



Southeast Panama Mission

Photo courtesy of Southeast Panama Mission.

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ABDIEL GUERRA

Abdiel Guerra, business administration, serves as secretary-treasurer of Southeast Panama Mission.

Southeast Panama Mission is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Panama. It is a part of Panama Union Mission in the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Territory and Statistics

Southeast Panama Mission is a part of Panama Union Mission. Its territory includes Darién Province and the eastern part of Panama Province. The mission has 33 churches and 16,680 members. Its offices are located in Barriada La Primavera, Chepo, Panama.¹ It has five elementary schools and a radio station.

Southeast Panama Mission has people from several races and cultures – Chinese, Arab, Hindu, mulatto, black, Colombian, native, and settlers from other areas of Panama, mainly from Chiriqui, Los Santos, Herrera, and Veraguas – in search of good land and better opportunities.

Tocumen International Airport, the main airport of entry into and exit from Panama, is in this area.² It is the largest airport in Panama and has the most advanced infrastructure in Latin America.

Origins of the Church in Mission Territory

The Adventist work in Southeast Panama Mission's territory started with the construction of the *Colegio de Pedregalito* in 1925. This institution became the core of what is now Central American Adventist University (UNADECA). The church in Pedregal was also the first Adventist church in the region.

In the 1940s, the *Iglesia Adventista de Pedregal* brought the message to the Juan Gil community, resulting in the second church in the mission's territory. Among the first converts in the Juan Gil church was Rosa Evelia de León, who was baptized in 1945. In 1959, Ciprián Carrera, an Adventist, and Álvaro Gonzales went to live in Río Iglesia, Darién. Ciprián gave Bible studies to Álvaro, sharing his Bible and a book called *El Hogar Adventista*. Álvaro moved to La Colonia and evangelized its people with that book. This is how the church in La Colonia was established. Meanwhile, Ciprián evangelized in Yaviza, and a church was planted along with a school.

Obed Quirós was the first missionary officially sent to Darién. After, congregations appeared in places like Tocumen, Garachiné in Darién, Jesús María and Bayano in Chepo, and many more that now comprise the territory of Southeast Panama Mission.

East Panama Conference launched a numerical, financial, and institutional growth program titled *Un Nuevo Amanecer en la Ruta del Crecimiento* ("A New Dawn on the Path to Growth") that resulted in the planting of many churches. Southeast Panama Mission's territory, also known as Zone F, was part of East Panama Conference. One of the first districts stretched from the village of San Martín to Jaqué, Darién. The work grew, and new groups and congregations were planted, resulting in the conference voting to form an experimental region – Southeast Panama Region – whose assigned coordinator was Pastor Luis Gómez.³

East Panama Conference's administration requested the South Central American Union Conference and the Inter-American Division to officially change Southeast Panama Region into a mission. As a result, on July 23, 2014, an inaugural session was held to officially form Southeast Panama Mission with Pastor Israel Leito, president of the Inter-American Division, present along with the administrators of East Panama Conference: Pastor José De Gracia, president; Pastor José Daniel Sánchez, secretary; and Mr. Ismael Estribí, treasurer. Pastor Luis Gómez was appointed president with Abdiel Guerra as secretary-treasurer of this new field with offices located on Main Street in La Primavera, Chepo, Panama. The mission was organized with 27 churches, 11,161 members, and ten pastors.⁴ In accordance with the regulations for the growth and development of a new mission, East Panama Conference left the mission with an operating capital and liquidity of 100%. In addition, a building was purchased, remodeled, and equipped.⁵

Pastor Luis Gómez and his pastoral team chose a theme that identifies Southeast Panama Mission as a field: *Misión Sureste, Somos Todos y con Jesús, Vamos por Más* ("Southeast Mission, we are all, and with Jesus, we go for more"). The field is composed of three zones that have been growing over the years.

In December 2018, Pastor Gómez retired, and the administrative board of Panama Union Mission appointed Pastor José Amílcar Herrera as the new president of Southeast Panama Mission. In 2019, Osmel Serrano was appointed its secretary-treasurer.

The ideals of Southeast Panama Mission are expressed in the declaration of its mission, vision, and values.

Mission: To glorify God and, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, guide each believer to have an experience of a transformational and personal relationship with Christ that will equip them to share the everlasting gospel with every person

Vision: Each member of the body of Christ prepared for the kingdom of God

Values: Unity, Respect, Integrity, Excellence, Spirituality, Fellowship, Glory to God, and Service with Love

Motto: God is great!

Institutional Growth

Southeast Panama Mission was created with four educational institutions: Colonias Adventist School, *Centro Educativo Adventista de Pedregal*, *Escuela Bilingüe de Nueva Esperanza*, and the *Centro Educativo de Metetí*. In March 2017, La Mesa Adventist School was established in San Martín. On May 17, 2017, Colonias Adventist School received a resolution from the Ministry of Education which authorized it to render general basic education from preschool to middle school. In November 2018, the Adventist Accrediting Association of the General Conference accredited the school.

Nuevo Amanecer Vision Radio station launched a project to acquire a new FM frequency for the preaching of the gospel in Panama. The project was coordinated by Víctor Caballero. After complying with all the requirements of the *Autoridad Nacional de los Servicios Públicos* (ASEP), the frequency 91.1 FM was finally granted. The inauguration was held on July 16, 2018, and attended by Pastor Israel Leito, Inter-American Division president; Pastor José De Gracia, Pastor Carlos Saldaña, and Mr. José Smith, the respective president, secretary, and treasurer of Panama Union Mission; and the administrators of all the local fields and institutions. The transmission was officially initiated in Darién, reaching every home in this vast territory and resulting in missionary contacts and souls for Christ.

In the area of evangelism, Southeast Panama Mission has established new congregations in Sansón, Agua Fría, Chimán, Tanara, Bajo Grande, Loma Bonita, Río Indio, Santa Isabel, San Juan, Nueva Canaán, El Muelle, El Salto, Pijibazal, Los Cántaros, Don Bosco, and Santa Cruz.

Growth and Development

Since its inception on July 14, 2014, Southeast Panama Mission has experienced a consistent annual increase in stewardship. All other departments of Southeast Panama Mission have experienced development and growth from within and are committed to the fulfillment of the mission. This proves the mission's motto to "go for more" with Jesus leading lives.

Plans for Future Growth

Southeast Panama Mission prepares for growth with the following:

to form a new mission in the city of Metetí

to have all of its elementary and secondary schools accredited

to become a conference within the next two years

List of Presidents

Luis Gómez (2014-2018); José Amílcar Herrera (2019-).

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. "Southeast Panama Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, accessed 2020, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=52910>.

2. *Tocumen Panamá*, accessed 2020, <http://www.tocumenpanama.aero/index.php/43-red-de-aeropuertos/panama-metro/terminal-1>.

3. East Panama Conference Board Meeting, 2006, 098-2006, Southeast Panama Mission secretariat archives.

4. East Panama Conference Board Meeting, "Inaugural Session of Southeast Panama Mission," July 23, 2014, 007-2014, secretariat archives.

5. East Panama Conference Board of Directors, 2014, 077-2014 and 078-2014, secretariat archives.

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