

Western Mindanao Adventist Academy

RENEBOY MAQUILAVA, AND IRISH BULAHAN

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Western Mindanao Adventist Academy (WMAA), formerly Western Mindanao Academy, a secondary boarding school, belongs to the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist educational system. The main campus is located in Dumingag, Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines, and the annex campus are in Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental, Philippines. It operates in the territory of Western Mindanao Conference (WMC), under the South Philippine Union Conference (SPUC).

Dumingag is a municipality of Zamboanga del Sur that is located in the heartlands of the Zamboanga peninsula.¹ This organic capital of the province is classified as a second-class municipality and, as of the 2015 census, had a population of about 47,485.² The academy has received awards and citations in different fields, local and national, and is making good progress.³

WMAA is accredited by the Fund Assistance on Private Education (FAPE), the Adventist Accreditation Agency (AAA) of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Board of Regents. It is affiliated with the Association of SDA Schools in the Philippines; Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities; and Association of Zamboanga Basilan Sulu Tawi-Tawi Private Schools.⁴

Under the K-12 curriculum, WMAA offers a complete junior high school program for grades 7 through 10, and the senior high school includes grades 11 and 12, with STEM, ABM, HUMMS, and TVL academic strands. For the school year 2020-2021, the school serves 457 students for junior high school, including the Grade 7 and 8 students from the annex campus, and 303 students for the senior high school, with 760 students in total.⁵

The functioning of this school is maintained by 36 active employees, made up of 15 regular workers, including two ordained ministers, and 21 non-regular workers. The employees include 25 licensed teachers and five skilled workers, with six with a master's degree in teaching and two with doctors of education and ministry degrees.⁶

Establishment and Developments

Though primary education for children was advocated by Adventists during the 1850s and 1860s, it was not until the early 1870s that the Adventist Church began to recognize and develop a denominationally-based school system.⁷

Abraham La Rue, an Adventist mariner and missionary, brought bundles of literature to the Philippines from Hong Kong.⁸ From this humble beginning, the Lord blessed the canvassing ministry. People who read the books wanted to hear more of the gospel story. The country was such fertile ground for the gospel that a couple of missionaries came to reinforce Caldwell. In 1906 Elder J. L. McElhany and his wife came from Australia to start evangelistic work in Manila. The Lord sent another couple, Elder and Mrs. L. V. Finster, who arrived on December 17, 1908.⁹

Finster conducted the first public evangelistic meetings that resulted in the organization of the first Seventh-day Adventist church in the country, located at Santa Anna, Manila, in 1911. The church was organized during the visit of Elder I. H. Ivans, Asiatic Division president. The Philippine Mission was established in 1906.¹⁰ The pioneer missionaries longed to reach the whole area of the Philippines. They sent truth-filled literature and workers to different places in the country and trained Filipinos to help spread the gospel.¹¹

The humble and modest beginning of Adventism in WMM territory can be attributed to the publishing ministry and the pioneering medical work of Dr. Ulysses Charles Fattebert and his wife, Ellen. The Fatteberts were believed to be the first foreign Adventist missionaries to step on the soil of Mindanao, particularly in Misamis.¹² Soon after the Fatteberts' arrival, they looked for a strategic place to set up a medical clinic to accomplish their mission. Through their medical work, many were interested in knowing more about their faith.¹³ They became the core of the first Adventist congregation on the island of Mindanao.¹⁴

Like many pioneering institutions, WMM based its beginnings on "faith that works," a classic principle of bold and resolute missionary spirit, which was demonstrated by the pioneers on the island of Mindanao. In 1958 and 1959, during Pastor Obregon's term as pioneering president, the first mission headquarters was located in a rented house at Rizal Street, Ozamiz City.¹⁵ As Pastor Bocala, the Far Eastern Division secretary, noted, "the mission contributes financially to the worldwide work of the Adventist church." He further stated that this accomplishment gave the mission the new designation as "the largest conference in the Philippines."¹⁶

History and Foundation

On February 20, 1962, four years after the organization of WMM, under the leadership of Pastor Bayani Arit, it was recommended to the union during the executive committee meeting of the Western Mindanao Mission, that a day school should be established in Dumingag.¹⁷

In 1963 the South Philippine Union Mission approved the name, Western Mindanao Junior Academy.¹⁸ Pastor Bayani Arit was the chairman of the school board and Pastor Gabriel Mendoza was the pioneering principal.¹⁹

Permitted by the government to operate a junior academy as a day school, the school began to function.²⁰ As God gives power to the plants to grow, so He caused a school to germinate and grow to what is now the Western Mindanao Junior Academy, with its problems, challenges, and promise.²¹

In 1962 the original location of the school was a one-hectare plot of ground, half of which was donated by Marcelino Decolongon to the Dumingag Church and half of it was sold by him to the mission to make up the one hectare for the use of the academy.²² The one-half hectare lot cost 500 Pesos.²³ It was understood that the building would be built and maintained by the Dumingag Church and neighboring churches, with Dumingag brethren taking the responsibility to lead out in the construction.²⁴

However, the Dumingag brethren were not yet ready to put up the school building and, in order to make use of the land during planting season, they requested the WMC Executive Committee to cultivate the land on a two-thirds and one-third basis. Produce from the one-third share cultivated by the mission would be sold and the amount would be credited to a Mission Academy Fund, which would later be used to buy materials for construction.²⁵

With the Dumingag Church leading in the construction, it was only partially finished, and the cold, soft sod still served as the floor.²⁶ The school began with three classrooms and a chapel for religious services.²⁷ A group of 99 students desirous of a Christian education matriculated in the first two years of the secondary course under the guidance of four teachers, namely: L. T. Maypa, E. A. Santos, P. J. Pasco, and G. B. Mendoza.²⁸ The school's mission was to provide quality Adventist education for the spiritual, mental, physical, and social development of the youth in Western Mindanao.²⁹ All of the students enrolled during its first year of operation, except four, began their secondary education in an Adventist school, and 16 out the 20 unbaptized students took their stand for the Master.³⁰

The following year the enrollment in the high school increased to 154, and it was thought best to add the third-year class. An elementary school was run along with the academy in order to give children a basic foundation. A total of 221 students enrolled for the school year 1964-1965. The number of teachers increased to nine with the call of Mr. and Mrs. A. Y. Baculanta, Mr. S. Conferido, and Ms. E. A. Mendoza. Miss F. Baloyo was called to be a primary school teacher and as the dean of the girls whose homes were far away. Mrs. C. L. Maypa acted as registrar in addition to her teaching load in the elementary school.³¹

It is a source of joy and satisfaction to see students enjoy the blessings of Christian education under God-fearing and self-sacrificing teachers. Only the future knows what will become of the students who have set for themselves lofty ideals and goals to reach in their individual pursuits, after having been subjected to the molding influence of Christian-oriented education.³²

School finances suffered from insufficient capitalization and inadequate subsidiary income, aside from the tuition fees. Enrollment in the high school the following year dropped by 34 students due to a prolonged drought which resulted in two successive years of crop failure, upon which a bulk of the parents derived their

income.³³

On July 8, 1968, the school applied for a permit to operate a complete secondary course day school academy³⁴ with the new name, Western Mindanao Academy.³⁵ The slogan, "The School for a Better Future," was created on May 26, 1969.³⁶

In the 1968-1969 school year, WMA held its first academy graduation for 44 seniors. The following were the speakers for the graduation ceremonies: Pastor B. U. Donato, educational secretary of the South Philippine Union, Consecration; Pastor J. R. Obregon, MV secretary of the Central Philippine Union, Baccalaureate; and Pastor C. P. Legaspi, secretary-treasurer of the South Philippine Union, Commencement.³⁷ The academy had been in operation for six years before its third and fourth years of high school were approved by the South Philippine Union and by the Far Eastern Division.³⁸

There was great need for a larger property for the school and, for this reason, Pastor Paterno M. Diaz, president of Western Mindanao Mission with headquarters in Ozamis City, appealed to Mr. Decolongon to sell to the mission additional land. The Decolongons had no plan sell their piece of land because it was their only means by which to support their children to attend an Adventist academy and college.³⁹ A 50-acre (20-hectare) tract of land belonged to the family,⁴⁰ half of which was titled to Ruth D. Gallego, their eldest daughter, so that she could support her children in school.⁴¹

Pastor Diaz bargained to purchase this lot for half the standard price in Dumingag at the time. When the owner learned that, in spite of the minimal cost, the mission could not pay cash, he regretted the agreement to sell it. Remembering his vow to God to give a portion of the land for His work, he said "I consider half of it donated." He believed it was better to see the school's flag fly on that land than for other people to occupy it. He further said that many young people would have the opportunity to be trained for God's work.⁴²

After the dormitory was built, the school moved to its new location on October 19, 1970, using the dormitory as an administration building. During the next four years an auditorium, temporary cafeteria, a new dormitory, and a faculty residence were constructed.⁴³ In 1971 a baptistry was constructed in preparation for God's work in the student community.⁴⁴

Since July 3, 1972, WMA has been fully recognized by the Department of Education of the Republic of the Philippines. On June 3, 1974, the school began operating as a boarding academy with an enrollment of 353 and a faculty of 11. Most of the students, all nationals, are from Seventh-day Adventist homes.⁴⁵

In 1984 an administration building was constructed. It houses four offices and six classrooms, the school auditorium, and the library.⁴⁶ The corporate status of WMA was processed beginning on December 16, 1986,⁴⁷ and the following year SPUM evaluated WMA.⁴⁸

About 100 Gmelina trees grow on the campus. These partly supply lumber for the carpentry needs of the school, including dormitories and the construction of a ramp between the administration building and the

auditorium in 1990. In 1992 a tennis court was added next to the basketball court⁴⁹ and the construction of a guest house followed, in 1994, after WMM's donation.⁵⁰

The beginning of the 21st century brought the golden age of WMA as it welcomed an increasing number of students each year.⁵¹ In 2012 the boy's dormitory was renovated and the following year saw construction of the annex/science building.⁵²

In 2013 WMA celebrated the golden anniversary of its founding, and the name of the school was changed to Western Mindanao Adventist Academy (WMAA). Dr. Generato was appointed principal to start the new era. New challenges also arose with the national education system as it shifted to a K-12 curriculum.

In 2015 a new building was constructed in preparation for the senior high school students.⁵³ In March 2018, 94 students graduated as the first batch of the K-12 curriculum.⁵⁴

Adopting the K-12 curriculum and acquiring the government recognition permit in 2016, brought a continually increasing enrollment.⁵⁵ In the same year, WMAA was accredited by the Fund Assistance on Private Education (FAPE), the Adventist Accrediting Agency of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Board of Regents.

In 2018 the WMAA Board of Trustees, under the chairmanship of Dr. Quidet, settled on the extension of the academy into the heart of Ozamiz City, and construction began for three standard-size classrooms.⁵⁶ Through the leadership of Dr. Generato, principal of WMAA-Ozamiz City, the school was established in 2019 with 30 grade 7 students and two teachers; namely, R. T. Maquilava and S. O. Hortilano. The annex campus received its government recognition permit in 2020 as a complete junior high school!⁵⁷

Despite the pandemic in 2020, the Lord never forgot WMAA. Several schools closed due to the transfer of students to public schools, which caused many teachers to be left without jobs, but WMAA continued its mission of Adventist education. Because of the pandemic, the learning modality shifted to distance learning delivery.⁵⁸

Though face-to-face classes were on hold, infrastructure continued to be built, under the project management of R. P. Galo (2019-present). This included construction of ramps from the main gate to the guardhouse, a new library building, a media production studio, a new cafeteria, and HSF restrooms.⁵⁹

As of 2021, the biggest infrastructure project of WMAA is the on-going construction of the Alumni and Friends Square, a convention center with an initial budget of 20 million Pesos, spearheaded by Pastor Benasahan, alumni president, under the guidance of Dr. Solo as the school's philanthropist.⁶⁰

From the time WMAA opened as a senior academy in 1968 until 2015, about 2,533 students graduated,⁶¹ and another 1,152 students graduated under the K-12 curriculum. In total, 3,685 graduates have been produced by WMAA as of the 2021 school year.⁶²

WMAA's Contribution

For more than 56 years, WMAA has proved its excellency in developing students to be spiritually inclined individuals and leaders, equipping them to be globally competent in their future professions and harnessing and building on their distinct abilities.⁶³

WMAA is far more than just buildings which house educational instruction. The academy plays an essential role in the spirituality of the students and of every member of the church throughout the Western Mindanao Conference. It serves as a venue for conference-wide conventions, fellowship, training, and seminars, since it has a large space for outdoor activities, with dormitories that can accommodate delegates from different local churches in the conference territory. It produces leaders for the church in the union, conferences, and missions throughout the Philippines.⁶⁴

The school's mission is to provide holistic Adventist education for the development of 21st-century learners and for the progress of the community towards a better future. WMAA envisions itself as an exemplar of a Christ-centered institution which produces globally competent graduates, empowered to serve the church and the community.⁶⁵

At Western Mindanao Adventist Academy, students are exposed to a plethora of interesting fields and activities such as sports, singing groups, ministerial organizations, and activities of clubs such as those for English, Filipino, math, science, history, values, and many more. Students can also take music lessons such as piano, violin, flute, cello, saxophone, trumpet, and voice lessons.⁶⁶ Students are assured they will be given a quality education with a holistic approach which includes: faith-driven spirituality, sharpened mental and physical skills, and building a good rapport with other students.⁶⁷

The school actively incorporates the biblical mandate of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to preach the gospel until the end of the world comes. It is on this principle that the school's Philosophy, Vision, Mission, and Objectives are founded. WMAA endeavors to devise ways and means to meet and harmonize the institution's evangelism objective to preach the gospel to its own students and parents, as well as sectors in the community, municipalities, and cities. The school's spiritual master plan makes the evangelism possible. It includes daily worship in the dormitories, classroom devotionals, church worship, chapel convocations, weeks of prayer, student weeks of devotion, branch Sabbath Schools, Pathfinder Clubs, tract distribution, church visitations with choral groups, and the recent "Feed Our Community" program.⁶⁸

Principals and Treasurers

Western Mindanao Junior Academy (1963-1967)

Principal: G. B. Mendoza (1963-1968).

Treasurer: P. J. Pasco (1963-1968).

Western Mindanao Academy (1968-2012)

Principals: G. B. Mendoza (1968-1970); V. J. Secong (1971); N. N. Macarine (1972); G. A. Arafiles (1973-1975); E. G. Ibanez (1976); R. A. Tabingo (1977-1978); E. G. Ibanez (1979-1982); H. R. Zamora (1983-1984); E. M. Baculanta (1985-1987); M. S. Sanes (1988) Acting; M. S. Sanes (1989-1991); S. S. Sanes (1992-1994); D. D. Ambaan (1995-1999); M. N. Benito (2000-2002); W. M. Toledanes (2003-2006); A. C. Ravelo (2007-2009); R. M. Solo (2010-2012).

Treasurers: P. J. Pasco (1968-1969); R. S. Tanghal (1970-1971); G. D. Orillosa (1972-1983); D. D. Ambaan (1984); N. F. Rosario (1985-1992); A. C. Pilipinosas (1993-1999); E. M. Acopio (2000); L. B. Baliton (2001); D. D. Ambaan (2002-2004); E. M. Acopio (2005-2009); G. D. Peduche (2010-2012).

Western Mindanao Adventist Academy (2013-present)

Principal: D. T. Generato (2013-present).

Treasurers: D. D. Ambaan (2013); R. D. Sausa (2014-2015); J. R. Ladublan (2016-2018); R. P. Galo (2019-present)

Acting.

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