

# Asuncion Adventist Sanitarium

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Asuncion Adventist Sanitarium (Sanatorio Adventista de Asuncion or SAA) is a medical missionary institution of the Seventh-day Adventist Church located in the Paraguay Union of Churches Mission territory. It is headquartered on 380 Silvio Pettirossi Avenue and is crossed by Paí Perez, ZIP code: 001221, in the state of Teniente Silvio Pettirossi, San Roque county, in the capital city of Asunción, Paraguay.<sup>1</sup>

The SAA institution offers medical and hospital services. The SAA is part of the worldwide Adventist Health System, an organization that currently has “more than 150 Hospitals and Sanitariums, 330 Clinics and Dispensaries, 80 Nursing Homes, and 16 Orphanages” spread around the world.<sup>2</sup> Its purpose is to “preserve human dignity; promote a healthy lifestyle; deal with physical and social harms caused by alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and noxious substances; foster obedience to the divine laws of health; develop a clearer discernment in the moral and spiritual aspects through the promotion of healthier habits; and announce the plenitude of the Gospel message in promoting physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being of everyone.”<sup>3</sup>

In its service to the public, the SAA has the following specialties: allergy, cardiology, general surgery, plastic surgery, cardiothoracic surgery, health clinic, dermatology, diabetology, endocrinology, phlebology, gastroenterology, gynecology and obstetrics, mastology, family medicine, pulmonology, neurology, nutrition, ophthalmology, orthopedics and traumatology, otorhinolaryngology, pediatrics, psychopedagogy, psychology, rheumatology, and urology. In addition, it has services of radiology, ultrasonography, clinical analysis lab, physiotherapy, tomography, and cardiac and gastroenterological examinations.

The Sanitarium clinical attention services provide care on a national level. The number of beds has increased to 33,<sup>4</sup> with five more beds in the intensive therapy unit. The number of employees is 280, of whom 82 are nurses and 14 are doctors. The total of workers is 13, of whom six are licensed as missionaries, six are credentialed missionary workers, and one is a licensed minister.

## Developments that Led to the Institution’s Establishment

In the beginning of the 1900s, the Adventist message arrived in Asunción, Paraguay, through Ignacio Kalbermatter, who dedicated his life to handing out flyers, Adventist publications, and missionary books. At the time, Luis Ernst had already worked as president of the Upper Paraná Mission (presently the North Argentine

Conference), which included the territories of the Misiones province in Argentina and Paraguay. In 1907, as part of their efforts, Ernst, with Kalbermatter's collaboration, organized a small 12-member church in Asunción.<sup>5</sup>

A few years later, in 1914, the medical missionary activity in Paraguay began with the arrival of nurse and massage therapist Mateo Leytes (1883-1963) to Asunción.<sup>6</sup> Leytes had graduated from the River Plate Sanitarium and Hospital (Entre Ríos, Argentina) Nursing School.<sup>7</sup> He then decided to start disseminating the Adventist beliefs through the medical work in Paraguay. In 1914, after many difficulties, he received the required authorization to work in Asunción. And at the end of year, he said that he had gotten the city doctors' and the medical council's sympathy.<sup>8</sup>

In the following year, 1915, Leytes became so well known in the city that the government named him head nurse who was responsible for the Military Hospital's Massage department.<sup>9</sup> Leytes was a missionary who financially maintained himself, and only a few times had he received any assistance from the Upper Paraná Mission. For a time, he was the Paraguay president's private masseur. He usually carried documents that afforded him protection wherever he went. Leytes worked in that area until 1932.<sup>10</sup>

In 1929, the Austral Union Conference (presently the Argentina Union Conference) authorized the investment to equip a treatment room in Asunción. However, nothing could be done until many years later.<sup>11</sup> In addition, in the end of 1943, the South American Division authorized the development of a "basic health care at home" book. This guide had to be available for churches, allowing them to promote this practice in a more practical way. Two years later, the Austral Union Conference recognized the need for having treatment rooms, then suggested that a higher percentage of the offering annual funds could be assigned to this goal.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the medical work in Asunción was promoted by Niels Wensell, president of the North Mission, and in July 1943, the Mission asked for the Austral Union Conference and the South American Division to favorably consider the beginning of a medical work in Paraguay. Therefore, they requested a doctor, a nurse, and funds for equipment. Similarly, in August 1944, another fund request to begin this work was made, and the Union and Division leaders considered the request, so funds to establish the medical work in Asunción were provided from the Division.<sup>13</sup>

## The Foundation of the Institution

The forerunner institution of the Asunción Adventist Sanitarium was called Fisioterapia Mayo. Its director was Miguel Esparcia, and he was assisted by his wife, Emma Hardy, and Arnold Treiyer. These young nurses, who had graduated from the River Plate Sanitarium,<sup>14</sup> started their activities by performing nursing tasks on August 4, 1945, on 411 25 de Mayo St. These events served to produce economic income, enabling the stonemasons to make progress on the building construction. This nursing activity was hosted by the North Mission (MN) and was administered by Pedro M. Brouchy<sup>15</sup> who, besides being called to be a pastor and preacher, worked as a nurse.<sup>16</sup>

## History of the Institution

Due to the Paraguayan Civil War (1947), a conflict that affected the politics, the society, and the economy of the country,<sup>17</sup> the clinic operated in a precarious state during its first years of operation.

In March 1954, in response to a call from the General Conference, Dr. Ira E. Bailie came from the United States (EE. UU.) to the city of Asunción along with his wife and daughter Cheryl. The call that Bailie accepted expressly had the purpose of starting a medical institution in which he would work as Sanitarium's director. Bailie was a graduate from the College of Medical Evangelists, California, United States.<sup>18</sup> He started studying Spanish and had to take all the necessary medicine tests in order to finally get a license that would allow him to practice medicine in Paraguay.<sup>19</sup>

In 1956, the clinic moved to its present address on 380 Silvio Pettirossi Avenue crossed by Paí Perez, then referred to as the Asunción Treatment Rooms.<sup>20</sup> Once that was accomplished, plans for a building, equipment, and staff could be made. After this, they brought teams from Buenos Aires, Argentina, and from the United States. Once the project was completed, the clinic was officially inaugurated on July 26, 1959. Many government authorities and church leaders were present. Dr. Ira E. Bailie was the first doctor and director for the institution.<sup>21</sup> From that year, the clinic was referred to as the Paraguay Adventist Sanitarium.<sup>22</sup> At the time, the Sanitarium had 10 beds for examination, doctors' offices, a medical lab, an x-ray department, and an operating room.<sup>23</sup>

In 1961, the Sanitarium found itself overwhelmed treating sick people. The doctors accommodated the patients on massage tables, in the ambulance zone, and on the health clinic exam tables. Facing those events, in the same year, Dr. Bailie requested funds from the Mission to enlarge the Sanitarium since it was already becoming difficult to assist that many people in a small medical center. After this request, the Mission approved the acquisition of more land and the addition of a building with 25 beds.<sup>24</sup>

This event resulted in the institution's rapid expansion in five years. However, so that most of the citizens in Asunción could come to the Sanitarium, the Adventist congregants had to preach the health message to the public, which in turn responded favorably to its beliefs and health message. The Sanitarium became very well known, so much so that it was visited by the president of Paraguay and his wife. Just as he did, many German descendants would come to the Sanitarium, however, from distant places. These patients had to travel more than 450 km to be assisted. For that reason and due to the patients of German colonies increasing interest, a new hospital at 450 km southwest of Asunción began to be built around Hohenau and Obligado colonies in the state of Itapúa. However, there were not enough funds to complete the project, but the colonists were so dedicated to this that they willingly offered to fund the project.<sup>25</sup> Thus, thanks to the good work carried out by the Sanitarium in Asunción, the Church's collaboration with other local institutions in Paraguay founded the Hohenau Adventist Sanitarium.<sup>26</sup>

After having been through many difficulties, the new Asunción Sanitarium building was inaugurated on November 29, 1964, with many authorities present.<sup>27</sup> This new phase of the Sanitarium in the following years brought positive influence regarding the Sanitarium's reputation, and it helped spread the word about the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its beliefs.<sup>28</sup> Dr. Bailie's work both as director and doctor lasted for 13 years, and in 1972, he returned to the United States. By then, the Sanitarium had been expanded and improved.<sup>29</sup> Years later, in 1981, the institution became known as Asunción Adventist Sanitarium.<sup>30</sup>

After having structurally grown and becoming well known throughout the years, the SAA, back in the first years of the 21st century, assessed the possibility of creating a nursing school that would depend on the Sanitarium. And in the beginning of 2009, this idea started coming together, and along with the Church in Paraguay, they started developing a study program that would be presented to the Chamber of Deputies and the nation's Senate. At the end of the year, they were given authorization to operate Paraguay Adventist University. This took place on December 24 of the same year, and they received the Paraguayan president and the minister of education accreditation under the Law no. 3959. The SAA participation in founding the first Adventist university in Paraguay was very significant, even including that the SAA had lent its premises to hold the first classes.<sup>31</sup>

In 2010, the SAA gained a level 3 classification of maximum complexity by the Paraguay Superintendence of Health. And since 2015, a building master plan has been developed which describes the guidelines for an orderly and sustainable growth of the Sanitarium. It is also included the acquisition of adjacent lands and the construction of new structural units.<sup>32</sup>

## Historic Role of the Institution

Since its foundation, the SAA has been developing projects under the direction of the SDA Church that aim to fully heal each human being. Among these projects, the SAA promotes and motivates both inside their facilities and through social media knowing about the "Eight Natural Remedies." These are principles that motivates people about having a healthy diet, drinking more water, breathing fresh air, exposure to sunlight, getting physical exercise, rest, temperance, and developing trust in God.<sup>33</sup>

Within its projects related to the Paraguayan population, there is the Healthy Vegetarian Cooking School, where participants learn about delicious recipes and hear advice from professionals about a vegetarian diet.<sup>34</sup> The institution also promotes a How to Quit Smoking Course. "The course/workshop on how to quit smoking has the goal of helping people to get clean from tobacco and, thereafter, to have a healthy lifestyle, smoke-free. The course has the orientation of doctors, nutritionists, physical therapists, and psychologists. They also offer the opportunity of quit using tobacco and without gaining weight."<sup>35</sup> Likewise, they develop "Ferias de Salud" [Health Vacations] that are carried out by health professionals, pastors, and other volunteers from the Sanitarium.<sup>36</sup> All these projects are non-profit-making developments.

Since 2006, the SAA has joined to public and private institutions to help with the Paraguay Transplant Program. This program was developed by the General Department of Social Welfare (DIBEN) and the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare of Paraguay. In turn, the SAA provided the hospital infrastructure necessary for conducting transplants and other specialized human resources. Also, the Kidney Transplant Project carried out in the Sanitarium until December 2009 reached 50 transplants, and they all had a zero percent death rate and renal functionality of more than 90%. As a result, the SAA is now considered relevant in the health area of national interest, contributing with the government in caring for people with very low economic resources.<sup>37</sup>

In 2019, when the Asunción Adventist Sanitarium celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary,<sup>38</sup> many activities were held in celebration. Among them, as an example, on September 15, the SAA staff took part in the plan called “Sanatorio Abierto” [Open Sanitarium]. This was a free medical campaign that aided more than 250 people. The advertising of this event took place through churches, announcements in the communities, and through Paraguay New Time Radio. On that day, “studies for checkups as chest x-ray, electrocardiograms, labs, echocardiogram, and appointments with specialized doctors” were carried out. The offered specialties on that day included: general surgery, bariatric surgery, health clinic, cardiology, endocrinology, gynecology and obstetrics, family medicine, pediatrics, diabetology, traumatology, and urology. “In the same way, chaplaincy service was not lacking, attending the spiritual needs of the patients.”<sup>39</sup>

Another activity carried out by the SAA in November emphasized World Diabetes Day (November 14). That was done with the intent of raising awareness concerning this subject so the focus could be on prevention. Throughout this month, the Sanitarium conducted many activities that benefited the community through lectures focused on giving advice about caring for physical and emotional health in dealing with this disease.<sup>40</sup> These projects and activities that the SAA have been developing serve to assist the people’s expressed needs and to elicit understanding through them. Thus, these are important complements for evangelism and for the breakthrough of missionary work. Then, the SAA seeks to fulfill the purpose of taking the message of salvation through physical, mental, and spiritual health care.

## Mission

Located on 380 Silvio Pettrossi Avenue crossed by Paí Perez, Asunción, Paraguay, since 1956, this institution has completed 60 years of caring for the health of thousands of people. The SAA mission as a Christian Sanitarium is to “establish a means of relieving diseases and sufferings in the world, starting with the closest community, developing programs that promote physical, mental, social, and spiritual welfare of people.” Thus, the Sanitarium has continued to focus on a maximum moral and spiritual discernment by seeking to clarify the mind so that people may discern between good and evil, the truth and error.<sup>41</sup> In short, the clinic seeks to continue offering high quality service to the whole community based on the knowledge of God’s Word, supported by medical science, technology, and other means of bringing hope and faith in God.

## Names

La Fisioterapia Mayo (1945-1955);

Clínica Mayo (1956-1958);

Paraguay Adventist Sanitarium and Hospital (1959-1980);

Asunción Adventist Sanitarium (1981-present).

## Leaders<sup>42</sup>

General Directors: Ira Eugene Bailie (1959-1966); Gunnar Wensell (1967); Juan Carlos Drachenberg (1968-1969); Ira Eugene Bailie (1970-1971); Juan Carlos Drachenberg (1972-1974); Alcides C. Cairus (1975-1977); Guillermo Richards (1978-1979); Haroldo Janetzko (1980-1983); Enrique Manrique (1984-2004); Kenny Vicente Senn (2005-2010); Marcelo Simi (2010-2018); Alexis Oleynick (2018-present).

Medical Directors: Ira Eugene Bailie (1959-1966); Gunnar Wensell (1967); Juan Carlos Drachenberg (1968-1969); Ira Eugene Bailie (1970-1971); Juan Carlos Drachenberg (1972-1974); Alcides C. Cairus (1975-1977); Guillermo Richards (1978-1979); Haroldo Janetzko (1980-1983); Enrique Manrique (1984-2004); Kenny Vicente Senn (2005-2010); Marcelo Simi (2010-2018); Alexis Oleynick (2018-present).<sup>43</sup>

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