Central Guatemala Conference

JORGE EDUARDO CARBAJAL CHAVEZ

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Central Guatemala Conference is a part of Guatemala Union Mission in the Inter-American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Its headquarters is located on 5th Avenue 00-44, Zone 2, Cotió Colony, Mixco, Guatemala Department.

Central Guatemala Conference consists of the municipalities of Mixco, San Juan Sacatepéquez, San Pedro Sacatepéquez, and zones 7, 11, and 19 of the capital city, which belong to Guatemala Department; the municipalities of San Lucas, San Bartolomé Milpas Altas, Santa Lucía Milpas Altas, Santiago, Santiago Sacatepéquez, Santo Domingo Xenacoj, and Sumpango in Sacatepéquez Department; and Santa Cruz El Chol in Baja Verapaz Department.¹

This territory covers about 3,126 square kilometers. This conference is located in the central region of the country, where Spanish is the predominant language. In some communities, mainly Chimaltenango and Sacatepéquez, Kaqchikel is the spoken language.²

This conference has 10,098 members distributed among 90 churches in a population of 1,907,539.³ It has six pastors with ministerial credentials, four pastors with a ministerial license, and one theology student.

Institutions

Progreso Adventist Co-Educational School: This school's story begins in 1908, making it the oldest Adventist school in Guatemala. For this reason, it has undergone many different stages, making it the most well-known Adventist school at the national level. In 1908, Pastors E. L. Cardey and C. A. Nowlen arrived in Guatemala with the goal of preaching the Adventist message. Pastor Cardey bought a school that was owned by the Amigos organization and which was located at the crossing of 4th Avenue and 8th Street, Zone 1, of Guatemala's capital city. This school was established as Guatemala Mission School and subsidized by the West Indian Union Conference. It began operations under the name “Guatemala English School” with seven teachers, including Pastor Cardey, who was the principal and a Bible teacher. In 1911, it became a self-supporting school.

In the 1920s, the institution was renamed “Guatemala Junior School.” The Education Minister requested that the school continue its work as a Spanish-speaking school, so, on February 15, 1937, the school was authorized by governmental decree #15 of February 9, 1937, in volume 95 of the Ministry of Education decrees. The principal of the school was Dorcas Pacheco Ruiz, who renamed the school “Progreso Co-Educational School,” a name which it carried until September 20, 2007, according to the resolution taken by MINEDUC UDE/CA-660-2007-CN.

The vision of Teacher Marta Argueta was for the school to have its own building. Approximately between 1971 and 1972, the property at 35-44 2nd Street Zone 7 of the city of Guatemala was acquired, and the school has operated there until this day.⁴ As of July 2019, it had 369 students with 33 staff personnel working in administration, teaching, and services. This school operates four education levels: pre-school, elementary, secondary, and higher education.

Florida Adventist Co-Educational School was established through the concern of an Adventist Church education commission in 1981. Professor Pablo Ixcaqic Reynoso was designated as the principal and legal representative of the new entity. On Sabbath, August 29 of that same year, the first school board meeting was held. The church had felt a need for an Adventist education as it served about 40 children of school age. Negotiations with the Ministry of Education were initiated, and, as a result, the opening of Florida Adventist Co-Educational School was authorized at the primary level for the five-year period from 1982-1986. The school started operations in January 1982. As of July 2019, it was located at 3-46 11th Avenue, Zone 19, La Florida Colony, Guatemala, and had 93 students and nine teachers.⁵

Adventist Medical Clinic: Recognizing the importance of the medical missionary work, Central Guatemala Conference decided to create an Adventist medical clinic for the benefit of the community and to preach the message. On January 29, 2015, the creation of a clinic located at 11-48 3rd Street, Zone 3 of Mixco, Nueva Monserrat Colony, was approved.⁶ As of July 2019, it offered service in several specialty areas such as laboratory services, dental services, medical consults, nutrition, and the help of a chaplain, among other services.

Origins of the Adventist Church in Conference Territory

During an exploratory trip to Central and South America, Pastor T. H. Gibbs entered Guatemala in 1887.⁷ Some years later, specifically in 1893-1894, a group of Adventists who worked with the international companies of the United Fruit Company and International Railways of Central America arrived in Guatemala.⁸ These people initiated meetings in Puerto Barrios, Izabal, and shared the message in that community.

Nevertheless, it was difficult for the Adventist Church to make progress in Guatemala for several reasons. One of these was that the territory was under the administration of West Indian Union Conference.⁹ Because of the distance between the union and the territory, administering the region and spreading the message was made difficult. It wasn’t until 1908 that the country was officially recognized as a part of Central American Conference and offices established in the capital city of Guatemala. Additionally, Guatemala English School was acquired in 1908 with the main purpose of providing an Adventist education to the residents of Guatemala. Its growth made its official recognition as an Adventist educational institution possible. In 1913, with room for 150 students, it had 129 students with eight teachers teaching grades one through seven.¹⁰
On March 11, 1926, there was an uprising against the dictatorship of President Manuel Estrada Cabrera, who had already presided over the country for 22 years. Nevertheless, the Adventist Church continued to preach the gospel in Guatemala under the leadership of President/Treasurer E. W. Thurber. Four colporteurs sold Adventist books, an act that was essential to spreading the Adventist message. In 1923, they distributed 403 copies of the magazine, *El Centinela*.

In 1934, the central church and Guatemala mission buildings at 10-44 2nd Avenue, Zone 1, were remodeled and reopened in February. The new church had a designated room for books and Bibles, which could be checked out. It also had a gallery and entryway that led to a well-illuminated church with a capacity to comfortably seat 350 people, although there were 500 people in attendance on some occasions.

Pastor W. A. Bergherm visited the country in August 1935. He had the privilege of attending the colporteur institute in Guatemala and noted the missionary spirit and activity of the church members. He wrote that he was impressed by the way that the gospel was preached through the sale of books.

In 1942, Zacharias Thompson visited Montufar, a village in the municipality of San Juan, Sacatepéquez. He was received by a friendly gentleman who took him into his home and bought a Bible and a “set of small books” from him. During the night, this man showed Thompson his own copy of the book, “Bible Readings for the Home Circle,” and said that, upon reading it and digesting its content, he found things that he had never imagined and teachings that changed his life. One of these was about the true day of rest, which he had already begun to keep. Thompson wrote, “Let us pray that [the man] will keep on searching and by the aid of the new books he has received, he soon will be completely persuaded to unite with the true people of God.”

In 1944, plans were begun to promote *Radio Escuela Postal*. After announcing that it would begin in July 1945, it started operations with approximately 2,000 people enrolled in Bible studies. In 1951, under the leadership of Pastor Kenneth Fleck, 105 baptisms took place in the first five months of the year.

In 1959, an important youth revival led by Pastors E. I. Minchin and D. H. Baasch was held in the city of Guatemala. Several young people decided to commit themselves to prepare for and hold “Voice of Youth” meetings. Besides this, “Friendship Groups” were organized to attract friends and neighbors to the knowledge of the truth. “Many precious souls who had grown cold to the message returned and some were re-baptized.”

The work was continued with enthusiasm. In 1977, Gabriel Castro held a series of meetings in La Florida Church. He had six women assisting in the programming of his evangelistic meetings. “At the close of the week, ten were baptized and 80 enrolled in the Bible class.”

Guatemala President Marco Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo officially recognized the important work of ADRA. He invited Pastor Emilio de León, president of Guatemala Mission, and other Adventist leaders to a meeting “with government officials and representatives of many other organizations involved in community programs. The government officials expressed their desire to become more actively involved” in the work of organizations like ADRA.

In January 1991, preparations began for “Mega-Guate ‘91,” a large national evangelistic campaign with the main goals of baptizing 1,000 people and organizing 12 new churches that would have at least 100 members per church. To fulfill the first goal, church members gave Bible studies to over 14,000 people. Before the campaign ended, 406 people had already been baptized; by the campaign’s end, 932 others decided to be baptized. Relating to the second goal, nine new properties were purchased, and some of those properties’ buildings were remodeled to serve as churches. In 1991, 5,850 new members were baptized into the Adventist Church.

### Events that Led to Organization of Conference

From the organization of Guatemala Mission in 1913, the message was spread little by little through the entire country.

According to the work of administrators, pastors, and church members, the Adventist message continued to spread in the territory of the country’s central region. The membership and the number of churches grew. For that reason, in 2005, it was decided to organize a new field named Central Guatemala Mission with 62 churches and 14,751 members. These churches and members had been ceded by Central Guatemala Conference, which was renamed Metropolitan Guatemala Conference and retained 48 churches and 19,181 members.

Central Guatemala Mission continued its strong efforts to share the Adventist message with great results. The membership grew each year, so, at Guatemala Union Mission’s 2009 annual administrative meetings, it was decided to organize a new trial field named “Southcentral Mission.” The vote that was taken reads:

**Creation of the Trial Field Southcentral Mission**

To create a trial mission which will be called: Southcentral Trial Mission, with its headquarters in Villa Nueva, Guatemala, and which will consist of the Villa Nueva municipality and the department of Escuint, formed with 72 congregations, of which 54 are churches and 18 are groups. The Metropolitan Guatemala Conference will cede 12 congregations; the Central Guatemala Mission, 42 congregations; and the South Guatemala Mission, 18
In spite of Central Guatemala Mission ceding churches and members to this new trial field, its own growth was so notable that it had a change in status in 2014 and became Central Guatemala Conference with Pastor Mario Calderón as president and Pastor David Thomas as secretary-treasurer.

**Strategies to Carry Out Mission**

Central Guatemala Conference seeks to attain holistic development. For that reason, in all of its activities and projects, it emphasizes:

- Seeking spiritual revival leading to true reform
- Maintaining consolidated churches
- Motivating each member to be a faithful steward
- Reaching more people for Christ through implementation of different department plans

**What Remains to be Done to Fulfill the Mission**

Central Guatemala Conference faces several challenges. The most pressing are to:

- Establish an Adventist presence in the municipalities of Chimaltenango that have not yet been reached
- Constantly motivate administrators, pastors, leaders, elders, and members to fulfill the mission entrusted to us by our Lord, Jesus Christ
- Contribute to improve infrastructure of the two schools recognized by the conference
- Consolidate the educational project in Viva Mejor School to attain accreditation and be recognized by the church

**List of Presidents**

Irving Calderón (2006-2010); Mario Augusto Calderón (2011-2017); Eddy Orlando Hernández Ramírez (2018-).

**SOURCES**


Ford, Orley. “Good News from Guatemala.” *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, May 1934.


“Radio Evangelism.” *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, July 1945.
Roque, P. C. “Results of Youth Revival in Guatemala.” *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, February 1959.


**NOTES**


