

# Arismendi Torres, Rufino Serapio (1915–2014)

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## NEY JULIÁN DEVIS

Ney Julián Devis Arias has worked for the Seventh-day Adventist Church for 24 years as a district pastor, departmental, administrator, and theology professor. He is currently a candidate for a doctorate in pastoral theology degree from SETAI and works as departmental in East Venezuela Union Mission. He is married to Loyda Fermín de Devis, with whom he has two children.

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Rufino Serapio Arismendi was an important figure in the expansion of the Adventist message among the indigenous people of the territory of Gran Sabana during the twentieth century. He served as a pastor and administrator in the Colombo-Venezuela Union Mission.



Rufino Serapio Arismendi Torres

Photo courtesy of Haroldo Arismendi.

## Early Years, Education, and Marriage

Rufino S. Arismendi, born April 22, 1915, in Río Caribe,<sup>1</sup> Estado Sucre, Venezuela, spent his childhood spent on the family's farm. In 1923, he learned about the Adventist message through family members.<sup>2</sup> Baptized at age 13, he joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Estado Sucre.<sup>3</sup> When he was 18, he entered the publications ministry and started traveling throughout Venezuela, sharing the Adventist message.<sup>4</sup> By 1938, at 23, he had earned enough selling Christian books to study in Medellín, Colombia,<sup>5</sup> entering the Colegio Industrial Coloveno (Coloveno Industrial College).<sup>6</sup>

On December 3, 1942, he graduated with a teaching degree.<sup>7</sup> Shortly afterward, on December 14, 1942, he married Elva Mujica.<sup>8</sup> The couple had two birth children, Harold and Adamelis, and adopted Rosa Cedeño, in 1976.<sup>9</sup>

## Administrative Work

In 1943, Arismendi began working as a dormitory dean and instructor at Coloveno.<sup>10</sup> The next year he served as an associate pastor in Caracas, Venezuela, and contributed to the organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Catia.<sup>11</sup> While in Estado Táchira, he founded an Adventist village called “Rafael López Miranda” along a school of the same name.<sup>12</sup> In 1954,<sup>13</sup> in the City of Carúpano, he established Colegio Libertador in the eastern part of Venezuela.<sup>14</sup>

Pastor R. S. Arismendi became president of the West Venezuela Mission in 1958.<sup>15</sup> From 1960 to 1966, he served in one of the departments of the Colombo-Venezuela Union Mission.<sup>16</sup> He also became president of the East Venezuela Mission in Caracas. When he visited Gran Sabana during that period, he confirmed the existence of four Adventist villages in the territory. Years later, the church established several Adventist schools in the region.

## Work in Gran Sabana

In 1972, leadership assigned Arismendi as a pastor in Gran Sabana to support the construction of a college. He also organized six new churches, nine groups, and built four church buildings as well as various primary schools in the region.<sup>17</sup>

## Retirement and Dedication

When he retired in 1979, he started doing missionary work among Gran Sabana’s indigenous communities, determined to establish a boarding middle school for the their youth.<sup>18</sup> His hard work came to fruition on October 8 of the same year with the start of Gran Sabana Adventist Academy (COLGRANSA) as the region’s boarding high school.<sup>19</sup> He stayed in Gran Sabana until 1985. Beginning to have health issues, he moved with his wife to Victoria, Estado Aragua. In 1995, together with members at El Limón, he started the building of a community church.<sup>20</sup>

When he was 90 years old, he returned to Gran Sabana in order to continue to strengthen COLGRANSA’s educational program and to help finish the construction of its church building. From 2005 to 2010, Pastor Arismendi dedicated himself to share the message with the Gran Sabana community and church members.<sup>21</sup> He dedicated a total of 18 years to missionary activity in the region. He always said that “God chose me from childhood to do this work.”<sup>22</sup>

On December 2, 2013 he traveled to the United States for a family reunion, and on May 10, 2014, a Saturday afternoon, he passed away.<sup>23</sup> Part of his ashes were deposited in La Victoria cemetery in Estado Aragua in his wife’s grave. In 2015, to commemorate what would have been his one hundredth birthday, the rest of his ashes were taken to Gran Sabana and deposited at the foot of Roraima Mountain, Estado Bolivar, near Pastor Ovid Elbert Davis’ grave.<sup>24</sup> The words in his obituary declare: “Known for being adventurous, always ready to share his faith, not afraid to live, and always having God present in his life.”<sup>25</sup>

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## SOURCES

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## NOTES

1. Rio Caribe a coastal town located on the northern margin of the Paria Peninsula, district capital, was a fishing village. "Municipio Arismendi: Capital Río Caribe," accessed on July 1, 2019, <https://www.turismosucre.com.ve/pueblosyciudades/riocaribe/>
2. Adamelis Arismendi de Zambrano (R. S. Arismendi's daughter), interviewed by author via WhatsApp, Puerto Rico, July 4, 2019.
3. East Venezuela Union Mission, "Obituario: Rufino Serapio Arismendi," 2014.
4. Nathaniel García, *Sin temor al futuro* (Caracas: 1989), 40.
5. East Venezuela Union Mission, "Obituario: Rufino Serapio Arismendi," 2014.
6. In 1937, in order to meet the church's educational needs, Colegio Industrial Coloveno opened. In 1950 the name changed to Instituto Colombo-Venezolano until 1981, when the mission created the Corporación Universitaria Adventista, accessed July 1, 2019, <https://www.unac.edu.co/>.
7. East Venezuela Union Mission, "Obituario: Rufino Serapio Arismendi," 2014.

8. García, *Sin temor al futuro*, 40.
9. Adamelis Arismendi, interview by author, July 4, 2019.
10. García, *Sin temor al futuro*, 40.
11. Ibid.
12. "Gratitud a Dios por R S Arismendi," by Esperanza TV Venezuela, "En memoria del pastor R S Arismendi," June 2014.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrB4Ky2t-n0>, accessed July 1, 2019.
13. García, *Sin temor al futuro*, 40.
14. East Venezuela Union Mission "Obituario: Rufino Serapio Arismendi."
15. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, accessed July 5, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1959.pdf>.
16. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, accessed July 5, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1965,66.pdf>.
17. "Gratitud a Dios por R S Arismendi," by Esperanza TV Venezuela.
18. Carlos Schupnik, *Aquí obró Dios: Historia de la Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día* (Nirgua, Venezuela, Artes Gráficas del Instituto Universitario Adventista de Venezuela, 2010), 102.
19. García, *Sin temor al futuro*, 41.
20. Adamelis Arismendi, interview by author, July 4, 2019.
21. Ibid.
22. "Gratitud a Dios por R S Arismendi," by Esperanza TV Venezuela.
23. Adamelis Arismendi, interview by author, July 4, 2019.
24. East Venezuela Union Mission "Obituario: Rufino Serapio Arismendi."
25. Obituary for Rufino Serapio Arismendi, accessed on July 1, 2019, <https://obitree.com/obituary/us/florida/lake-worth/all-county-funeral-home--crematory/rufino-arismendi/1872937/index.php>.

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