

Puerto Rican Union Conference

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Francisco J. Vega, D.Min. (McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois), is a retired minister who has served the church in Puerto Rico as president of West Puerto Rico Conference and North Puerto Rico Mission. He has also served as department director for personal ministries, education, and communications; district pastor; manager of *Radio Paraíso*; and, most recently, associate professor of Antillean Adventist University. He is married to Milca Sánchez Vargas and has three adult children.

The Puerto Rican Union Conference was established in 1994 when the Antillian Union was divided.

The Puerto Rican Union Conference serves the island of Puerto Rico. The headquarters of the Puerto Rican Union Conference is located at Hostos Ave. #744, Road #2, in Mayagüez. As of June 30, 2019, the union had 312 churches, and 33,303 members,¹ 13 elementary schools, 11 high schools, 95 ordained ministers, 29 licensed ministers, and 145 professors.

As of June 30, 2019, the population of Puerto Rico was 3,059,000., and the statistics for the four conferences of the Puerto Rican Union were as follows:

East Puerto Rico Conference: 14,164 members; 127 churches;² five elementary schools and three high schools; 38 ordained ministers and 12 licensed ministers; and 67 professors. Its office is located on Julio Andino Avenue, Río Piedras.

North Puerto Rico Conference: 5,152 members; 49 churches;³ two elementary schools and two high schools; 16 ordained ministers and 1 licensed minister; and 21 professors. Its office is located at 670 Road Km. 3.6, Bo. Cotto Norte, Manatí.

South Puerto Rico Conference: 2,180 members; 32 churches;⁴ one elementary school and one high school; 11 ordained ministers; and 14 professors. Its office is located at Venus Road, #22, Ponce.

West Puerto Rico Conference: 11,669 members; 104 churches;⁵ five elementary schools and five high schools; 30 ordained ministers and 16 licensed ministers; and 43 professors. Its office is located at Sector Cuba #1060, Mayagüez.

Union Institutions

Schools of the union include Antillean Adventist University, Central Adventist Academy (Caguas), and Metropolitan Adventist Academy (San Juan). Health care centers include Bella Vista Hospital and Bella Vista

Policlinic.

Development of the Adventist Mission in Puerto Rico

The first Adventist in Puerto Rico was the nurse-soldier David Trail, who came with the North American army troops in 1898. In 1901, the General Conference sent the first missionary, Alberto M. Fischer, and his wife, Ida, with their little girl, who established themselves in the city of Mayagüez. After a year of labor, Fischer died of typhoid fever, and his wife continued the mission until the next missionary, B. E. Connerly, arrived in 1903.

After arriving in Mayagüez, Connerly began publishing the missionary magazine called *El Centinela de la Verdad* (The sentinel of truth), the first Protestant magazine published on the island. The magazine continued to be published in Puerto Rico until 1909, when Connerly was transferred to Panama. Since then, the magazine has continued to be published, presently by Pacific Press Publishing Association. In 1904, C. E. Moulton arrived as the first literature evangelist. In that same year, the first baptisms were reported, and a group of 19 persons kept the Sabbath.

Organization and Development

In 1909, the Puerto Rico Mission was organized, with William Steele as president. The mission's territory included the Dominican Republic until 1924 and the Virgin Islands until 1926. The first literature evangelist was Rafael López Miranda, who had been converted in 1912. He worked as a literature evangelist in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Venezuela. On May 15, 1922, Lopez Miranda was murdered in Venezuela, making him the first Adventist martyr in the Inter-American Division.

In 1908, the medical-missionary mission started when Dr. Walter Martin arrived. He had received a license from the secretary at Battle Creek to work at the sugar mill in Guánica. After 40 years, one of the missionary physicians, Dr. William Dunscombe, decided to move to Mayagüez, and in coordination with the Puerto Rican Conference, established the Bella Vista Hospital in Mayagüez, which opened in 1954.

Thanks to the preparation of the local workers, the Adventist mission grew. In the summer of 1916, the first training course took place in Aguadilla. The next year, training was held in Cayey. From that group, in 1923, Francisco Megrant, the first Puerto Rican ordained to the ministry, arose. In 1920, the first institute for the preparation of national missionaries was established: the Puerto Rican Adventist College in Aibonito, which was closed in 1928 because a huge tropical storm caused economic problems. In 1937, the Adventist Academy in Santurce started to offer high school classes. In 1957, it was moved to Mayagüez as a boarding school. In 1961, it became known as Antillian College.

In 1948, the mission was organized as the Puerto Rican Conference with 35 churches and 2,627 members. The first president was S. L. Folkenberg. Two years later, in June 1950, Pastor Eloy Acosta Muñiz became the first

Puerto Rican president.

In a special session on December 1968, the Puerto Rican Conference was reorganized into two territories: the East Puerto Rico Conference, with 67 churches and 5,883 members, with Ernesto Santos as its president; and the West Puerto Rico Conference, with 51 churches, 4,514 members, and J. H. Figueroa as president.

The Puerto Rican Union Conference originated from the Antillian Union Mission, which had been organized in 1923. The main office was located in Havana, Cuba, until 1961, when it was transferred to Puerto Rico. At that time, the president was R. L Jacobs. The main offices were located at Bori Road #1542, Urbanización Belisa, in Río Piedras. On May 27, 1965, the offices on Verona Road #1188, Urbanización Villa Capri, in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, were inaugurated. The president at that time was A. R. Norcliffe.

After 70 years, two union conferences were born in the Antillian Union session held January 12–15, 1994. At this session, the Antillian Union was divided into the Dominican and the Puerto Rican Union Conferences, and the Antillian Union ceased to exist.⁶ The new Puerto Rican Union Conference, led by Félix Ríos, continued its establishment at Villa Capri. In 2002, the main offices were transferred to Mayagüez, under Miguel Ramos's presidency.

The Puerto Rican Union Conference started with two conferences—the East Puerto Rico and West Puerto Rico Conferences—and its institutions: Antillean Adventist University and Bella Vista Hospital. Its growth made possible two additional missions in 2000,⁷ the North Puerto Rico and South Puerto Rico Missions. In 2010, these two missions became conferences.⁸ On February 12, 2012, a modern building was inaugurated to house the headquarters of the Puerto Rican Union Conference.

Presidents

Felix Ríos López (1994–1995); Miguel Muñoz (1995–1999); Miguel Ramos (1999–2006); José A. Rodríguez (2006–).

SOURCES

Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook. Accessed April 3, 2020.

<https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13918>.

Minutes of the Puerto Rican Union Conference. Puerto Rican Union Conference records, Mayaguez, Porto Rico, Porto Rico.

NOTES

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Puerto Rican Union Conference," accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=13918>.
2. Ibid. Figures as of June 30, 2019.
3. Ibid. Figures as of June 30, 2018.
4. Ibid. Figures as of June 30, 2018.
5. Ibid. Figures as of June 30, 2019.
6. Israel Leito, "Antillian Union Reorganizes," *General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Inter-American Division News Flashes*, February 1994, 1.
7. Minutes of the Puerto Rican Union Conference, September 22, 2000.
8. Minutes of the Puerto Rican Union Conference, June 8, 2010.

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