**Southern Mindanao Mission**

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Southern Mindanao Mission is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church covering the following territory: the provinces of Maguindanao, Sarangani, South Cotabato, and Sultan Kudarat, the Butulan barangay in
Davao del Sur Province, and the province of Cotabato (except for portions of the Arakan and Tulunan municipalities). It is part of the South Philippine Union Conference in the Southern-Asia Pacific Division. First organized in 1950, Southern Mindanao Mission was reorganized in 1965. Its headquarters are in General Santos City, the Philippines.

Statistics (June 30, 2019): churches, 407; membership, 156,449; general population, 5,995,365.

Origin of SDA Work in Territory of Conference

One of the oldest Adventist missions in the island of Mindanao, Southern Mindanao Mission (SMM) traces its origin as part of the mission activity in Mindanao that from 1920 until 1930 came under the supervision of the East Visayan Mission. Dr. and Mrs. Ulysses Charles (Carlos) and Ellen Fattebert, together with Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Steward who were working in the East Visayan Mission, were the first foreign missionaries to start an organized work on the Islands of Mindanao in 1919. However, as early as 1918 Adventist periodicals in Tagalog regularly found their way to Mindanao.

The medical work of the Fatteberts created many Bible study interests. According to a report by Fattebert, “The first week we were here some came in wanting to know if they might attend our services the following Sabbath. We of course told them that we could be glad to have them come, and since then we have a good Sabbath service.

In 1922, a group of Adventist believers from Magallon Negros Occidental, headed by Tiburcio Singuillo migrated to Sindangan, Zamboanga. Toward the later part of the year, Singuillo requested for a minister to come to Zamboanga to baptize his interests. Pastor G. Hugh Murrin went to Sindangan and baptized the 21 candidates. Later, the Sindangan church organized with a membership of 29, and Singuillo served as an elder for quite some time.

A report given in 1926 summarized the early beginnings of Adventist work in Mindanao: “Imagine our surprise to find a church in Misamis with a membership of sixty-seven! Up the coastline twelve kilometers, at the town of Clarin, we found another flourishing church; and out in the country still another. South of Misamis there is a group of believers that will soon be formed into a fourth church; across the peninsula, at Sindangan, in the province of Zamboanga, there is a church with a membership of about thirty.

To meet the needs of growth and expansion, in 1937 the Mindanao Mission (MM) organized as a local mission under the supervision of the Philippine Union Mission in Manila. The Mindanao Mission had its headquarters in Cagayan de Oro, Misamis Occidental. William B. Riffel served as its first president. After its organization, the mission grew rapidly, expanding throughout different parts of the island. The church growth in Mindanao was even faster than that of the North and Central Philippines.

Organizational History of the Conference

The first church organized in the area was in 1940 at Libungan, Cotabato Province. At that time, it fell under the supervision of the Mindanao Mission. The Southern Mindanao Mission became a separate institution in 1950, and the records for 1951 show 35 churches with a combined membership of 2,583. The organization of 1950 divided the Mindanao Mission into two missions: Northern Mindanao Mission (now North Central Mindanao Mission) retaining the original location for its headquarters at Cayagan de Oro, City, and the Southern Mindanao Mission that made its headquarters at Cor. Sta. Ana Avenue and Adriatico St., Davao City. During that time, the Davao Mission (DM) that we know today was part of SMM.

Northern Mindanao Mission at the time of the division consisted of the provinces of Surigao del Sur and del Norte, Agusan del Sur and del Norte, Misamis Occidental and Oriental, Lanoa Sur and Norte, and Bukidnon. On the other hand, SMM covered the provinces of Davao del Sur, del Norte, and Oriental, the Sarangani islands, South and North Cotabato, Maguindanao, Zamboanga del Norte and del Sur, and the Sulu archipelago.

Because of the growing number of young people in the territory of SMM, leadership saw the need to build a new academy. Beginning operation as Digos Seventh-day Adventist Elementary School in 1950, it was upgraded into a junior academy in 1952. In 1958, the school moved to a new location and offered the first year to fourth year levels. The new site resulted from donations and the Thirteenth Sabbath offering over five.

In 1954, during the tenure of A. Z. Roda, SMM transferred its offices to Camus St. Davao, City. The following year they moved to the corner of A. Mabini and 184 V. Mapa Streets, Davao City. In 1960, SMM under the leadership of D. C. Sabrine, reported 74 churches and 6,681 members. Beside the officers, the mission employed 7 ordained ministers, 2 credentialed missionaries, 2 licensed ministers, 3 licensed missionaries, 1 licensed Bible instructor, and 14 church school teachers.

In response to the expansion of the work and to provide better supervision, church leadership reorganized Southern Mindanao Mission in 1965 and divided it into two missions. The new Davao Mission retained the original headquarters and covered the provinces of Davao del Sur, del Norte and Oriental and the new provinces of Campostella Valley. On the other hand, SMM kept the remaining provinces of the original SMM but relocated its headquarters to a rented building fronting the Magsaysay Memorial College in General Santos City. After some time, the office headquarters shifted to the Panlaque Building at Morrow Boulevard and then eventually to one of the rooms of the SDA elementary school behind the Atis Adventist Church on Atis Street, General Santos City.

Another reorganization took place in 1965. During it, Elpidio L. Lamara became president. Pualino P. Nebres, and
Daniel J. Celiz, served as secretary-treasurers. During that time SSM had only 58 churches, 5, 187 members, 6 ordained ministers, 3 licensed ministers, 15 licensed missionaries and elementary teachers, and 56 literature evangelists.22

From the time of the SSM’s division into two missions, the mother mission experienced challenges both in the areas of finances and church growth through the years 1965-1985. In fact, its leadership labeled the period as the “survival years.”23

In 1968 Teofilo Layon became the second president of Southern Mindanao Mission.24 During the same year, SSM established Matutum View Academy.25 The number of churches rose to 66 with 7, 095 members at the end of the year.26 SMM was the first mission in Mindanao to obtain the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) registration, Number 44984 granted on August 11, 1971.27 At this time, the mission had only 60 churches and 5, 573 members.

In 1972, Isaias C. Ladja, was elected president but served only for two years. He donated a six-hectar property in Acmonan, Tupi South Cotabato, for the use of Matutum View Academy (MVA). Later on, the academy opted to operate a college named Matutum View Christian College, later retitled Adventist College of Technology (ACT).28


Again in 1975, SMM relocated its headquarters to a two-hectare lot in Purok Manga, City Heights, General Santos, City30 where it stands today but significantly bigger and better than the early years. During that time, the mission renovated an unfinished building to serve as its office. Another makeshift building served as the stock room.

As early as 1975, Bofetiado, together with all the mission employees, dreamed of having a more presentable building to house the mission work for southern Mindanao. However, tight finances prevented any progress. At this time that church membership had increased to 18, 522 with 90 churches, 13 church schools, and 70 church employees.

The fourth SMM general constituency meeting in 1980 elected Jimmy H. Adil, Sr., as president31 Victor S. Ligsay (1981-1983), David O. Salarda (1983-1985) served as secretary-treasurers. In August 1981, the SMM office building burned down, but in spite of the setback, the staff and membership rallied together to fulfill the long-awaited hope of a new mission office. When Adil left the presidency for another responsibility at the end 1985, a new concrete building stood as a monument of the unity and sacrifices of both the mission workers and the church members. In 1985 SMM reported 125 churches and 30,388 members.

In January 1986, Levy Tabo became with David O. Salarda (1986-1988)32 and Malakias D. Ferenal (1988-1989) as secretary-treasurers. From 1986, SMM registered a steady growth both in finances and church membership. The 42.5-hectar Onica Farm in Kidapawan that it procured during 196833 produced corn, rubber, coconut, palm, mango, bananas, and other fruits, augmenting the mission’s financial income. SSM had originally intended the site for a school, but the proximity of Southern Mindanao Academy led to the shelving of the plan.34 The added income the farm provided supported the mission in constructing more church buildings and hiring more church workers.

In 1989, Laverne Tucker and the Quiet Hour Ministries came to SMM to conduct a series of large-scale evangelistic meetings. They resulted in 3, 000 baptisms. At the end of the year, the mission could report 164 organized churches, 230 companies, 47, 871 church members, 19 ordained ministers, 12 licensed ministers, 33 credentialed missionaries, 38 licensed missionaries, and 240 literature evangelists. That year alone the churches added 6, 894 new members. In October, Tabo died from illness35 L. B. Tabo Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church was erected as a memorial of his dedication to the ministry.

Donato J. Generato, Jr., became the seventh president of SMM in November 1989 and held the office until 1995. Ahser P. Ortaleza served as secretary-treasurer from 1991 until December of 1995. The 1991 SDA Yearbook listed SMM as having 165 churches and 51,220 members.36

In 1996, constituents elected Wendell M. Serrano as president. Chemuel U. Almocera served as secretary-treasurer from June 1997 to December, 2000. The work of evangelism continued to progress, reaching out to the tribal communities in the territory. The mission built more churches and hired more workers, enabling it to lessen the number of churches each pastor had to shepherd. In the 1996 statistical report, SMM records 260 churches, 73,550 church members, 31 ordained ministers, 55 credentialed missionaries, 10 licensed ministers, 49 licensed missionaries, and 62 credentialed and licensed literature evangelists.38

By 2000, SMM could report 281 churches with a membership of 92,191 members.39 31 ordained ministers, 60 credentialed missionaries, 11 licensed ministers, 33 licensed missionaries, 63 credentialed and licensed literature evangelists,40 17 academy teachers, and 55 church school teachers.41

The start of the new millennium saw the election of Virgilio Sagabay as president, and the mission added a new position of executive secretary in the person of Wilson Catolico.

In 2001 the mission inaugurated a chapter of Adopt-a-Minister International. Reva Moore, its sponsor, hired ministerial graduates to assist the different churches in the mission.

In 2006, Wilson C. Catolico became president. It was this time that TV programs sponsored by the mission got under way. In 2008, Roger O. Caderma became president to fill the place of Catolico who had received a call as executive secretary of the South Philippine Union Conference in Cagayan de Oro, City. Caderma’s leadership brought
tremendous improvements both in church growth and the physical development of the mission headquarters.

In 2009 the mission began construction of the Wong Multi-purpose Building to house the workers during the monthly meetings. It also serves as a guest house to accommodate visitors for official meetings and other purposes. The building’s spacious ground floor functions as a cafeteria during large gatherings. Donations from church members funded the building, and James, Mel, and Willan Wong and family of California, U.S.A., furnished it.

In 2010, the number of evangelistic and outreach programs increased. During this year SMM could report 361 churches, 174 companies, 64, 537 church members, 48 ordained ministers, 94 credentialed missionaries, 19 licensed missionaries, 58 licensed missionaries, and 65 credentialed and licensed literature evangelists.

Because so many guest evangelists come to preach in the SMM, they pay a significant amount for lodging during their stay. The mission proposed that if they would agree to give their budget allotments for hotel expenses to the mission, it would erect a building for them to stay during their visit. When the guest evangelists accepted the proposal, construction of the Minister’s Lounge began in earnest and finished in 2015. Now 12 hotellike guest rooms stand behind the Wong-Multi-purpose building.

Another multi-purpose building, named the Spirit of Prophecy and Publishing Center, houses the office of the Home Health Education Service manager, a mini-lecture hall, and stock rooms for books for the literature evangelists. It has several guest rooms as well.

In June 2013, another multi-purpose building, the Adventist Convention and Media Center (ACMC), began. Though the plan seemed a bit ambitious considering its size, estimated cost and the mission's financial limitations, nonetheless the visionary leaders went ahead in faith. The building, though still under construction, would host the evangelistic meetings of Bill Tucker and Quiet Hour Team in March 2015. The ACMC structure has a plenary hall with a 3,000-seating capacity. The ground floor was designed to have guestrooms. Housing the Hope Channel and Hope Radio, General Santos City, the building has rehearsal rooms, a TV studio, and other offices.

The 1980 mission complex underwent renovation and expansion in 2010. The original ground floor of the original building became offices for the department directors, secretaries, auditors, and the president. Right at the entrance a lobby was created to receive visitors. In 2012 more renovation took place. The old building was extended on both the right and left sides. The ground floor of the annex housed the accounting office and the treasurer’s office, and its upper level served as a studio for Hope Channel. The second floor where the director’s offices had been before was converted into guest rooms that bear the names of the donors and benefactors. The upper level on the right side became a worship and small group meeting hall.

Towards the end of 2015, Caderma left to serve the SPUC as executive secretary. Constituents elected Rene S. Rosa as president to begin January 2016. In 2015 during its 50 Years’ Celebration and the thirteenth general constituency meeting December 9-12, SMM could report 119,744 church members, 41 ordained ministers, 12 licensed ministers and 18 non-regular workers, 38 literature evangelists, 30 academy teachers, and 130 church school teachers.

By the third quarter of 2019, membership increased to 159,722 with 408 organized churches and 245 companies. The mission employs 32 ordained ministers, 12 licensed ministers and 18 non-regular workers, 38 literature evangelists, 30 academy teachers, and 130 church school teachers.

List of Presidents


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NOTES


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8. Ibid., 136.
9. Ibid., 138.
11. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
27. See SEC Certificate of Registration, SMM Archives, accessed November 6, 2019.
28. Dabucol, “Matutum View Academy”?
33. See “Onica Farm” Files, November 5, 2019, Southern Mindanao Mission Archives.
34. See Romulo R. Tuballes, “In Pursuit of A Dream” in *Southern Mindanao Mission, 50 Years 1965-2015: Celebrating God’s Goodness with Thanksgiving* (no publisher: no date of publication), 44.
35. Ibid., 20, 21.
37. See 134th Annual Statistical Report--1996 (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Southern--Asia Pacific Division Archives), 12.
39. See 139th Annual Statistical Report--2000 (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Southern--Asia Pacific Division Archives), 30.

40. Ibid., 47.

41. SMM Secretary’s Statistical Report-Quarterly, 4th Quarter 2000. SMM Archives, November 6, 2019.

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44. See 149th Annual Statistical Report--2010 (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Southern-Asia Pacific Division Archives), 32.

45. Ibid., 52.

46. Phone Interview with Roger O. Caderma, former SMM President and currently the president of South Philippine Union Conference, April 15, 2020.

47. Building Permit, ACMC, November 5, 2019, Southern Mindanao Mission Archives; see also Southern Mindanao Mission Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Action # 2013-100, October 21, 2013. SMM Archives.


49. SMM Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Action # 2010-081, September 26, 2010.

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51. Interview by author with Caderma.

52. See Rene S. Rosa, Employee Service Record, Far Eastern Division, accessed November 5, 2019, Southern Mindanao Mission Archives.

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