



South-Central Luzon Conference headquarters.

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South-Central Luzon Conference

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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.

South-Central Luzon Conference is located on 240 Maharlika Highway, San Rafael, San Pablo, Laguna. This conference is within the North Philippine Union Conference in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. Its territories

are the provinces of Batangas, Laguna, Marinduque, Occidental Mindoro, Oriental Mindoro, and Quezon. In June 2018, South-Central Luzon Conference had about 329 churches with a membership of 61,458 out of a population of 9,157,754.¹ South-Central Luzon Conference is committed to proclaiming the gospel in its territories and equipping workers for Christian ministry. It seeks to prepare people for eternity.²

Origin of the Seventh-day Adventist Work

In the early 1930s, debate was the most effective instrument for soul-winning.³ Many people discovered the gospel and accepted Jesus Christ through the discussions during debates in public places. Various Protestant churches like *Iglesia ni Kristo* participated in these debates. In these gatherings, ministers from different denominations presented their arguments, and people flocked to listen to the speakers. Debate was a tool used to establish the light brought by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to the Southern Tagalog areas.

The voluntary efforts of colporteur evangelists also helped spread the gospel in the territory. The colporteurs played a vital role in propagating the gospel by bringing printed media to many homes. Through their diligent labor and unwavering faith, many people were added to the church each year.⁴

Organizational History

The gospel work in the Southern Tagalog Region prompted the establishment of South Central Luzon Mission (SCLM). During the General Conference Session of the Central Luzon Mission held at Baesa, Caloocan, in April 1931, it was voted that SCLM be established with headquarters in Lucena, Quezon.⁵ The newly-instituted mission had six provinces in its territory: Quezon, Laguna, Batangas, Marinduque, Occidental Mindoro, and Oriental Mindoro with Sibale Island, a part of Romblon.

The pioneering years of SCLM were led by Pastor Flaviano Dalisay, mission president, and Lope Balan, treasurer. There were four departments at the time: home missionary, Sabbath school, book and periodical agency, and missionary volunteer.⁶ Around 49 churches and 19 small companies were established with a membership of over 2,000. The church members were missionaries who annually brought many to Christ for baptism,⁷ and the mission workers were divided among the territories to visit and nurture the churches.⁸ With challenges ahead, they persisted in pursuing the vision of the mission. Only three evangelists and two women Bible workers worked in the vast territory.⁹ At this stage, as funds were limited, much of SCLM's financial support came from higher church organizations. However, the church grew financially stronger as more people joined the church.

In 1935, Pastor Flaviano Dalisay passed the torch of responsibility to Pastor Florentino Jabola as the mission's second president. He was assisted by Anecito Aqui as secretary/treasurer. At this time, shepherding the mission territories was a priority. Four districts were created, and four district leaders were elected: Pastor Petronilo B. Gonzales to the Laguna district, Pastor Romulo P. Alinsud to the Batangas district, Pastor Fausto Dabu to the

Quezon district, and Pastor Canuto Cara to the Mindoro-Marinduque district. Departments held annual fellowships. District pastors received a monthly salary of 32 PHP.⁹ Lay preachers were also available to help in the ministry and were key in preaching the gospel. There were 50 lay preachers in the territory.¹¹

The expansive territories of district pastors posed a challenge since these workers experienced extended periods of time away from their families during church visitations, resulting in the pastors' wives staying home as full-time mothers instead of working. This instigated the view that a pastor's wife should dedicate her time in support of the ministry instead of pursuing a job, especially one outside the denomination.¹²

To cope with the demands of the mission work, seminars were conducted to aid the ministers in their professional growth. At times, ministerial interns were asked to deliver sermons to further develop their skills.¹³ Seminars were also held for church members to assist in soul-winning.¹⁴ As mentioned, debate was one of the tools utilized for soul-winning. SCLM president, Pastor Florentino Jabola, a sought-after debater, had techniques that influenced one of his young interns, Reuben Ballesteros, who acquired those skills and "became one of the leading debaters in the 1950s."¹⁵

A medium to advance the gospel work was literature ministry. The colporteurs relentlessly spread the gospel and strengthened the church. Despite the lack of payment, colporteurs continued to evangelize through both printed media and the spoken Word. Furthermore, laymen were trained to assume various responsibilities in the gospel ministry such as house-to-house visitations and Bible studies. Agdangan Church was "a result of a layman's effort."¹⁶

Pastor Florentino Jabola passed away in 1937, and Pastor Juan Yovan was elected the mission's third president. He was assisted by Meliton Zamora as secretary/treasurer. Pastor Yovan was known as a faithful and strict Sabbath keeper who also dynamically encouraged vegetarianism. His administration strongly emphasized nurturing the youth, and, during his time, youth meetings began.

When World War II began, the Philippines was greatly affected. The work in the SCLM territories was also hampered. The years 1941-1945 experienced a decrease in church growth. Pastor Jose Bautista was appointed president with Aniceto Aqui as secretary/treasurer. Before his presidency, Bautista was a missionary from Japan Union in the Palau Islands from 1934-1941.¹⁷ This allowed him to learn Japanese, which enabled him to protect church members from invading Japanese soldiers during the war. Ministers and laymen couldn't continue their work because of lack of transportation, the difficult situation of the war, and other reasons. Additionally, salaries and subsidies were being withheld by the General Conference treasury.

After the war, the church gained a new perspective. Church workers received the back pay of 500 PHP that had been withheld during the war years. "The stresses of war made the people more receptive to the truth. Each minister was encouraged to conduct evangelistic campaigns twice or thrice within a year."¹⁸ Pastor Petronio Gonzales was appointed president and served from 1948-1951 with Eliseo Cupino as secretary/treasurer. The gospel message advanced, and more believers were added to the church through evangelistic meetings.

Colporteur evangelists, mostly women, also greatly contributed to the endeavor.¹⁹ There was still political strife, yet the volunteer spirit was in abundance.

From 1952-1956, Pastor Florentino Martin led the mission with Primitivo Reyes as secretary/treasurer. The church grew through evangelistic campaigns and tent meetings. From May-July 1952, Pastor Martin led tent evangelism in Lucena and in Mauban, Quezon, and invited a medical team from the Manila Sanitarium and Hospital to hold a medical rally.²⁰ He emphasized the role of laity in promoting gospel work.²¹ From 1956-1962, Pastor P. Banaag led the mission with Conrado Legaspi as secretary/treasurer. He was an active and supportive church leader. During his time, various youth and Pathfinder camps, district fellowships, and picnics were held to strengthen the church. Laymen and colporteurs were also active in the ministry. In April 22-24, 1961, the Mangyan tribe's need for a school in Ulasan, Occidental Mindoro, was confirmed with the visit of Elder Cris Sorensen from the Far Eastern Division, Elder Andrew Robbins from the North Philippine Union Mission, and Pastor Banaag. After six months, Mr. Lamont, an American philanthropist, financially supported the construction of a church school building, which was named the Lamont Mangyan Mission School.²²

The next mission president was Pastor Gil de Guzman with Conrado Legazpi as treasurer. In Pastor de Guzman's one-year term, he visited Lamont Mangyan Mission School, baptized many students, and "conducted the first foot-washing and communion service."²³ Pastor Eugenio Tangunan was elected as the next mission president, and Legazpi was secretary/treasurer for another year. Pastor Efinite Macalintal was secretary/treasurer from 1965-1969 and ordained in 1970 during the 9th Biennial Session of the North Philippine Union on the Philippine Union College campus.²⁴

On May 5, 1965, the mission headquarters in Lucena, Quezon, was burned to ashes. For a year or so, SCLM's office occupied available rooms of South Central Luzon Academy. With God's continuous leading, a new site for the headquarters was found. A hectare of land that cost 25,000 PHP was bought in San Rafael, San Pablo City, Laguna, in December 1966. Construction began in February. In five months, the mission office and two duplex houses were built. In August 1967, the new headquarters was transferred from Lucena to San Pablo City, Laguna. The new SCLM office was inaugurated on December 7, 1967, with Pastor R. S. Watts, Jr., the Sabbath school secretary of the Far Eastern Division, as the speaker.²⁵

Pastor Juanito Tulio was mission president from 1968-1973 with Pastor Macalintal as secretary/treasurer. Reuben Barboza became secretary/treasurer in 1970, and Nacienceno Alzola replaced him in 1971, holding the position until 1976. Pastor Jeremias Medina was president from 1974-1976, and the longtime dream of former SCLM leaders for a boarding academy was achieved. Dr. and Mrs. Benjamin Jimenez kindly donated a lot for the academy site.²⁶ In June 1975, Lipa Adventist Academy, a boarding school under SCLM, started operations in Bugtong na Pulo, Lipa City, Batangas, Philippines. The great need of the new academy prompted discussions among church members through SCLM's territory. During SCLM's first triennial session in Lucena City from March 30-April 3, 1976, O. C. Edwards, the division's education director, revealed some developmental plans for

the academy, and many delegates pledged their support for the needs presented.²⁷

In 1977, Pastor Vicente Napod became mission president with Ephraim Palmero as secretary/treasurer, who was later ordained as a pastor. Pastor Efinite Macalintal, a former secretary/treasurer, was the mission's president from 1978-1984. Various developments marked his leadership: New dormitories in Lipa Adventist Academy and the academy auditorium were built with laypeople's assistance. To accommodate the increasing number of mission personnel, a six-door apartment was built. Pastor Palmero was replaced as secretary/treasurer by Salvador Napod in 1980.

From 1985-1987, Pastor Guillermo Gucilar was mission president. His term was characterized by a "breakthrough in evangelism."²⁸ All mission workers – elementary and academy teachers, colporteurs, and laymen – worked with district pastors in soul-winning activities, bringing SCLM to the lead for baptisms. In 1988, Pastor Florante Yulip served as president with Diomelio Zenith as treasurer and Pastor Ely Recto as executive secretary. Various camp meetings were held as well as pathfinder, family, evangelistic, and leadership meetings. After 14 months, Pastor Yulip stepped down due to health issues. Pastor Demetrio Robles was appointed president, Pastor Samuel Ada was executive secretary, and Herminigildo Suasi, Jr., was treasurer. Progress marked this period; a right wing was added to the mission, and SCLM also celebrated its 60th anniversary.

With a call to serve as an overseas church pastor in Texico Conference in the southwestern USA, Pastor Robles left office. Pastor Zineo Manalo was appointed president and served for eight months before being called to pastor a church in Canada. In December 1992, Pastor Gerardo Ramos was elected president with Pastor Samuel Ada as executive secretary and Herminigildo Suasi, Jr., as treasurer. Pastor Ramos introduced the use of computers to evangelism and oversaw various developments in the mission's physical structure, like adding a second story to the office. Department directors and local leaders were active in the mission's progress. SCLM prepared for recognition as a conference in the territory of North Philippine Union Mission (NPUM). Pastor Ramos served SCLM from 1993 to May 2002. Pastor Nelson de Chavez was elected executive secretary during Pastor Ramos's term, and Romero Daquila became treasurer in December 2000.

On April 23, 2002, SCLM was granted conference status.²⁹ This milestone in SCLM's history was achieved with help from NPUM and Southern Asia-Pacific Division (former Far Eastern Division), who visited SCLM to evaluate the conference petition. On that same day, the new status was granted, and the mission became South-Central Luzon Conference (SCLC). During the SCLC General Session a month later at Lipa Adventist Academy, Pastor Nelson de Chavez was elected president with Pastor Reymundo Torres as secretary and Romero Daquila as treasurer. The conference work grew each year. Thousands were baptized as conference workers, laymen, and guest evangelists united in soul-winning through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. With Pastor Arnelio Gabin as secretary and Romero Daquila as treasurer, Pastor de Chavez served another term as president after his reelection during May 9-14, 2005, the second constituency meeting. In December 2005, Romero Daquila was elected treasurer for NPUM, and Tomas Dayahan became SCLC treasurer. Pastor de Chavez served SCLC until

April 2008.

During SCLC's Third General Session of May 7-10, 2008, Pastor Genes Villanueva was elected president with Pastor Reymundo Torres as executive secretary and Tomas Dayahan as treasurer. In 2011, Pastor Arnelio Gabin was elected president with Pastor Jasper Flores as executive secretary and Tomas Dayahan as treasurer. In this period, the office terms were extended to a five-year period. Pastor Gabin led various evangelistic activities in the territory with help from local and international evangelists, reaching the desired goal for baptism and planting more churches. Various professional development sessions for workers were held. In 2014, Vege Yum, a health and wellness vegetarian restaurant, began operations offering healthy food choices. Remodeling the entrance to SCLC and construction of facilities in Lipa Adventist Academy were also done.

Between December 10-19, 2015, during the Second Quinquennial Session, Pastor Pascual Panaglima was elected president with Pastor Jasper Flores as executive secretary and Roland Fabon as treasurer. Different church undertakings were done during this term, like establishing the Gerry Ramos Media Center, reorganizing districts to accommodate the increasing number of churches, and upgrading the SCLC printing press machines. The conference's vision is to fulfill the Great Commission within its territories. With technology's improvement, the plan is to reach untouched territory and to also minister to other groups of people like the wealthy, the elite, and the government officials. Pastor Jasper Flores said that effective urban evangelism is the conference's aspiration. Another focus area is the retention of church membership; for as many who are brought into the church, an increase in apostasy has been observed. Many church members refraining from attending church worship eventually leave the church. The conference intends to address this challenge.

The various experiences of South-Central Luzon Conference marks its identity in the history of the church. As SCLC programs and makes plans for the future, workers are reminded to examine which among past experiences proved to be effective and which did not. The goal is to innovate and create programs and activities suitable to the needs of the modern community and future challenges. SCLC is confident that God will always lead.

List of Presidents

F. Dalisay (1931-1934); F. Jabola (1935-1937); J. Yoban (1937-1941); J. Bautista (1941-1947); P. Gonzales (1948-1951); F. Martin (1952-1956); P. Banaag (1957-1962); G. de Guzman,(1962-1963); E. Tanguan (1964-1967); J. Tulio (1968-1973); J. Medina (1974-1976); V. Napod (1977-1978); E. Macalintal (1978-1984); G. Gucilatar (1985-1987); F. Yulip (1988-1989); D. Robles (1989-1992); Z. Manalo (1992-1993); G. Ramos (1993-2002); N. de Chavez (2002-2008); G. Villanueva (2008-2011); A. Gabin (2011-2015); P. Panaglima (2015-)

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