

Lipa Adventist Academy

MARY GRACE LADION-DE GUZMAN

Mary Grace Ladion-De Guzman taught at Lipa Adventist Academy for eleven years, the first established academy within the territory of South Central Luzon Conference. She is a licensed science teacher and holds a master's degree in Science Education. She is particularly interested in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education and staff development. Her husband, Marlon De Guzman, is a senior auditor for the South Central Luzon Conference. They have two children. Guzman is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Education with a specialization in Curriculum and Instruction from the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies.

Lipa Adventist Academy—the school that prepares for service—is a boarding school offering kindergarten to 12th grade basic education that is situated in Barangay Bugtong-na-Pulo, Lipa City, Batangas, Philippines.

Lipa Adventist Academy (LAA) is operated by the South-Central Luzon Conference (SCLC) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church under the leadership of the North Philippine Union Conference. The school campus is five-hectares (about 12 acres) of land that is located about six kilometers (about four miles) north of Lipa City proper. From Manila, LAA is a 76-kilometer (47-mile) drive south to Batangas province.¹ It caters basic education to both Adventist and non-Adventist students in and out of the SCLC territory, namely Batangas, Laguna, Quezon, Occidental and Oriental Mindoro, Cavite, Metro Manila, and other nearby provinces. As of the school year 2019–2020, the enrollment is over 400 students.

Developments of LAA's Establishment

The Adventist work in Lipa City, Batangas, Philippines, started in the 1900s. This territory is under the care of the South-Central Luzon Conference, which was early referred to by the Far Eastern Division as Central Southern Luzon, then South-Central Luzon Mission (SCLM) when it separated from Central Luzon Mission. In 1920, evangelistic tent meetings resulted in 30 converts at Lipa, Central Southern Luzon, in spite of great opposition.² Elder Finster noted that the Advent message awakened the people's interests, and over a hundred were attending Sabbath worship.³ Victor Arevalo was among the persuasive workers in the 1920s.⁴ Since then, the Advent message has spread continuously⁵ in the face of great opposition that met the message at the beginning from the powerful influence of Catholicism in the area.

It must have been the South-Central Luzon Mission's unfortunate experience on May 5, 1965, that brought discussions in establishing an academy in Lipa City, Batangas. The first academy under the supervision of SCLM was the South Central Luzon Academy (SCLA) located just beside the SCLM's headquarters in Lucena City. However, the mission headquarters was burned to ashes, which resulted in its establishment in San Pablo City, Laguna, in August 1967.⁶ This move initiated the desire of the mission to establish an academy closer to its

current location. While Jeremias Medina was the mission president from 1974 to 1976, the former SLCM leaders' long-time dream to have a boarding academy was achieved.⁷ The former SCLA campus was transferred to Lipa City with a new name: Lipa Adventist Academy, or LAA.

The History of LAA's Establishment

Four years before the establishment of LAA in June 1975, the land was acquired through the generous help of some active church members in Lipa City.⁸ Among them are Dr. and Mrs. Benjamin Jimenez, who donated a lot for the academy site, costing 14,000 pesos.⁹ Despite the lack of funds to finance the academy construction, the church leaders and lay members worked together to achieve the goal. The groundbreaking of the new academy took place on February 12, 1975. This ceremony was attended by the North Philippine Union Mission leaders, including Florencio Arrogante, North Philippine Union Mission president, and Teofilo Barizo, the Education director. Leaders from South Central Luzon Mission were also present, headed by Jeremias Medina, the mission president, Tomas Racasa, the education superintendent, and Gerry R. Ramos, a member of the executive committee. Many of the lay members who were pillars of the churches in Lipa City and nearby churches and were very supportive of establishing the academy in this place joined hands to commemorate this event.

Benjamin Jimenez, Julian Bathan, Graciano Bathan, Eladio Dimalibot, Herminiano Subido Sr., and Pedro Inandan were among those kind donors and supporters who witnessed this remarkable day. On March 1, 1975, construction of the school building started, and "if it had not been for the dedication of the church members, the academy would probably still be standing only partially completed."¹⁰

The following days were real fights to do the work necessary in time for the opening the school in June, three months later. However, it was not very long before the funding had been exhausted. Several church members came to work as volunteers, others donated bags of cement, and some loaned the mission money so that the building construction could go on.¹¹ Ingathering funds from the union were also appropriated to aid the academy's construction.¹² Soon the building with eight classrooms was standing to accommodate young people from various places in SCLM.

While the construction was going on, Ruben Budayao, a dedicated leader and pioneer of two other academies, was appointed as the first principal of LAA.¹³ He prepared the various documents for the government to grant the permit to operate by June. The Department of Education (DepEd), formerly the Department of Education, Culture, and Sports (DECS), was not optimistic that the school would be able to offer its services by June. However, Budayao constantly invited Salvador Cruz, the private school area supervisor of the Division of Lipa City, to evaluate the school's facility and status to offer education to young people. Sure enough, after much hard work and persistence, the academy was granted a permit to operate starting June 1975 with the name Bugtong-na-Pulo Adventist Academy¹⁴ but was soon officially named Lipa Adventist Academy¹⁵ on July 1, 1975, as acted upon by the North Philippine Union Conference committee and board.¹⁶

In LAA's first year of operation, 98 young people came to study, and eight teachers were tasked to train them. They were mainly from various places in the SCLM territory. Four of the classrooms were dedicated to teaching and instruction for the first year to fourth-year students. One room became the library, and the other room was shared by the principal and the registrar as their office. The other two classrooms were used as the girls' dormitory. The boys stayed in a temporary shelter that served as their dormitory near the school building. The pioneering years were characterized by much excitement and many challenges, including having an unfenced school standing isolated in the middle of a sugarcane plantation, dim lighting at night, manual water pumps, and muddy pathways during the rainy season.¹⁷

The great need of the babe academy prompted discussions among church members throughout the SCLM territory. During the first triennial session of SCLM in Lucena City from March 30 to April 3, 1976, O. C. Edwards, the division's education director, revealed some of the developmental plans for the academy, and many delegates pledged support for the needs presented.¹⁸ With the Lord's providences and the strong determination of the pioneering leaders to move forward with the cause of the academy to train young people for service, efforts were rewarded, and the school was officially recognized by the Department of Education in 1980.¹⁹

In the years 1978 to 1984 the academy progressed. When Efinito Macalintal, a visionary leader and an able man, was voted as the SCLM president in 1978, he directed various projects for LAA's sake as chairman of the school board. The projects included the girls'²⁰ and boys'²¹ dormitories, auditorium,²² and school cafeteria.²³ The girls' dormitory can house up to 90 students, and the boys' dormitory, 100 students. Both dormitories are two-story buildings.²⁴ The academy auditorium stands as a memorial of the involvement and support of the laypeople.²⁵ Moreover, duplex faculty housing was constructed right after the school facilities were completed with the assistance of the North Philippine Union Conference²⁶ and donors. The construction of these edifices was funded by the North Philippine Union Conference, SCLM, church members, mission workers, teachers, and friends. Through their contributions, a big dream that was shared by many became reality. The ingathering fund also greatly contributed to these projects.

In 2004, a science building was put up through the generous effort of Benjamin Jimenez and his family. The science building had four laboratories devoted to the study of earth science, biology, chemistry, and physics. The school and some alumni contributed to purchase laboratory equipment and reagents to support the laboratory activities of the students. Students also helped through funding a project to provide additional equipment for the laboratory. They enjoyed the many hands-on science laboratory activities, including dissecting animals and testing chemical reactions.²⁷

The years 2011 to 2015 marked a major change in the physical structure of the school. B. D. Balayong, the school principal, and Arnelio Gabin, the school board chairman, led this remarkable change of renovating the school building and transforming it into a two-story building. This was done to accommodate the senior high school students in 2016. Eight classrooms were added to the original 8, making 16 classrooms all in all. Twelve of

these classrooms were devoted to teaching and instruction. One became the office of the alumni and the senior high school teachers. The three remaining rooms were used as a computer laboratory, speech laboratory, and hardware servicing laboratory.

Students and Teachers

Student enrollment increased throughout the years. Also, the academy opened its doors to foreign students after it was accredited by the Bureau of Immigration²⁸ in 2007. Although there were years that the enrollment went down, it picked up again when the senior high school program started in 2016. It is important to note that there were several changes in the SCLC territory that affected the student enrollment. For example, layman academies were established in Mindoro and Quezon. Also, the economic conditions that the country has experienced for the past 40 years affected enrollment, such as the economic depression in 2008.

As the number of students increased throughout the years, teachers were also added to accommodate the growing needs of the students. From 1985 to 1995, at least 5 teachers were added to the original working force of 8. In 1997, 21 faculty and staff served LAA.²⁹ When the senior high school program began in 2016, about 27 faculty and staff served LAA. They expanded this number to 34 in 2020 to accommodate the blooming number of senior high school students that resulted from opening two sections for the grade levels 11 and 12. The quest for excellence has pushed teachers to upgrade and do better in the service of the Lord. As of 2018, most of the teachers hold master's degrees and have earned doctoral units.

Curriculum

Primarily, the academy offered education to high school students from the first year to the fourth year. However, after several years, a multigrade elementary level was established in 1994 to accommodate the need for a basic elementary education among the faculty and staff's children. In 2011, the Department of Education granted the LAA Elementary Department a permit to operate and was recognized in 2015.³⁰

Since the establishment of the school, it aligned itself with the Department of Education's Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) of 10 years. Grades one to six are considered to be the elementary level of education and the first year to the fourth year as the high school level. In the 1990s, a few revisions were made by the government to the basic education curriculum, making it the Revised Basic Education Curriculum (RBEC), having 10 years still in basic education. In 2013, with the implementation of the K to 12 Enhanced Basic Education Curriculum, LAA readily adapted the new educational policy, thus offering kindergarten to grade 12 with senior high school tracks in Accountancy and Business Management (ABM); Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM); and Humanities and Social Science (HUMSS). In 2015, the government granted the school the permit to operate the senior high school program.³¹

Accreditations

After government recognition of the school in 1980, the administration, teachers, donors, and mission and union leaders continued to work to bring the school into a better status. In June 1990, the Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines (FAAP) granted LAA a Level I accreditation status through the Association of Christian Schools, Colleges, and Universities—Accrediting Agency Incorporated (ACSCU-AAI). In 2009, the academy was granted a Level II status by ACSCU-AAI. The academy has maintained Level II status and aspires to reach Level III status.

Within three to five years, the school invited accreditors and evaluators including the Adventist Accrediting Agency (AAA) and ACSCU-AAI to look into the academic activities of the school to maintain and improve standards of instruction. AAA's evaluation always prepared the next accreditor, ACSCU-AAI. With this, the school can kick off its academic endeavor and progress in their instruction.

Awards and Honors

Awards and honors have been received both by the school and the students for participating in events hosted by the Department of Education and the Department of Fire Protection. These events include campus journalism, STACAA (a sports event), and Provincial Urban Fire Olympics. The school participated in campus journalism annually, and students were able to make it to the finals in the national competition. Two of the students made it to the top in the nationals. Ira Alexis Aclan, the grandchild of Dr. and Mrs. Benjamin Jimenez, topped in photojournalism at the National Schools Press Conference in 2012. She is also the representative of the Division of Lipa City to the National Competition for Young Artists (NAMCYA) Solo String Category and placed third.³² Rei Jeuz Del Mundo, the son of the vice-principal, Melinda Del Mundo, topped in editorial writing in the National Schools Press Conference in 2014. Also, the school paper, *Cistern*, garnered various awards in campus journalism. When it comes to sports, students were also recognized in basketball, volleyball, lawn tennis, table tennis, badminton, and tae kwon do.

LAA has participated in several exchange programs with other academies (Banahaw View Academy in Quezon, Adventist University of the Philippines Academy, Rosario Advent Academy, and non-Adventist high schools nearby) to establish friendship and camaraderie among young people. The school has also produced distinguished alumni. Some were prominent church leaders, medical doctors, nurses, educators, and engineers, and others are working in the Philippines and abroad. All these milestones of the school's success were due to the rich providences of God and the strong partnership of the school with the parents, alumni, church members, donors, and friends.

Principals

R. A Budayao (1975–1977); W. T. Martinez, Sr. (1977–1978); R. Evangelista (1980–1981); A. Salazar (1981–1982); A. G. Labro (1982–1984); N. G. Castillo (1984–1986); F. E. Yulip (1986–188); B. A. Bico (1988–1991); N. S. Basit (1991–1992); N. D. De Chavez (1992–1994); S. T. Molina (1994–2000); B. A. Bico (2000–2005); C. C. Aguilar (2005–2006); J. M. Galabit (2007–2011); B. D. Balayong (2011–2016); S. A. An (2017–)

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