



Central Colombian Conference headquarters.

Photo courtesy of Central Colombian Conference.

# Central Colombian Conference

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## FREDY GUSTAVO LUENGAS

Fredy Gustavo Luengas Camelo, M.A. (Herbert Fletcher University – Online, Mayagüez, Puerto Rico), serves as coordinator of the Risaralda area and district pastor at Central Colombian Conference. He has served the church for 21 years as a district chaplain and pastor. He is married to Lilia Rocío Rincón and has two daughters.

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Central Colombian Conference is located in *el Eje Cafetero*, or “the Colombian Coffee Region.” The region is located in central-west Colombia and is a part of the West and Central Andean mountain ranges. Its temperature ranges from -8° C on the mountain tips to 29° C in the valleys.<sup>1</sup>

Central Colombian Conference's territory covers a population of 3,137,377 and comprises the departments of Caldas, Quindío, and Risaralda, and the north part of Valle del Cauca. It is a part of South Colombian Union Mission, which is a part of the Inter-American Division. Central Colombian Conference has 92 churches, 18,306 members, nine ordained ministers, and eight licensed ministers. The offices are located in Carrera 10 s 48-167, Barrio Maraya, Pereira.<sup>2</sup>

## Origins of Work in Territory of Central Colombian Conference

In the late 1890s, the self-supported missionary, Frank C. Kelley, arrived in Colombia, determined to introduce and spread the Adventist message. He stayed in the country only for three years until his wife fell ill, and they had to return to his country. His job included selling photographic equipment and teaching English.

"Unfortunately, for two decades there was no one to further Kelley's pioneer work," and the seed he had planted had not germinated.<sup>3</sup> This was the first attempt to preach the Adventist message in Colombia.

In 1913, a missionary, B. E. Connerly, volunteered to try "to break the proverbial ice in Colombia" through publications. In 1915, he and his family stayed in Barranquilla, and, in 1916, they moved to Medellín. There, he wrote, "This is the most delightful and the hardest field in which I have ever worked."<sup>4</sup> G. A. Schwerin picked up Connerly's unfinished work in 1917, but by the time Trummer first visited Colombia, L. V. Cleaves had replaced Schwerin and taken charge of book sales. For Trummer, the organizer of the first systematic literature program in Argentina, this tour was the spark that reignited the old fire. Less than two years later, when he transferred to Bogota, he implemented once again his expertise as a canvasser to prepare Colombia for active evangelism. It was during his years of service that the Adventist Church in this republic had its real beginning.<sup>5</sup>

In 1921, Pastor E. M. Trummer arrived in Bogotá to strengthen the missionary work of the past, and the Kelley and Cleaves families were contacted to join forces in preaching the gospel in Colombia's capital.<sup>6</sup> In 1926, the Trummers attended General Conference meetings in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and were sent from Bogotá to Medellín. After his return to Colombia in 1927, Pastor Trummer took a three-day trip by mule from Medellín to Quinchía and Supía, two small towns in the department of Caldas. Two groups in these places wanted to know why the Seventh-day Adventists kept the Sabbath of the Jews and why they baptized people the way they did. However, in both towns, the missionaries were forbidden entry and ordered to leave the villages without returning.

Pastor Trummer wondered what to do and prayed for divine guidance. He felt the need to visit the governor of the department of Caldas and ask him for special permission to teach the people of Quinchía and Supía to be better through health care, cleanliness, education, and service to others. When he arrived in Manizales, he met with and presented his request to the governor, who gladly approved it. With this authorization, the pastor visited the mayors of the aforementioned municipalities, who gave him the opportunity to continue his missionary work.

The villagers continued to oppose the Adventists' many efforts, so Pastor Trummer proposed that those from Quinchía and Supía who were interested travel to Medellín to study the Bible without opposition. To Pastor Trummer's surprise, 11 of them arrived in Medellín aboard a truck. Pastor Trummer kindly received them at his home, and, after a week of intense Biblical studies from Pastor H. E. Baasch, five of them were baptized. After that, Pastor Trummer continued visiting them, and more people were added to the church through baptism.<sup>7</sup>

In 1935, Pastor Trummer traveled from Quinchía to Supía, where Carlos Espinosa, Ernesto Ospina, and their families became Adventists on the Taborda sidewalk. These new believers joined Pastor Trummer in evangelizing on the Gaudalejo sidewalk, where, in 1939, Gonzalo Izquierdo and his family were baptized. Once converted, they worked on the sidewalk of Cabras and founded Sinai Church.<sup>8</sup>

In the early 1940s, evangelism work advanced to Municipio Pereira through Pastor Trummer's evangelism tent campaign with support from Adventist musical groups from the city of Cali. In these conferences, Polidoro Agapito Portela Gonzales, who was a builder by profession, and his family encountered the Adventist message. Two years later, he was baptized and became a great layman who shared the Adventist message. The first families Portela Gonzales evangelized were the Solís, Campuzano, Botero, and Ocampo families. The gospel spread to nearby cities, such as Cartago, Armenia, and Manizales. From Cartago, the Adventist Church's work extended to the municipalities of Águila, Algeria, Cairo, Versailles, Alcalá, Ulloa, and Obando.

Among the pioneers of the Adventist Church's work in this area of Colombia were Pastor E. M. Trummer, Gilberto Bustamante, Abel Avendaño, Hans Nickel, Fernando Larrazábal, Ismael Rojas Rojas, Mario Robinson, Moisés Valdés, Balmore Osorno, Luis Bolívar, Clímaco Joya, Cupertino de los Ríos, Rómulo Lozano, Body Robert, Josué Roa, Daniel Alvarez, Juan Tabares, Pedro Garnica, Jaime Penna, Joel Almeida, Eduardo Ortiz, and others. Among the lay founders were Agapito Portela, Jorge Zapata, Roberto Trejos, Ernesto Arcila, Pedro Zapata, Eleuterio Hernández, Ernesto Agredo, Gentil Ramírez, Justiniano López, and others. Brother Justiniano López excelled in founding churches in the municipalities of Calarcá, Armenia, Cordoba, Genoa, Barcelona, Pijao, Calcedonia, Seville, Montenegro, Quimbaya, La Tebaida, and Cajamarca.

In 1955, the first colporteurs were María del Carmen Casallán and Guadalupe Casallán; both were daughters of Brother Agapito Portela who left their work in the cookie factory, *La Rosa*, in Municipio Dosqueas to fulfill their mission in the municipalities of Caldas, Tolima, Putumayo, and Nariño. They became sales champions as they sold their books to religious leaders, teachers, mayors, and people in the community.<sup>9</sup> Between 1952 and 1965, to help spread the Adventist message, church schools were established in the cities of Pereira, Tuluá, Armenia, and Calarcá. This is how the Seventh-day Adventist Church's work began in the center of Colombia!<sup>10</sup>

## Events that Led to Organization of Central Colombian Conference

Colombian Mission was organized in 1922 with Pastor E. M. Trummer as its president. It was located in Bogotá, Republic of Colombia. Its advisory committee consisted of E. M. Trummer as president, L. V. Cleaves, Fred

Brower, Frank C. Kelley, and Antonio Redondo.<sup>11</sup> In 1926, Colombian Mission was reorganized into four missions: Antioqueña Mission in Medellín, Atlantic Colombia Mission in Barranquilla, Central Colombia Mission in Bogotá, and Pacific Colombia Mission in Cali. Antioqueña Mission comprised the provinces of Antioquia and Caldas.<sup>12</sup> In 1929, Caldas became part of Pacific Colombia Mission.<sup>13</sup> In 1930, Caldas and Antioquia became part of Central Colombia Mission.<sup>14</sup> In 1934, Caldas became part of Pacific Colombia Mission again.<sup>15</sup> In 1995, Pacific Colombia Conference reorganized its territory, and Caldas became a part of the territory of the newly-created West Central Colombian Mission.<sup>16</sup>

In April 2003, Pacific Colombia Conference with Pastor Juan Caicedo Solís as its president made a proposal to Colombian Union Conference to create the region that would consist of the departments of Risaralda, Quindío, and Caldas, and the north part of the Valle area.<sup>17</sup> Colombian Union Conference approved the creation of the Central Colombian experimental region. On July 1, 2003, it started operations with headquarters in a rented house in La Pradera in Municipio Dosquebradas. On May 7, 2004, a house was purchased in Maraya, Pereira, and Pastor Daniel Sanmiguel was appointed coordinator. In 2004, Colombian Union Conference requested the Inter-American Division to create Central Colombian Region. Once approved, the region began operations on January 1, 2005.<sup>18</sup> On December 15, it received government recognition from the Ministry of the Interior as *Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día – Sección Misión Central de Colombia*<sup>19</sup> In January 2008, Central Colombian Region had a change in name and became Colombia Central Mission.<sup>20</sup>

In its meeting on November 15, 2011, the South Colombian Union Mission board voted to request a loan from the Inter-American Division for the amount of \$100,000 USD. The purpose was to purchase a property in Maraya, Pereira, to establish the offices of Central Colombian Mission.<sup>21</sup> Its previous offices were used for a new congregation. On December 12, 2011, South Colombian Union Mission requested the Inter-American Division to study a change of status for Central Colombian Mission to become a conference.<sup>22</sup> The Inter-American Division approved the change of status, and, in the South Colombian Union Mission May 2012 board meeting, it was voted to make this change effective in February 2013.<sup>23</sup>

On February 11, 2013, Central Colombian Conference began its operations in Pereira with Pastor Luis Fernando Manrique as president, Abdiel Trejos Bermúdez as secretary, and Martha Buendía as treasurer.<sup>24</sup>

Central Colombian Conference fulfills its mission through a strategic plan based on three fundamental components.

The first component, “I get close to God,” seeks to strengthen the church member’s relationship with God through programs promoting a permanent devotional life through daily Bible study, constant prayer, and commitment to the fundamental doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The second component, “We get close to God,” seeks to strengthen the unity and growth of the church through programs that educate Adventist believers about Christian coexistence (love and service) in the family and in the church, promoting Christian discipleship in each church member.

The third component, “We get others close to God,” seeks to strengthen evangelization through health programs, use of technology, and training a team of evangelists under the program, “Messengers of Hope.”<sup>25</sup>

## Recent Events

Central Colombian Conference’s administration and pastoral group have experienced a growing sense of unity and teamwork while fulfilling the mission. Thanks to the church’s missionary book, which has been in effect since 2013, public and private institutions and the general community have been reached. An active evangelization plan has been implemented by organizing all congregations into small groups, which allows to better reach and retain church members. Ten new churches have been organized in the last four years. An Adventist presence has been established in 11 new municipalities, and key properties in Armenia and Tuluá have been purchased.<sup>26</sup> The conference’s offices have also been remodeled.

## Challenges to Fulfilling Mission

Central Colombian Conference works to fulfill its mission through its administration, office staff, and pastors working with laymen and church board members in discipleship and evangelism efforts.

Challenges include the secularized society in which we live, lack of places of worship in key locations, need for Christian education, and need to make a presence in radio and television.

The goal is to foster the missionary and dedicated spirit of our pioneers to secure a promising future in the growth and development of the church in the region, to maintain a united church and not allow divisive thoughts to emerge, and to unite all the forces of the church in one purpose as it was in the past and advance in the task that the Lord has entrusted to us.

## List of Presidents

Daniel San Miguel (2003-2005); Eduardo Ramirez (2005-2010); Luis Fernando Manrique Peña (2010-2014); Abdiel Trejos Bermudez (2014- ).

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## NOTES

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