

Negros Occidental Conference

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Negros Occidental Conference (NOC) is in Central Philippine Union Conference in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. NOC is located in C. V. Ramos Avenue, Barangay Taculing, Bacolod. Its territory is comprised of the province of Negros Occidental on Negros Island.¹ Negros Island was the center of the sugar industry in the Philippines, where “American, Spanish, and Filipino capitalists [grew] millions of acres of cane and [manufactured] thousands of tons of sugar annually.”²

A 2019 second quarter secretariat report indicates that NOC had 293 organized churches, 104 companies, 24 home groups, and a total membership of 41,144.³ The territory's total population is 3,159,507.⁴ In 2019, NOC had 29 ordained pastors, 12 licensed district leaders, 26 office workers and staff, 29 regular church school teachers, and six temporary teachers.⁵

Origin of the Adventist Work in NOC's Territory

Negros Island's Adventist converts were introduced to the gospel via printed pages. Missionaries and workers who influenced the first converts were Elder Adams, G. Hugh Murrin, William Bergherm, F. M. Mote, H. P. Evans, and F. A. Pratt. Those in Negros Oriental and Siquijor Island were influenced by F. E. Fattebert, Hugh Murrin, E. E. Douglas, W. B. Riffel, E. N. Lugenbeal, and M. C. Warren.⁶ Literature ministry pioneers were Pedro Habana, Primitivo and Juan Sumagaysay, Nicolas and Luis Roca, Adriano Aguirre, Alejandro Muchuelas, and Demetrio Juanillo.

Evangelists Pastor Aquilino Same, Juan Golez, Jose Roca, Diego C. Sabrine, Maximo and Francisca Lirazan, and several others are remembered as pioneers in evangelizing Negros Occidental while Arrogante and Llaguno pioneered in evangelizing Negros Oriental.⁷ The earliest record found on the beginnings of the gospel work in Negros Island was Elder L. V. Finster's article in the 1916 first quarter “Missions Quarterly” issue. He stated that, at the time of his report, work had already begun in Antique as several people there and in Negros Island kept the Sabbath.⁸

In 1917, Robert E. Stewart with Carlos Fattebert and his wife started canvassing work in Argao, Cebu, and extended it to the south of Cebu Island.⁹ They later went to Siquijor Island and Negros Oriental.¹⁰ In the

meantime, Floyd Ashbaugh with a local translator, Fausto Jornada, extended his canvassing work in Negros Occidental.¹¹ Until Negros Mission was organized in early 1962, churches in Negros Occidental were affiliated with West Visayan Mission (now West Visayan Conference) in Iloilo while those in Negros Oriental and Siquijor Island were affiliated with East Visayan Mission (now Central Visayan Conference).¹²

Early pioneers left an impression in the memory of Negros Island's first Adventist converts. Several of those pioneers became key members in organizing Negros territories into mission fields. Workers that followed built on the solid foundation laid by these devoted pioneers. Each convert shared the gospel story with relatives, friends, and neighbors, strengthening the membership in southern and central Negros Island.¹³

Testimonies of the Pioneers

A 1931 report recorded the work of La Carlota Church's members. A meeting held under a tent resulted in the construction of Ma-ao Church. To support the construction and raise funds, Brother Alvarez composed a campaign song to the tune of "Where Are the Reapers?" and sang it at night with several brethren while he played the guitar. The mission office only approved of their singing method after they had reached their goal in harvest ingathering. They raised over 100 PHP for this project.⁴

William H. Bergherm, union home missionary secretary, reported that, on Negros Island, a church member who went door to door selling *patadyong* (a cloth worn as a kind of skirt) shared the gospel, reading from the Bible he carried, hidden within his goods. He created interest in the people who later accepted the truth. His efforts also resulted in the establishment of churches.¹⁵

Pastor Gil de Guzman, director of West Visayan Mission, reported in the Far Eastern Division year-end report of 1945 that, in Barangay Prosperidad, San Carlos City, Pastor D. Sabine baptized 38 converts, and many more awaited a second baptism to be conducted. In the nearby Calatrava and Lopez Jaena, another 50 believers awaited the arrival of an ordained minister to baptize them.¹⁶ Furthermore, at the First Biennial Session of the South Philippine Union in 1953, Pastor D. C. Sabine, president of West Visayan Mission, reported that the first junior academy in Negros Occidental had been established in Magallon (now Moises Padilla), where six teachers taught elementary grades and two academy grades.¹⁷

Organizational History of the Conference

Church leaders decided to allow the fast-growing Negros Island territory to become a separate entity. The request to form a new mission was sent to the Far Eastern Division during the January 4-11, 1962, South Philippine Union Mission Biennial Session. The Far Eastern Division approved the organization of the new Negros Mission that would be comprised of Negros Island's two provinces and Siquijor Island with Pastor Meliton M. Claveria as president, Orlando C. Aguirre as secretary/treasurer, and M. M. Zamora as mission

auditor.¹⁸

For the young Negros Mission to survive and function, the mother missions decided to contribute the following: 44% from West Visayan Mission and 18% from East Visayan Mission.¹⁹ There were 134 churches and companies, 86 of which were organized, 8,852 members, nine ordained ministers, two licensed ministers, one credentialed literature evangelist, two Bible instructors, and seven church school teachers.²⁰ One of the earliest records about the progress of the work in Negros Island was a financial report submitted by Pastor Claveria to the Far Eastern Division indicating that, after six months of operation, the Negros Mission displayed an operating gain of 2,787.98 PHP.¹

The cornerstone for the Bacolod Sanitarium and Hospital was laid on August 29, 1962,²² and the hospital opened on December 8, 1966.²³ Elder F. M. Arrogante, the second Negros Mission president, presided over the mission's first general meeting during April 18-22, 1967, and expressed his desire to construct an educational institution and a mission office.²⁴ To this end, Urbano Hechanova, Sr., solicited support for Adventist education during the last general meeting at West Visayan Mission. Through his efforts, all those present became supporters of establishing an academy that would be named Negros Mission Academy.²⁵

A junior academy with Pastor David J. Recalde as its principal was started with makeshift classrooms made from used materials while mission officers and workers campaigned for funds to finish building the academy and to purchase equipment and books. Only Heaven knows how the "school built by faith" began and was completed, but it testifies to the faith and courage of the workers and brethren, as expressed by Elder B. R. Arit, education director of Central Philippine Union Mission.

Another notable event was the construction of one of the largest and most beautiful Seventh-day Adventist churches in Central Philippine Union. Church services had begun serving the spiritual needs of conference, academy, and hospital workers and staff in 1968. However, it was not until 1973 that the 250,000-PHP two-story concrete Bacolod English Church was built. The ground floor had eight rooms for Sabbath School classrooms for nurses and children. The second floor's main sanctuary had a seating capacity of up to 1,500. A choir loft and elevated baptistry were located at the front of the sanctuary, and at its rear was a mezzanine floor and foyer in which to welcome visitors. The Far Eastern Division gave 55,000 PHP toward the construction of the church, and the balance came from church members with a large amount from the Bacolod Sanitarium and Hospital. Church Pastor/Hospital Chaplain H. V. Gayares administered the church's construction under the supervision of Engineer Eliezer Roca.²⁶

Formative Events that Led to the Organization of NOC

In 1962-1968, the Negros Mission headquarters was located at 164 Lacson Street, Bacolod City, and it was later moved to Attorney Remetio's Building on Mabini Street.²⁷ A request for an office building was sent to the Far Eastern Division (now Southern Asia-Pacific Division) through Central Philippine Union Mission, and an allocation

of 60,000 PHP was released. The groundbreaking ceremony was held on October 23, 1969. The following day, construction began and was supervised by Engineer Eliezer Roca, Sr., and Esteban P. Genis, secretary/treasurer, acted as campaign manager to collect funds from local brethren and friends abroad. The collected funds, however, were affected by the devaluation of the Philippine peso.²⁸

To avoid paying monthly rent and other, related workers' expenses, and to better supervise the construction, it was decided to occupy the new building while the finishing touches were still being done. On March 15, 1970, the Negros Mission office's equipment and personnel were moved to the new office building, which cost a total of 77,831.87 PHP to build. The inauguration ceremony took place on December 17, 1971. Mission President Pastor Diego C. Sabrine announced his retirement during this event, and Pastor David J. Jucaban became the new Negros Mission president.

With the academy and office building fully established, Mission President Jucaban concentrated on church growth. Baptisms and planting of churches helped the mission steadily grow to 16,707 members and 217 churches, 144 of which were organized after 16 years of operation. In 1974, Pastor Joaquin S. Rosendo and his team reached the million mark in the sale of books and literature, which led to the baptism of over 100 converts to Adventism.

In the mid-1970s, the mission's education department gained a permit and recognition from the Philippine government's Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports. Pastors Jose Corpus, Crisanto Garilva, and Andres Savilla, although newly retired, still actively participated in the Adventist Church shepherding and soul-winning programs. At the end of 1977, Mission President Pastor Jucaban retired and joined the evangelistic work that was emerging in Southern Negros.

Pastor Dionisio M. Niere, president of the Central Philippine Union Mission, continued its "Harvest Time" program and actively led the search for a college site, visiting many potential plots of land until deciding to purchase the one where Central Philippine Adventist College now stands.

The efforts of reliable and dedicated local laymen and young people throughout the mission territories were blessed bountifully. As they teamed up with experienced evangelists, they shared the gospel with many, having the greatest number of Branch Sabbath Schools and Vacation Bible Schools throughout the union.

Pastor Oscar L. Alolor was the Negros Mission president in the early 1980s. Some towns in Negros Occidental were evangelized, resulting in more churches being built. Soul-winning techniques and programs were varied and upgraded, and public health evangelism became a strong tool for preaching the gospel message. At this time, child preachers' efforts resulted in soul-winning in different districts. Various implemented soul-winning techniques were instrumental in leading many to Christ.

Dr. Daniel T. Alfamoso, Pastor Abraham T. Carpena, Mrs. Tessie O. Balacy, and Pastor Prospero L. Gonzaga from Bacolod Sanitarium and Hospital were supporters of this new ministry and became involved in campaigns

against drug abuse, smoking, and alcohol consumption. At this time, they had visited public and private schools, having had the approval of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports and a direct endorsement from Governor Alfredo L. Montelibano.

The challenge was greater when Pastor Hector V. Gayares became Negros Mission's president in 1984. Every church department was asked to get vigorously involved in the "Harvest 90 Evangelism Program." The focus was on evangelizing the towns of Ayungon, Amlan, Sibulan, and Valencia in Negros Oriental. Churches were built in each of these unentered areas with generous funds from the "Quiet Hour Ministry." For three consecutive years, Negros Mission reached over 7,716 baptisms. Under the leadership of Pastor Gayares, the mission experienced a baptism of 1,416 after the Health Expo Crusade with Speaker Elder Tucker from April 17-26, 1987. The baptism was held with over 20 ministers officiating the rite on April 25 at the Paglaum Swimming Pool.

Pastor Gideon B. Buhat became president of Negros Mission and continued the program started by Pastor Gayares, holding district camp meetings from 1989-1992. Pastor Buhat was instrumental in the thorough preparation of the mission to become a conference.

In 1994, Pastor Trinidad G. Fortaleza became the president of Negros Mission as it became Negros Conference. The mission was granted conference status by the Asia-Pacific Division during its first Negros Conference General Session during May 4-7, 1994.²⁹ Then, during the second General Constituency Meeting during April 2-3, 1997, a vote was taken for Negros Conference to be divided. The Negros Oriental-Siquijor Mission was created with headquarters in Barangay Tubtubon, Sibulan, Negros Oriental, and the existing Negros Conference changed its name to Negros Occidental Conference.³⁰

List of Presidents

Meliton M. Claveria (1962-1965); Florencio M. Arrogante (1966-1967); Diego C. Sabrine (1968-1971); David J. Jucaban (1972-1977); Dionisio M. Niere (1978-1980); Oscar L. Alolor (1981-1983); Hector V. Gayares (1984-1988); Gideon B. Buhat (1989-1993); Trinidad G. Fortaleza (1994-2000); Charlie T. Jondonero (2001-2009); Luisito T. Tomado (2010-2015); Renito C. Inapan (2016-).

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