ariporo, interview by author.
9. Ninfa Gutiérrez Parada and Israel Fernández, sons of the pioneering families of the Adventist work in El Yopal and direct witnesses to the recounted events, interview by author.
10. Ortega, 35.
11. Species of small improvised room, made of lightweight and generally non-durable materials.
12. Written historical collection, provided by Román Ariza, in 2017, East Los Llanos Conference archives.
13. Ortega, 37.
14. *Ibid.*, 228.
15. Historical compilation written by Esperanza Hernández Martínez in 2017, East Los Llanos Conference archives.
16. Ortega, 41.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Greenleaf, 134.
19. "Colombian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1923), 176.

20. "Colombia," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1926.pdf>.

21. In 2008 it was annexed to the experimental camp, the Ariporo Peace District, which was ceded by the conference of the Colombian Northeast.

22. Pastor Germán Darío Pérez Cruz, secretary of the Llanos Conference in 2017, interview by author.

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