



Caribbean Costa Rica Mission

Photo courtesy of René Estanislao Martínez Alvarado.

# Caribbean Costa Rica Mission

## RENÉ MARTÍNEZ

René Martínez Alvarado, B.A. (Central American Adventist University, Alajuela, Costa Rica), is a district pastor and departmental minister of personal ministries and communications of the Caribbean Mission. He has served the church for 17 years as a district pastor, ministries department director, and area coordinator. He is married to Stephanie Alfaro and has a son.

Caribbean Costa Rica Mission is located in the province of Limón and includes the territory of Limón, the canton of Turrialba in the province of Cartago, and the canton of Sarapiquí in the province of Heredia. The mission is located at the east end of the country. It shares borders in the north with the Republic of Nicaragua, in the northeast with the Caribbean Sea, in the west with Heredia, Cartago, and San José, and in the southwest with Puntarenas and Panamá.<sup>1</sup> The province is rich in diversity of cultures, ethnicities, and languages: English, Spanish, Creole English, Bribri, Kabecar, and others. In 1872, the construction of the railroad in the Costa Rican Atlantic led to the arrival of Jamaican workers with Afro-American culture and British influences, giving Limón its distinctive *limonense* folklore.<sup>2</sup>

In the 2011 National Population and Housing Census, the population of Limón province was 386,862 inhabitants. Some main activities included the cultivation of bananas, pejobaye, cocoa, grains, and fruits; the raising of livestock; fishing; and tourism, which included nature reserves and national parks.<sup>3</sup> Some of Limón's sources of economy include JAPDEVA (*Junta de Administración Portuaria y de Desarrollo Económico de la Vertiente Atlántica*) Port and APM Terminal.

In April 2019, Caribbean Costa Rica Mission had 15 groups, 84 organized churches, 14,898 members, nine ordained pastors, six licensed ministers, six office workers, and two laymen. The offices are located in downtown Limón adjacent to the ICE offices. It is a part of South Central American Union Mission.<sup>4</sup>

## Caribbean Costa Rica Mission Institutions

Limón Adventist Educational Center is a high school in the district of Limón. It was founded in 1921 and offers day care, preschool, primary, and secondary education up to 11<sup>th</sup> grade. It has 23 teachers and five administrative employees.<sup>5</sup>

Peniel Adventist Educational Center is an elementary school in Guápiles, Pococí. It offers day care and education from preschool and primary up to sixth grade. It was founded in 1996 and has 12 teachers.<sup>6</sup>

An Adventist camp is located in the canton of Talamanca, in front of the entrance of Puerto Vargas, in the province of Limón.<sup>7</sup>

## Origins of Adventist Church in Mission Territory

Caribbean Costa Rica Mission played an important role in the expansion of Adventism since the first church in the country was founded in its territory. In 1902, H. Luie Mignott, C. N. Moulton, Horton, and Brooks sold books and worked in the community of Pacuarito and Puerto Limón. In 1903, the "Review and Herald" reported baptisms and an organized church with 26 members in the community of Pacuarito.<sup>8</sup>

As the population grew, the church work also grew. The first settlers of the province established themselves along the margins of the railway line, receiving migrants from the Caribbean islands and the neighboring Nicaragua. In 1916, they built a small church. Over the years, they built other two-story churches in the community of Cairo, Siquirres. They ran their schools in the first floor and their church programs in the second floor.<sup>9</sup>

The McGregor family, Nicaraguan immigrants, settled in Guacimo as faithful Sabbath keepers in 1926. In 1930-1933, the Rogers, Sanders, Brown, and Sawyers families, other brethren, and Pastor Ellis established the church work in Puerto Limón and, during that time, baptized 200 members. Later, in the community of Guácimo, worship was held in the African community of this district, allowing the growth of the work and establishing the

first organized church in 1937.<sup>10</sup>

## First Hispanic Convert in Caribbean Costa Rica Mission

In 1933, Pastor Joaquín Vela, a Hispanic preacher, was sent to Siquirres to conduct evangelistic meetings. A man from Cartago, Francisco Arroyo, began attending the evangelistic meetings. His trust in the messages he heard started to grow, and, one night, he accepted the Adventist faith and joined the group.<sup>11</sup>

## Expansion of Work in Following Years

The church work grew and developed throughout the territory of the province of Limón thanks to the efforts of each church member who was committed to expanding the work regardless of various crises due to dissenting movements. In 1937, a church was established in the Matina community. In 1942, church work was started in Río Hondo.<sup>12</sup>

In 1945, Pastor Elder Rankin baptized 14 new converts and established the church work in Cahuita with help from the Vargas and Sandino families. In 1950, the church work was established in Batán and later transferred to the community of Veintiocho Millas with the brethren, García, Kellerman, and Moss, and a member of the Corina community, Ralph Tucker.<sup>13</sup>

## Formative Events that Led to Organization of Caribbean Costa Rica Mission

Until 2001, Costa Rica Mission was the only field in Costa Rica. The rapidly growing population opened new methods to develop Adventist work.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, on July 1, 2001, the decision was made to divide the field into two regions. Costa Rica Mission requested authorization from Central American Union Conference to implement the plan. This started a new experimental field, Caribbean Costa Rica Region, which was established with the territory of the province of Limón and the canton of Turrialba.<sup>15</sup> On October 1, 2001, a small office was officially established in the pastoral house next to the central English church in Puerto Limón. They began operations with a secretary who also served as a cashier, Erenia Espinoza; seven pastors; and a coordinating president, Pastor Heraldouff Thorbourne.<sup>16</sup>

By 2002, after much work, Caribbean Costa Rica Region hired a new pastor and an assistant pastor. The operating capital and liquidity were over 100 percent of the established goals, and the region maintained constant growth. Membership in the region increased. As a result, Caribbean Costa Rica Mission was formed, no longer an experimental field.<sup>17</sup>

On December 9, 2003, Caribbean Costa Rica Mission held its first official session. Pastor Heraldo Douff Thorbourne was elected its president, and David Velásquez was elected secretary-treasurer. The following department directors were also elected: Ana de Douff for the departments of children's ministry, women's ministry, SIEMA, and education; Kendell Ferguson for the departments of youth and communication; Enrique Parkinson for the departments of stewardship and family life; and Pastor Enrique, Sr., for the departments of personal ministry and sabbath schools. Pastor Thorbourne also held the positions of ministerial secretary and religious freedom.<sup>18</sup>

On May 22, 2004, the remodeled headquarters building of Caribbean Costa Rica Mission was dedicated. On September 29, 2006, the legal status that accredited the mission with Costa Rica's government as an independent entity was obtained.<sup>19</sup>

## Plans to Fulfill Mission

Caribbean Costa Rica Mission's expectations of growth and development of the work in the territory have become a reality. Without a doubt, membership has grown and received better administrative and pastoral attention.

As a challenge, the members have the main objective of establishing new congregations in places where there is no Adventist presence. This is accomplished through small groups and organizing existing groups in churches. They also work constantly on retaining and rescuing members who have moved away.

Their goal is to develop a solid discipleship program for church elders, small group leaders, department directors, and the members in general. The program will empower these leaders and involve everyone in the work of the gospel. Financial support will be established to help support this initiative in the work of the Lord.

In addition, work is being done on the infrastructure of the camp in Talamanca to make it a place of recreation and training in ecclesiastical leadership. The mission is also working to improve the infrastructure and its curricular program for its two educational centers.

The work of the Lord continues to constantly grow in the territory of Caribbean Costa Rica Mission and with great expectations of growth in all areas of the Lord's work, which makes us say with certainty, "so far, the great God of heaven has helped us."

## List of Presidents

Heraldo Douff Thorbourne (2001-2014); Miguel Adonia Greenaway (2015-2017); Mario Spencer Parker (2017- ).

---

### SOURCES

Caribbean Costa Rica Mission. July 17, 2007. Department of the secretariat archives, Limon, Costa Rica.

Duncan, Quince and Carlos Meléndez Chaverri. *El negro en Costa Rica*. San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Costa Rica, 2005.

"Limon." *Guías Costa Rica*. Accessed May 28, 2019. <https://guiascostarica.com/provincia-limon/>.

Quesada, Vinicio Piedra. "Costa Rica, Leyes, decretos: División Territorial Administrativa de la República de Costa Rica." *La Gaceta*. March 2017.

Rubio Montalbán, Luis. *Los adventistas en Costa Rica...un siglo de avance*. Costa Rica: self-published, 2002.

*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996.

---

## NOTES

1. Vinicio Piedra Quesada, "Costa Rica, Leyes, decretos: División Territorial Administrativa de la República de Costa Rica," *La Gaceta*, March 2017.
2. Quince Duncan and Carlos Meléndez Chaverri, *El negro en Costa Rica* (San José, San José: Editorial Costa Rica, 2005).
3. "Limon," *Guías Costa Rica*, accessed May 28, 2019, <https://guiascostarica.com/provincia-limon/>.
4. Scheila Rasford, interview by author, Limón, Costa Rica, June 14, 2019.
5. Marillú Mayorga, interview by author, Limón, Costa Rica, June 2019.
6. Pamela Cross, interview by author, Limón, Costa Rica, June 14, 2019.
7. Scheila Rasford, interview by author, Limón, Costa Rica, June 14, 2019.
8. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996).
9. Luis Rubio Montalbán, *Los adventistas en Costa Rica...un siglo de avance* (Costa Rica: self-published, 2002), 14.
10. *Ibid.*, 15.
11. *Ibid.*, 18.
12. *Ibid.*, 19.
13. *Ibid.*, 20.
14. Caribbean Costa Rica Mission, July 17, 2007, department of the secretariat archives.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

---

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000