



Central East Venezuela Conference

Photo courtesy of Central East Venezuela Conference.

# Central East Venezuela Conference

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## MARCOS EDGARDO VELÁSQUEZ

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Central East Venezuela Conference's territory includes an area east of the Gran Caracas and the east-central part of Miranda State. Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, has a population of over six million people. The conference is located on the outskirts of Ávila, Municipio Libertador, which includes the *municipios* named Chacao, Baruta, Sucre, and El Hatillo.<sup>1</sup> Miranda State is located in the north-central area of Venezuela and is part of the Capital Region and Vargas State. It is bordered by the Federal District to the north, the Caribbean Ocean

to the east, Aragua State to the west, and the states of Guárico and Aragua to the south.<sup>2</sup>

The culture of Miranda state is an important part of its people; the state's traditions and costumes are intimately linked with its people's history. Miranda is an important center of political, economic, cultural, and commercial activities. It is located in a large depression between Serranía del Litoral and Serranía del Interior, which is called Llanura de Barlovento. Tuy Valley and the eastern part of Caracas Valley are also part of Miranda.<sup>3</sup> It has many diverse folkloric and religious traditions, such as the "Dancing Devils of Yare" ("Dancing Devils of Corpus Christi"), one of the most important religious traditions of Miranda – it was declared "Intangible Heritage and Good of the Nation" in 2003.<sup>4</sup>

Central East Venezuela Conference was organized in December 2009 as Central East Venezuela Mission, and it became a conference in 2014. It started with 10 districts, 36 churches, 21 organized groups, and 9,386 members.<sup>5</sup> The territory consists of the east municipalities of Gran Caracas, which are Chacao, Baruta, El Hatillo, and Sucre; and the central and coastal zone of the Miranda state, which has Plaza, Zamora, Acevedo, Brión, Buroz, Páez, Andrés Bello, and Pedro Gual. At the beginning of 2019, it had 68 churches, 42 groups, and 12,810 members; its territory had a population of 2,409,466.<sup>6</sup> There were seven ordained ministers, four licensed ministers, and two full-time laypeople who worked as district directors. Several laypeople leading conference departments also serve *ad honorem*.

## Central East Venezuela Conference Institutions

*Colegio Alejandro Oropeza Castillo* (Alejandro Oropeza Castillo Academy), an Adventist school, was registered at the Public Notary Office of Plaza District in Miranda State on May 30, 1983. It was named after the community in which it is located.<sup>7</sup> It was built with seven classrooms and two bathrooms. When it opened, it taught preschool and elementary education. In the 1999-2000 school year, the first ninth grade class graduated. In the 2004-2005 school year, the first year of diversified education with an emphasis in science was added. In the 2005-2006 school year, this science program held its graduation with 20 students.<sup>8</sup> Many conference and church events are celebrated in the institution's auditorium.

Chuspita Campground is located in Chuspita, Municipio Acevedo, Miranda, and is about 9.79 kilometers from Caucagua and 18.63 kilometers from Guatire. It consists of two beautiful hectares where oranges, lemons, and bananas are abundant. This land was acquired in 1989. Chuspita River runs through the land, making it an ideal campsite. Two major youth events are celebrated on the campground. In February of every year, the Adventurers hold their camporee event, and, every April, the Pathfinders and Master Guides hold their camporee events. This land has space to accommodate 1,500 campers and has an auditorium that can hold 2,000 people.

Radio Station Viene 103.3 FM was acquired by Central East Venezuela Conference in 2011 to reach the conference's entire territory, but government entities only allowed for broadcasting in Guarenas, Guatire, and the Petare zone. The objective of the radio station is to fulfill the church's mission. It is located in the central church of Guatire and has enough space to operate and install new radio equipment.<sup>9</sup>

## Beginnings of Adventist Church in Central East Venezuela Conference Territory

The Seventh-day Adventist Church began its work in the Central East Venezuela Conference's territory in 1960 with a six-month-long evangelistic campaign given by Pastor Roberts in *Teatro La Florida*. It happened to coincide with the establishment of the most symbolic Catholic church on the east side of Caracas, *Iglesia del Marques*.

The Adventist brethren and newly baptized members in the east side of Caracas founded a local Adventist church in 1961. At the beginning, it held its services in the English church in El Bosque. Harold Bohr was its first assigned pastor. Among the church's founders were the brethren Aparicio, Greenidge, Chacón, Bolivar, Robaina, Moreno, Greenidge, Osterman, Do Carmo, López, García, and their wives, along with Criselda de Frontado, Mercedes de Hamilton Zegarra, Ruth de Ruocco, José Cutillas, Carmen Aguilera, Mercedes de Melgarejo, Horacio Rodriguez, and his wife, Elvira de Spinoza, Mercedes Sánchez and his children, Sister Pedroza, and others. In 1966, the group moved to the basement of El Paraíso Church. In 1975, the group moved to *Teatro Flexible*, a theater building in Zona Rental, Venezuela, and moved again a year later to *Teatro Chacaito*. In 1977, the church was finally formally established in Avenida Sanz in El Marqués, Caracas, Miranda.<sup>10</sup> As a result of the work of those first believers, the Adventist message spread to several municipalities in the area.

## Events that Led to the Establishment of Central East Venezuela Conference

By 2009, Central Venezuela Conference covered a large geographic territory and had a considerable amount of church members. The complexity of the area, its transportation system, and the attention given to members from many urban developments, buildings, and neighborhoods gave leaders and constituents the idea to open a new territory to better handle the challenges of the area and give appropriate attention to church members. A proposal to divide the field was presented at the second annual session of Central Venezuela Conference in Caracas on October 4, 2009. The proposal was approved during a plenary session of the year-end meetings of East Venezuela Union Mission in Maracay in November 2009.<sup>11</sup> On December 20, 2009, East Venezuela Union Mission voted Pastor Augusto Pérez to the position of president with Nelson Ochoa as secretary-treasurer. In June 2010, the new field was officially created as Central East Venezuela Mission.<sup>12</sup>

The offices were initially located in the lower level of Central Venezuela Conference's headquarters. By September 2010, the offices were moved to a house at 4ta. Transversal Montecristo, Quinta Chepota # 35, Urb. Los Chorros, Caracas. Since then, their missionary work was consistent with the slogan they still retain: "Engaged in the Growth of the Lord's Work."<sup>13</sup>

In February 2014, Pastor Israel Leito, Inter-American Division president, was at the first quadrennial session. At that session, the status of Central East Venezuela Mission was changed to Central East Venezuela Conference. The administrators were reelected, and a new executive secretary position was added. Pastor Marcos Velásquez was voted president for the 2018-2022 term.<sup>14</sup> His appointment was ratified in April 2018 during the second quadrennial session under the direction of Pastor Jorge Atalido, East Venezuela Union Mission president, and Pastor Al Powell, who represented the Inter-American Division. Nelson Ochoa was elected treasurer with Javier Guevara as executive secretary.<sup>15</sup>

## Central East Venezuela Conference's Mission Initiatives

Areas that stand out among the conference's plans and perspectives to preach the Lord's gospel:

### 1. Personal Ministries and Evangelism Assistants

Establish district schools to educate and keep members involved in sharing the gospel and winning new members for the church and kingdom of Heaven

Strengthen the effort of small groups using friendship evangelism

Focus on the work on youth and children to attract their parents to the Lord

### 2. Education

Empower workers in all districts, especially the teaching faculty who teach at the Adventist college

Start a school in Cúpira and other areas where no educational institutions exist

### 3. ADRA – Team up with ADRA in reaching those in most need in the territory

4. Health - Start health groups in churches and maintain the existing gastronomic schools

### 5. Children and Adolescent Ministry

Offer a motivational program to church women that work with children and adolescents

Equip those women for sharing the gospel with others

Help children experience spiritual growth through vacation Bible schools, Adventurers and Pathfinders clubs, and the Sabbath School weekly program

## Recent Events Experienced by Central East Venezuela Conference

Caracas has been the center of many political conflicts in recent years, and most protests are carried out in this territory, especially on Sabbaths. Church brethren organized meetings in homes to continue evangelism and discipleship strategic plans. Even under these circumstances, small groups have been strengthened, and church members have united in helping and supporting each other. Something that has changed the conference is members immigrating to seek refuge in countries like Columbia, Peru, Ecuador, and the United States of America, leaving churches with empty spaces. Although this is a weakness, it is also an opportunity to fill empty spaces. Some have migrated, but they are still connected to their churches and demonstrate support through tithes and offerings. Thanks to that honorable initiative, the conference has maintained its financial operations, allowing it to continue its evangelistic work.

Due to the migration of many church leaders, people who remained in the country filled empty positions, making continued church leadership possible under brothers and sisters who have special talents and God-given gifts. The migration of pastors has weakened the ministry, but God used committed lay people to fill their empty spaces.

In the midst of crisis, the church opens its doors to all without distinction. As a result, the community has approached the church to find refuge and comfort in the midst of the difficulties the country faces. Without any doubt, God uses every moment in history to touch peoples' hearts. The conference has experienced slight growth in membership in the last few years.

## Challenges for Central East Venezuela Conference

One of the most challenging tasks the conference faces to accomplish its mission is to divide larger districts into smaller ones to better serve the needs of its congregations. Dividing and multiplying districts with more congregations will spread the message of hope to more places and allow more churches to be established. Another goal is to establish an educational institution in the east side of Caracas. It is necessary to meet this challenge to accomplish the conference's mission. The ordination of all ministers before the end of the quadrennial period is another conference goal. Completing this task will result in strengthening experienced and spiritually matured ministers in issues of ecclesiastical direction.

## List of Presidents

Augusto Pérez (2009-2018); Marcos Velásquez (2018- ).

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