

Adventist University Institute of Venezuela

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The Adventist University Institute of Venezuela (IUNAV) is the first and only university-level educational institution that the Adventist Church operates in Venezuela. It functions under the legal entity *Asociación Civil Instituto Universitario Adventista de Venezuela* with the Adventist Church's sponsorship through constituent unions – East Venezuela Union Mission, West Venezuela Union Mission, and Dutch Caribbean Union Mission.

The campus is located ten minutes from the city of Nirgua, Yaracuy, in the Las Lagunas sector off the Vía Salom exit of the Pan-American Highway. The university is located in the fertile citrus valley of Nirgua and has an area of 196 hectares. Its buildings are concentrated on 30 hectares, and the remaining 166 hectares are used for orange groves and seasonal crops. The university offers elementary, secondary, and higher education academic levels with dormitories for men and women at the university level. It accepts students from all over Venezuela and abroad (Brazil, Colombia, Central America, the Caribbean, and elsewhere).

Origins

IUNAV was initially established as a secondary school with dormitories for boys and girls on October 1, 1962. It was named *Colegio Secundario Adventista de Venezuela*.¹ In 1990, it began an academic program accredited by the education department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church by offering a college degree in theology with support from *Corporación Universitaria Adventista* in Medellín, Colombia.² It also offered college degrees in administration, business, computers, and office management through a cooperative agreement with Montemorelos University in Nuevo León, Mexico. On July 26, 1999, by presidential decree, the government of Venezuela officially approved the offering of four degrees at a higher level, officially creating IUNAV.³ In January 2000, the Venezuela Adventist Theological Seminary (SETAVEN) was created, expanding the theology program to offer a five-year college degree with Adventist accreditation.

IUNAV is the concrete result of an Adventist educational project in Venezuela, which began in 1962. After a series of decisions voted with this goal in mind, a secondary school was established in the buildings of a former

chicken farm called Los Pinos, which was donated by a philanthropic Adventist, José Antonio Lamas, in the village of El Limón near Maracay, state of Aragua.⁴ There it functioned as a boarding school until July 1966. In 1964, a 60-hectare farm in the state of Yaracuy near Nirgua had been acquired. The school was moved to this property, and, on October 23, 1966, it was inaugurated with a new name, Venezuela Vocational Institute (INSTIVOC).

The new name was chosen in a contest in which members, students, and teachers participated. A trial attempt to offer a theology major was made possible with the help of Colombia-Venezuela Adventist University in Medellin, Colombia, which created an extension of its theology program on the Venezuelan campus. This was a progressive step. Pastor Rafael Eduardo Gómez was assigned to be the coordinator of this major, which would give experience in education at the university level for the Adventist church in Venezuela. Unfortunately, it was not possible to continue this major because there were not enough teachers with degrees in theology in Venezuela at that time.

This educational institution has functioned on the same site to this day, now serving as a non-boarding secondary school. It gave up a great part of its campus for IUNAV to be built there; the university began to operate in 1999 as a university with dormitories for both men and women.

History

The early pioneers started the work in Venezuela in 1910.⁵ They had a conviction that an Adventist school of higher education was important for Venezuela. In 1911, Mrs. Rosa V. Lane, wife of Pastor Frank Leis Lane (the first missionaries sent by the General Conference to Venezuela), started a little school for the children of the first Adventist believers in Caracas. This school continued to function until 1913, when the Lanes had to go back to the United States due to Mrs. Lane's ill health.⁶

In 1922, the first Adventist educational institution with primary and secondary levels was started in the town of Camaguán, Guárico, and it continued to operate until 1937 or 1938.⁷ Professor Richard Greenidge and his wife from the Bahamas worked together with the Lanes as the missionaries who established the Adventist work in Venezuela. Professor Greenidge became the director and teacher of the above-mentioned school for 13 years until his death in the United States in 1935. At that time, his son Luis took his place for a short time as the head of the school.⁸

On June 1, 1936, Pastor Luis Greenidge founded an Adventist school in the Venezuelan Mission house in La Concordia, Caracas. Its first teachers were ladies who had graduated from the Adventist school in Camaguán. For 20 years, the school operated at the mission house and at a rented house on the street between Bucare and Carmen corners, Number 97-2, on what is now Avenida Baralt. In September 1956, it became possible to rent a building named Pimpinela at 17 El Paraíso Avenue, a main thoroughfare, where the school has continued to carry out its educational work to this day under the illustrious name "Richard Greenidge Academy," which offers

all preschool-secondary grade levels. Nevertheless, there was still a strong desire to start a secondary boarding school.

In 1962, the president of East Venezuela Mission with headquarters in Caracas, Pastor Harold Bohr, and the administrative board voted to start an educational project on Los Pinos farm in El Limón near Maracay, Aragua. On October 1, 1962, *Colegio Secundario Adventista de Venezuela* was created with Pastor Antonio Ceballos Araujo as its director, six teachers, and 52 boarding students. In light of the fact that more physical space and a more rural environment were necessary, a focused search began. In 1963, a farm was purchased on Vía Salom, about ten kilometers away from the town of Nirgua, Yaracuy.⁹

Pastor Carlos E. Schmidt was invited to head the construction project, which he began in 1964. He would later become the school's second director. The buildings were ready to move from El Limón to Nirgua in August 1966. The 52 previous students began their fourth school year (1966-67) at the secondary level with a great deal of happiness and strong emotions with 88 new students, creating an enrollment of 140. The infrastructure was finished through many donations, the most important of which were: the offering from all of the members in Venezuela, the special donation of the Creole Petrol Foundation, and the designated 13th Sabbath Offering taken at the worldwide Sabbath schools at the end of March 1966.

After a great deal of hard work, in March 1990, the possibility to offer a four-year degree in theology opened. This was greatly due to the help of the recently-named president of the new Venezuela-Antilles Union Mission, Pastor Iván Omaña García, who, with Venezuela Vocational Academy's director, Pastor Gilberto E. Bracho, was able to carry out this project. To coordinate the theology major, Brazilian Pastor Ithamar Savino de Paiva was brought in from Colombia and laid the groundwork for what would become the Adventist Theological Seminary of Venezuela (SETAVEN).

In 1993, an agreement was made with Montemorelos University to offer various degrees on Venezuela Vocational Institute's campus, which was a significant step.¹⁰ For this reason, Venezuela Adventist Ecclesiastical University (INSTIVEN) was begun without government recognition but with denominational accreditation.¹¹ Venezuela Vocational Institute's secondary school continued to operate on a separate part of the campus.

After fulfilling the legal requirements of the national government, a presidential decree created IUNAV on July 26, 1999.¹² At that time, Venezuela Vocational Institute disappeared with the extension program from Montemorelos University. Now the academic offerings included new majors at the technical and university levels in education, administration and information systems, business, and human resources. Even though IUNAV started in July 1999, the Yaracuy's state governor, Dr. Eduardo Lapi García, officially inaugurated it on September 23, 1999, with Pastor Iván Omaña, president of the union, and the administrators of the institution present. Because the theology degree at the college level only had an accreditation from the education department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it was necessary for legal reasons to create the *Asociación Civil del Seminario Teológico Adventista de Venezuela*

(SETAVEN). Therefore, in January 2000, SETAVEN was officially created with Dr. Fernando Zabala Ruiz as director and Pastor Edgar Brito La Rosa as coordinator.

Historic Role

The university campus's buildings and facilities are at the disposal of the church's administrative organizations' activities. The university church has a sitting capacity of 800 and has held congresses, councils, training programs, and seminars for Adventists. The university itself has entered a denominational agreement to cede parts of the campus as a camping area for youth camporees. Some of the facilities, like the semi-Olympic sized pool, the Harold Bohr auditorium with a capacity of 1,200, the music academy, and the culture complex, "Pastor Antonio Ceballos Araujo," are at the disposal of the church as well as local and regional communities.

Through SETAVEN, IUNAV administers a short-wave radio station and a language academy that teaches English, French, and Portuguese. IUNAV's campus has a restaurant with a capacity of 400, two dormitories with 100 rooms each, a prayer garden with a chapel, walkways, and meditation and reading areas. It also has a library with 22,000 volumes, a copy center, an audiovisual room, and a denominational museum.

The university has cooperated on an ongoing basis with the Seventh-day Adventist Church in providing evangelistic, ecclesiastic, and academic services that assist the church in its evangelistic program with faculty and students. It also works with regional and national civil authorities through community service, brainstorming sessions, research projects, statistical research projects, and other related activities.

Through its print shop, the university provides a special service to the church in Venezuela, working with the Inter-American Division Publishing Association to print the Sabbath School Quarterly and other denominational publications. Through *Ediciones SETAVEN*, the university produces devotional books, theological magazines, and theological studies distributed within the country and abroad.

The university has a 163-hectare farm with 48,000 orange trees in orchards and over 40 dairy cows for institutional use and for selling dairy products to the community. In collaboration with the Inter-American Division (in a 49/51 proportion agreement), the university and Venezuela Union Conference have run a Health Food Company branch on campus since 1997. This includes a bakery, a cereal processing plant, a warehouse for the distribution and sale of food products, and a fast-food eatery.

Since 2012, the university has offered online education, offering diplomas in areas such as university teaching and human resources to satisfy the demand for distance studies. In so doing, the university ventures into the use of online communication and information technology. The university also offers diplomas through on-campus classes in the areas of sign language, pastoral leadership, and fundamentals of theology.

Fulfilling the Mission

The university voted on a spiritual development project that started in 2016: “Lord, Transform Me!” An evaluation of this program was planned for 2020. The objective was for each student and staff member to experience a powerful spiritual life at the university, and each graduate is challenged to become an agent for change and transformation in whatever place he or she works at as a professional.

The national government was requested for authorization to upgrade the academic degree the university offers from *técnico superior universitario* (a technical degree) to *licenciatura* (equivalent to a bachelor’s degree) for the following majors: preschool education, information systems, business administration, and human resources.

With thanks to God and the conviction of the great blessings to be realized from the physical plant’s future growth, plans were made for the construction of two new dormitories, staff housing, a sports complex, a music academy building, and a medical treatment center. All of this was planned during challenging economic difficulties from the socio-political situation, which makes financial resources difficult to gain. With competent and committed staff and a student body willing to be transformed by God for His service in this world and the next, IUNAV looks ahead with great hope and faith to the imminent great event, the Second Coming of Christ.

List of Presidents/Coordinators

Colegio Secundario Adventista de Venezuela (COLSEVEN): Antonio Ceballos Araujo (1962-1966).

Venezuela Vocational Institute (INSTIVOC): Carlos E. Schmidt (1966-1969); Humberto Hernández (1969-1974); Miguel Angel López (1974-1978); Gustavo Garrido (1979-1983); Iván Omaña García (1983-1985); Gamaliel Flores G. (1985-1989); Gilberto E. Bracho (1989-1990).

Venezuela Adventist Ecclesiastical University (INSTIVEN): Gilberto E. Bracho (1990-1994); Fernando Zabala Ruiz (1994-1999).

Adventist University Institute of Venezuela (IUNAV): Fernando Zabala Ruiz (1999-2002); Edgar Brito La Rosa (2002-).

Venezuela Adventist Theological Seminary (SETAVEN): Ithamar S. De Paiva (1990-1992); Michele Buonfiglio (1992-1994); Pablo D. Rothman (1994-1995); John Wesley Taylor IV (1995); Edgar Brito La Rosa (1995-2002); Luis A. Valencia (2002-2010); Emmer Chacón Parra (2011-2014); Juan Diego Benavides Riaño (2015-).

Inter-American Adventist Theological Seminary: Venezuela Campus: Edgar Brito La Rosa (2003-2007); Luis Valencia (2007-2010); Emmer Chacón Parra (2011-2014); Héctor Obed Martín (2015-2018); Juan Diego Benavides Riaño (2019-).

SOURCES

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Huérfino, Pablo E. "Venezuela Adventist University Institute: The Development of a Seventh-day Adventist Educational Institution: 1962-1969." Doctoral thesis, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A., 2001.

Schupnik Fleitas, Carlos Rafael. *Aquí Obro Dios*. Yaracuy: Instituto Universitario Adventista de Venezuela, 2010.

Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia. Second Revised Edition. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996. S.v. "Venezuelan Adventist Ecclesiastical University."

NOTES

1. Carlos Rafael Schupnik Fleitas, *Aquí Obro Dios* (Nirgua, Yaracuy, Venezuela: Instituto Universitario Adventista de Venezuela, 2010), 65.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Nathanael García Robayna, *Sin Temor al Futuro* (Caracas: Litobrit, 1989), 42.
5. Pablo E. Huérfino, "Venezuela Adventist University Institute: The Development of a Seventh-day Adventist Educational Institution: 1962-1969" (doctoral thesis, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A., 2001), 24.
6. García Robayna, 5.
7. Ibid., 39.
8. Ibid., 5.
9. Huérfino, 95.
10. Universidad de Montemorelos, "Convenio de Afiliación entre la Universidad de Montemorelos y el Instituto Universitario Eclesiástico Adventista," March 1996.; and Huérfino, 272.
11. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Venezuelan Adventist Ecclesiastical University."
12. Huérfino, 241.

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