Guatemala

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Guatemala, also known as the Land of Eternal Spring for its varied and almost permanent year-round flora, is located at the top of the Central American isthmus. Its territory covers 108,889 square kilometers, and is bordered to the west and north by Mexico; to the east by Belize and the Honduran Gulf; to the southeast by Honduras and El Salvador;
and to the south by the Pacific Ocean. The nation has 22 departments (provinces), with 340 municipalities. Its capital is Guatemala City with a population of 17,751,595.

Overview

Because of its location in a tropical zone, the Guatemalan territory has only two seasons: winter, or the rainy season, from May to October, and summer or the dry season, from November to April.

Guatemala is a multicultural country made up of four major ethnic groups: Mayas, Ladinos, Xincas, and Garifunas. It is also a multilingual country with its 25 languages, including Maya, Achi’, Akateko, Awakateko, Chuj, Ch’orti’, Itza’, Ixil, Kaqchikel, K’iche’, Mam, Mopán, Poptl, Poqomam, Poqomchi, Q’anjob’al, Q’eqchi’, Sakapulteko, Sipakapense, Tekuteko, Tz’utujil, Usapanteko, and Chaltiteko, as well as Garifuna, Xinca, and Spanish. The latter serves as the official language of the country.

Centuries before the Spanish Conquest, during the pre-Colombian era, only the Mayas occupied the Guatemalan region. Three fundamental features characterized their religion: polytheism, the worship of many gods; pantheism, the worship of the elements, atmospheric phenomena, and heavenly bodies; and, finally, dualism, the idea that good and evil are equally of divine origin.

Later with the discovery of America in 1492, Spain, one of the European countries with the greatest desire to create an empire, sent out various individuals to conquer the territory that now comprises Guatemala. One of those conquistadors was Pedro de Alvarado who completed his quest in 1524. Together with the Spanish takeover came the arrival of the Catholic religion and the first contact of the Guatemalan population with the Christian message of one God and Jesus Christ.

Initially, all of Central America constituted one entity, known as the Central American Republic. Eventually the peaceful separation of Central America from Spain became official with the Declaration of Independence signed on September 15, 1821.

The Magna Charta of the Republic of Guatemala, that is, its constitution, guarantees religious liberty as one of its primary articles. People practice a variety of religions in the country, among them Catholicism, Protestantism, Syncretism (the spiritual rituals of the Mayas), and Adventism. As of March of 2019, the nation had 251,852 Adventists, representing 1.32 percent of the total population.

Arrival of the Seventh-day Adventists and the Growth of the Church in Guatemala

In 1887 the General Conference decided to explore the territories of Central and South America and assigned Pastor T. H. Gibbs to do so. He arrived in the Guatemalan territory to get to know the area and an event commemorated by a plaque located on the Monument to the Ten Commandments in Puerto Barrios. Years later, between 1893 and 1894, the transnational companies of the United Fruit Company (UFCO) and the International Railway of Central American (IRCA) entered Guatemala through Puerto Barrios, along with a sizeable number of Adventist immigrants from various Caribbean islands as well as Jamaica, Islas de la Bahia, Honduras, and Belize.

The native language of the majority of UFCO and IRCA workers and representatives was English, all of which facilitated trade with England through Puerto Barrios. Because of its commercial role, Puerto Barrios became a kind of port of entry for Adventism, specifically through an unknown pastor sent to support the workers in those large enterprises, some of whom were Adventist believers. Thus, the Adventist message in Guatemala was first preached in English in the town of Puerto Barrios.

The Advent message continued spreading throughout the country, and by 1908 the Adventist Church in Guatemala became formally recognized as part of the Central American Conference and the West Indian Union Conference. With Pastor E. L. Cardey as president and secretary, and E. T. Nowlen as treasurer, the Central American Conference set up its headquarters in the capital city of Guatemala.

Despite administrative changes that occurred in 1909, the work in Guatemala continued growing, all of which led to the organization of Guatemala as a field in 1913 with the name “Guatemala Mission.” J. B. Stuyvesant, who was the only ordained minister in the field, served as superintendent and treasurer during the years 1914, 1915, 1916, and 1917.

The Guatemalan English School began in 1908 for the purpose of providing Adventist education in Guatemala. Its growth was so impressive that in 1915 the General Conference recognized it as one of its Adventist educational institutions. That same year J. B. Stuyvesant and his wife visited the school and traveled to Quetzaltenango, Mazatenango, Retalluleu, and Escuintla, sharing the Adventist message through such publications as Daniel and Revelation, Signs of the Times, The Great Controversy, The Coming King, and His Glorious Appearing. While visiting various places, they noted the pressing need for greater efforts to preach the gospel.
From December 25, 1917 to January 24, 1918, the country experienced a series of strong earthquakes, leaving many regions in ruins. Although the tremors destroyed hundreds of houses, churches, and historical structures, the mission building remained intact and no Adventists suffered harm.

On March 11, 1920 the Guatemalan people rose in protest against the dictatorship of the then president, Manuel Estrada Cabrera, who had already governed for 22 years. It marked the first revolution in Guatemala. Despite the difficulties caused by the event, the Adventist Church continued growing. At this time, E. W. Thurber was director and treasurer. Also, church records report four book salesmen active in the country and that their work most assuredly was contributing to the expansion of Adventism in Guatemalan territory. A colporteur institute convened February 13, directed by J. A. P. Green and William Bloomfield, with the support of the field director.

J. S. Seal, who at the time was a departmental secretary at the Carolina Conference of the Southeast Union in the United States, tells of an impressive event that he witnessed while visiting Central America. In 1922 a Guatemalan man from Jalapa traveled to the capital city in order to study. He walked 55 kilometers to buy second-hand books, which he brought back to his home. Among those books was Daniel and Revelation. It so thoroughly captivated him that he decided to share its contents with all his neighbors.

Adventist publications were an immensely useful tool in the preaching of the church’s message. In March of 1924, members distributed 403 El Centinela (The Sentinel) magazines in Guatemalan territory.

Recognizing Guatemala’s majority indigenous population, the Inter-American Division in 1926 recruited people to launch work for this part of the population and decided that the most effective way to do so was through medical programs. The Quiché Indians had a chief whom everyone obeyed and whose counsel everyone accepted. Many believed that it would be difficult for an American to be accepted by the local culture. However, the chief and his secretary approved of and supported Ellis P. Howard, a member of the executive committee of the Central American Union. Although he recognized that it would be an arduous task, he always felt certain that the communities could be won over for Christ.

In 1927, during a visit to Chichicastengo, Ellis P. Howard observed how many Indians would walk on their knees toward the town cathedral, praying and worshipping not God or the Virgin Mary, but their ancestors. Deeply saddened by what he saw, he began to believe that the best way to continue the work in the place was to set up a school and bring in missionaries to preach the Adventist message.

In 1929, W. E. Baxter related how during a visit to the Boehne family in their Guatemalan mission field, specifically in the department (province) of Sololá, a deep well was being dug in order to provide enough water for the community. Since the Boehnes had gained the confidence of the people, about one and a half million Indians visited the installation in search of help. Such missionaries continually demonstrated that Adventists were there to serve them.

In February of 1934 the mission established a new church in Guatemala. It contained a lending library of books and Bibles. The well-lit church had a seating capacity for 150 people, although on occasion up to 500 people attended. During that year Adventists conducted three evangelistic series in the country, one in Jalapa, headed by a Brother Larrabee; another in Quetzaltenango under the direction of José Aguilar; and a third in the capital, led by Faustino Cerrano.

José Aguilar tells how in 1935 he and David García went to Totonicapán where they expected to conduct a series of evangelistic meetings. When they approached the local chief of police to obtain permission to hold the meetings, they learned that the officials couldn’t help them, because they were expecting a visit from the then president, Jorge Ubico Castañeda. Undeterred, Aguilar and García began to pray. Later Aguilar felt impelled to write to a fellow Adventist who lived in nearby San Felipe, asking if they might have the meetings there. After waiting four days, they received a positive reply—they had a place for them to hold the meetings. Several people accepted baptism as a result.

José Aguilar stands out for his missionary activities. In spite of never having studied theology at any Adventist institution, he learned the basic teachings through Pastor John Brown. Because of Aguilar’s outstanding service and his significant contributions to the church, the executive committee of the Central American Union voted to ordain him in 1937. He became the first native-born Guatemalan pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the second Latino pastor in all of Central America. His ordination was a solemn occasion, celebrated at the end of a successful evangelistic effort he conducted in San Antonio. It led to 27 baptisms.

In 1938 a Spanish-speaking church organized in Puerto Barrios. Previously the city had had only an English-speaking congregation.

The Aurora Theater in Escuintla was the site of an amazing evangelistic series in 1940. On most nights 1,000 people attended. Under the direction of Pastor José Aguilar the 10-week long series resulted in 100 new believers joining the Adventist church. During that same year, Pastor Orley Ford and his wife launched an evangelistic outreach in Jutiapa, near the border with El Salvador. The theater had a seating capacity for 300, but on most occasions, it had standing room only with the aisles and doors full of people.

In 1941 Félix Barrientos arrived in the province of Jutiapa where he had rented a room in a hotel. The woman in charge, warning him about the danger of being assaulted on his way to the city, asked him what time he was planning to leave. He told her he’d be departing at 4:00 a.m. Because she once again warned him about possibly being attacked, he decided to leave secretly at 8:00 a.m. After an hour and a half on the road, he ran into five men who were carrying machetes. As they passed by, he greeted them, saying “Hello”, to which they responded, “Goodbye, gentlemen, we hope all goes well for you.” Six days later, Barrientos returned to the hotel and when its manager saw
him, she asked “How was your trip? And who were those men armed with pistols who were with you?” He responded that nobody had been with him. The woman assured him that she herself had seen the men and summoned another hotel guest who also had observed them. Although he had not seen the men, Félix believed that God had sent His angels to protect him.56

In 1944 Guatemala experienced changes. During that year an uprising took place against president Jorge Ubico who had assumed power in 1931. During the revolt, the government restricted civil liberties. On June 25, 1944, mounted police suppressed public protests and a teacher was assassinated. Public outcry at the tragedy had its effect, and on July 1 the president stepped down. However, problems persisted, so much so that on the early morning of October 20 small groups of militia, supported by the people, launched military actions. After 18 hours of fighting, the guerrillas toppled the government of Ponce Vaides, who had governed only 108 days and who was then replaced by a revolutionary junta.43

That same year, despite the unrest, the mission made plans to set up a radio Bible school. Subscriptions to the program increased rapidly. Many believed that the political situation in the country contributed to its success. Even when the government changed, the project continued. The first radio program began on October 1, and, from that point on, the registrations continued growing. By July of 1945, approximately 2,000 persons had signed up for the Bible school.44

In 1946 Pastor José C. Aguilar conducted a series of evangelistic meetings in Totonicapán. Their great success resulted in the establishment of a new church, built on land donated by a new believer.55 Braulio F. Pérez, evangelist with “La Voz de la Esperanza” (“The Voice of Hope”), held an evangelistic campaign in April 1950 in Guatemala City.56

The Centro Cultural Indigenista (Indigenous Cultural Center), located in Momotenango, Totonicapán, was a training center for missionaries. The method of teaching comprised part theory, part practice, preparing people both to sell books and to preach, in order to later send them out to the Maya Quiché indigenous populations. In 1954 Vernon Berry from the education department of the Inter-American Division published an article in the Inter-American Messenger about the training center, expressing admiration for the way it operated and the admirable leadership of Professor Manuel Cojulún, who sent students out two by two to do internships. The interns greatly contributed to the preaching of the gospel in indigenous areas, principally in Momostenango.47

During 1958 Adventists conducted simultaneous evangelistic campaigns throughout the country, including Escuintla, Ipala, and Huitán. The series lived up to leadership’s expectation that they would lead to more baptisms than usual, resulting in 259 as compared to 169 the previous year.50

Adventists attracted the attention of Guatemala in 1958 when Guillermo Flores Avendaño, president from October 27, 1957 to March 2, 1958 declared that no alcoholic beverages would be served at any of his official meetings. President Flores received the representative of the Temperance Union, Pastor Efraín Murillo, and signed an agreement in Murillo’s presence. This action received favorable comments.52

Unfortunately, things in the country grew worse. November 13, 1960 saw the beginning of the Internal Armed Conflict when a group of officers attempted a coup to unseat then president Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes. The coup failed, and the military officers resorted to guerrilla warfare in order to continue the struggle. They received support from the Guatemalan Workers Party or the Communist Party, together with other factions. The period marked a very difficult and sad time for the country, particularly in the rural areas.54 The civil war lasted 36 years until December 29, 1996, when the Acuerdos de Paz Firme y Duradera (The Definite and Lasting Peace Accords) were signed.55

In 1965, 732 persons were baptized, despite the fact the church had only four ordained pastors and three ministerial interns serving in the seven districts of the Guatemalan Mission.56

During the months of June and July of that same year, C. E. Guenther, associate secretary of the General Conference and director of the department of lay activities visited the Inter-American Division. In 1967, Guatemala hosted a lay-members’ conference July 6-9.56

In 1969 José Octaviano García and his family, the only Adventists in Paxtoca, Totonicapán, considered that it was vital to have a church building in order to facilitate preaching and growing the church. With this in mind, they began their search for an adequate piece of land. When they found one, unfortunately the price was beyond their means. They prayed fervently and saved as much money as they could. The owner of the land did lower the price and the Garcías were able to purchase it. But it meant that José and his family had to trim their living expenses to the point that their clothes became tattered and worn, but they understood that it was worth the sacrifice in order to advance the Adventist work.57

The year 1976 was a difficult one for Guatemala. On February 4, a 7.5 earthquake on the Richter scale shook the country.58 An official tally reported on March 9 a total of 23,000 dead and 76,000 injured.59 The General Conference and the Inter-American Division donated more than $100,000.00 to help with the most pressing needs. Robert Folkenberg, president of the Central American Union, kept in touch with church leaders through short-wave radio. The church offered further assistance by providing food for 5,000 people, offering two meals a day per person.60 By the month of March, news came of the death of six Adventists. The quake had destroyed eight churches and three schools, and 14 churches suffered damage. Approximately 450 families lost their homes and all their possessions.61

In 1978 volunteers with Maranatha Flights International arrived in Guatemala, led by John Freeman, and by Vanden Heuvel in Guatemala. They built 11 churches in two weeks.62

A significant event took place in 1979 when Timoteo Miranda received an invitation to give an evangelistic series in a
church of another denomination. When it concluded, the members voted to give the church building to the Adventist Church.63

Sadly, in that same year, tragic events unfolded in the western part of the country. In the town of Zacualpa Quiché, one of the areas most affected by the Guatemalan civil war, many of the victims were Adventists. The Zacualpa church, for example, that originally had 60 members, had to close its doors and the remaining families began to meet secretly in private homes. Later, the situation deteriorated, and many residents had to abandon their properties and their communities to find refuge elsewhere. Many members of the Adventist Church suffered material losses and some, even their lives.64

By 1981, Unión Radio, the Adventist radio station of Guatemala, was proclaiming the gospel on both FM and AM wavelengths.65 Ricardo Zeledón, a member of the Zona 15 church in the capital of Guatemala, visited, during a 12-year period, institutions that cared for those suffering with tuberculosis and leprosy, bringing them encouragement and help. Eventually, in 1981, the government named her coordinator for all the Social Assistance programs in the institutions.66 That same year the Guatemalan Mission honored Angel Méndez as Layman of the Year for raising two new churches.67

On January 10, 1982, 24 pastors baptized 679 new members in the province of San Marcos.68 Pastor René Martínez, in 1985, learned of a group of Sabbath-keepers in a dense part of the jungle. The district of Petén covered 36,000 square kilometers of sparsely populated land. Martínez considered using a pickup truck or a “cayuco” (type of canoe) to reach them, but eventually opted for a motorcycle. It took him two days to arrive at the village of El Pato. He was well-received and surprised to learn that the Sabbath believers were already practicing health principles. But he was even more intrigued to find them knowledgeable in biblical doctrine, meeting on Sabbaths to listen to the radio and turning in a tithe totaling $500.00.69

In 1986, crippled by polio and confined to a wheelchair, a man named Gaspar had almost reached the point of desperation when an Adventist layperson visited him in his home in San Pedro Soloma, Huehuetenango. Together they studied the Bible course and Gaspar accepted the Adventist message. After his conversion, the members of the church began to pray fervently for him and, miraculously, he began to walk again. Dedicating himself to preaching the gospel, he served as a church leader for the Adventist group in Soloma.70

In 1988 the entire church of Jocotenango participated in a four-week evangelistic program in Antigua, Guatemala, directed by two Brazilians, Eliseo Piño de Sousa and Antonio Amorín. During the Triennial Congress of the Guatemalan Mission, held in October 1990, the delegates approved “Mega-Guate 91,” an evangelistic plan to enter unreached areas of the capital city.71 At the beginning of 1991, preparations for “Mega-Guate 91” involved giving 14,000 Bible studies. The plan’s two-pronged objective included, first of all, a goal of baptizing 1,000 persons. Before the end of the plan, 406 had already been baptized and 932 had made their decision to be baptized. The second objective was to organize 12 new churches. Soon members had purchased nine properties and begun renovating some buildings to serve as churches. The targeted total of persons baptized for the year 1991 was 3,000.72 The mission surpassed that total as it added 5,850 new members.73

During an operation called “Jericó” (“Jericho”) all the available pastors from the surrounding provinces near Guatemala City left their churches in the care of their head elders. The pastors took up residence in Guatemala City and, with the help of church members, visited neighborhoods that did not have an Adventist presence.74

A new school complex began taking form in the mountains of Guatemala in 1993. A group of 170 volunteers with Maranatha Flights International spent four weeks working on the project during the month of March. When they completed the new auditorium in Totonicapán, it had a seating capacity for 300 students ranging from first to sixth grade.

In 1995, a former judge in the Supreme Court of Justice accepted the Adventist faith after attending evangelistic meetings presented by Milton Peverini, the speaker with the radio program, La Voz de la Esperanza (The Voice of Hope). The judge was one of 300 people baptized as a result of this evangelistic effort.75 During the following years of the decade of the 90s, the growth of Adventism produced several churches, including those of Almolonga, Llanos del Pina, Zona 7, and Tígales de Quetzaltenango.

Orión Stereo, the second radio station in Guatemala, began broadcasting in 1999 in order to cover the western part of the country and the altiplano (highlands).

In 2000 then president René Martínez of the Guatemalan Mission gathered the field secretaries to plan and strategize, focusing on the church’s growth in the capital city. Those who attended were Jaime Torres, Uriel Castro, Amado Niño, Gunther García, and Ramiro Hernández. Their ideas and plans resulted in the New Ministerial Formation Program.76 The Adventist Church in Guatemala now experienced unprecedented growth. The year 2000 ended with 353 churches around the country.77 Leadership organized other fields during 2005 and 2006 so that Guatemala came to have six local fields: the Metropolitan Conference, the Central Mission, the Western Mission, the Southern Mission, the Eastern Mission, and the Northern Mission78 with a total of 602 churches.79

On Sabbath, July 12, 2008, thousands of Adventists from all over the country met in the nation’s capital to celebrate the Centennial of the Adventist church in Guatemala. Pastor Jan Paulsen, president of the world Adventist Church, encouraged young people to get involved in the work of the church. Prior to this event, more than 60,000 Adventists participated in 30 parades around the country.80 By the end of the year, the nation had 665 Adventist churches.81

As a result of the intense missionary work around the country, in 2016 two new fields opened up: the Misión del Lago
(Lake Mission) and the Misión del Altiplano (Highland Mission). Toward the end of 2016 the number of churches in Guatemala reached 896, an increase of 231 in only eight years.

After several evangelistic series and the preaching through the printed word and over radio stations, by the end of 2018 the country had 985 churches, a growth of 89 in only two years. More recent information reports that in the first semester of 2019, Guatemala had 1,017 churches, 273 groups, and 236,216 members.

Guatemalan Adventist Institutions

By the end of 2018, the nation had 985 churches distributed throughout 119 districts and 24 zones within eight local fields: (1) the Asociación Metropolitana (Metropolitan Conference) organized initially as Misión de Guatemala (1913), later as Asociación Central (1999) and Asociación Metropolitana (2005). It has 69 churches and 12,549 members. (2) The Asociación Central organized originally as Misión Central (2005), and reverting to its original name (2014), with 88 churches and 9447 members. (3) The Asociación Occidental (Western Conference), initially, Misión Sur-Occidente (1999), subdivided and formed the Misión Occidental (2004), later changing its status to Asociación (Conference) (2014), made up of 155 churches and 49,941 members. (4) Misión del Sur (Southern Mission), that grew out of the Misión Sur-Occidente, became a field (2005) with 225 churches and 49,779 members. (5) Misión de Oriente (Eastern Mission), formerly known as Región Nor-oriental (1999) and later, Misión Oriental (2006) with 141 churches and 42,564 members. (5) The other branch that grew out of the Misión Nor-oriental is the Misión Norte (2002) that has 111 churches and 41,375 members. (6) La Misión del Lago, that developed out of the Asociación Central (2016) has 74 churches and 16,610 members. (7) Finally, the Misión del Altiplano (Highland Mission), that emerged from the Asociación Occidental (2016), consisting of 122 churches and 29,587 members.

Educational Institutions


In addition, local churches sponsor some academies, such as is the case of Las Margaritas (1968), Tocache (1996), Privado Mixto (1999), and Maranatha–Palencia (2014).

Recreational Facilities

Guatemala has two recreational sites, used mostly for camp meetings, one in the north and another in the east.

Care Facilities

Plus Ultra, for the care of older adults (2014) and Gadara, to treat addictions (2019).

Clinics

In June of 2019 three Adventist clinics had been established in the country to serve both Adventists and the community at large. They are Clínicas Médicas Agape (2013), belonging to the Asociación Occidental; Clínicas Médicas Adventistas (2015), located in the territory of the Asociación Central; Clínica Médica de Oriente (2018), as its name indicates, in the territory of Misión Oriental.

Radio Stations

Guatemala Adventists have two radio stations: Unión Radio (established 1978) has had impressive growth. In existence for 40 years, it broadcasts on six FM frequencies and one AM. In addition, it has 12 repeater antennae linked via a satellite that cover 16 provinces. The other station is Orión Stereo, established in 1999. It operates on two frequencies and covers five provinces in the northwest.

The Church and the Community

The Adventist Church has been dedicated to serving the community of Guatemala, principally in times of disasters, as occurred with the 1976 earthquake in the municipalities of Santo Tomás Milpas Altas and Santa Lucia Milpas Altas. The Council of Jalapa and the National Reconstruction Committee recognized the Adventist Mission for their participation in the National Reconstruction Plan.

After hurricane Stan hit the country in 2005, the Adventist Church donated $36,000.00 to buy food and other urgently
During 2008 and 2009, the Adventist Church launched the “Jornada de la Bondad” (“Journey of Kindness”) plan. It consisted in sharing a plate of food with needy people. Members distributed 200,000 plates of food.

In 2009, Alvaro Colom, then president of the Guatemala Republic, declared a state of emergency called “Calamidad Pública” (Public Disaster) as a means of dealing with the food crisis, the poor nutrition that was affecting 54,000 families, and the death of approximately 25 persons. Adventists responded to the call by donating $16,000.00 in food, benefitting some 8,000 individuals.

The year 2010 brought major problems for Guatemala. On May 27, the Pacaya volcano erupted, affecting more than 3,000 people in neighboring communities. Only two days later hurricane Agatha struck the country, touching more than 398,000 inhabitants nationwide. Both catastrophes opened a door for the church to reach out to its communities. Several supply centers opened up and the church donated approximately $150,000 in food items.

By 2014 the Adventist Church caught national attention because of “Abraza Guatemala” (“Reach Out to Guatemala”), an initiative that involved more than 30 housing construction and school remodeling projects, in which the church spent $77,320.00.

On June 3, 2018, the eruption of Fuego volcano, devastating chiefly Sacatepéquez, Escuintla, and Chimaltenango, resulted in 1.7 million victims. In the face of such a high number of fatalities, the Adventist Church expressed its desire to lend aid and pray without ceasing. ADRA Guatemala provided food and cash donations for the production and distribution of couchettes or bunk beds.

The church has made additional modest, but still significant contributions, among them a monetary grant for the purchase of equipment for the Regional Hospital of Quiché worth approximately $1,200.00; a donation of 561 sheets for the National Hospitals of Chiquimula, Zacapa, Jalapa, and Jutiapa; worth some $5,000.00; and 400 pounds of non-perishable food for the Hospital Regional de Occidente (Western Regional Hospital), presented by a group of Adventist women. The church has also made massive donations of blood to the Red Cross.

Recent Events Experienced by the Adventist Church

In spite of the fact that Article 36 of the Republic’s Constitution guarantees religious freedom, cases have arisen in which church members have had Sabbath difficulties in the workplace and in educational institutions. For example, a young woman studying at the country’s public university in Totonicapán required the intervention of the department of religious liberty of the Adventist Church, because the university would not allow her to take the end-of-year exam any other time but the scheduled Friday night. The petition was denied, despite several interventions on her behalf, until the following year when the university assigned her a different professor who did allow her to take the exam.

Another case, with a more positive outcome, occurred in the same province of Totonicapán. The province has a communal municipal government and a corporation made up of annually-elected community members. The corporation oversees the welfare of the community, taking into consideration local customs as outlined by Accord 169 of the International Work Organization of the United Nations, that recognizes the rights of indigenous communities to govern themselves. Those serving on the corporation board should serve community members regardless of gender or religious creed. Whoever does not do so can be sanctioned with the denial of basic services such as access to water, transportation, school, mill services (for their grain), and vehicle right of passage. Likewise, for each absence from the community assembly, they can be assessed a penalty fee of $15.00 to $40.00. In general, such assemblies convened on Saturday afternoons, but when a member of the Adventist church was nominated for service on the corporation board, things changed. He expressed that, although he could not attend meetings on the Sabbath, he was willing to offer excellent service from Sunday through Friday noon. His case created such interest that his coworkers asked for Bible studies and promised to pray for the resolution of the problem.

Challenges Facing the Mission and the Remaining Work to Be Done

The Adventist Church of Guatemala seeks to promote a well-coordinated effort, so that with administrators, pastors, colporteurs, and laypeople, working together as one, it can fulfill the great commission given by Jesus Christ.

Great challenges face Adventism in the country, among them, overcoming the language barriers in order to preach the gospel in the more than 22 languages; entering areas that currently lack any Adventist presence; training elders and church leaders; acquiring new radio frequencies; the construction of a new Adventist Communications System building and another for ADRA in the capital city; the creation of two new local fields in order to better serve church members; and the development of a Center for Healthy Living, a hospital, and a university.

Additionally, the church needs to implement new preaching strategies for the metropolitan area, a region heavily influenced by postmodern and materialistic thinking. One possibility would be the establishment of Centers of Influence to project the church’s presence into the community.

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