



New South Philippine Union Conference (SPUC) building.

Photo courtesy of South Philippine Union Conference.

South Philippine Union Conference

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Nildo S. Mamac is an ordained minister, serving as the Publishing Ministries director of South Philippine Union Conference (SPUC). Prior to his current responsibility, he was the associate publishing director for the Literature Ministry Seminary of SPUC. He started his denominational service as a full-time literature

evangelist. He was called to serve as a district pastor, and later as ministerial secretary and publishing director of Zamboanga Peninsula Mission. He is currently pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Philippines.

The South Philippine Union Conference was organized in 1951 and reorganized in 1964.

Territory: Mindanao and Sulu Archipelago; comprising the North Central Mindanao Mission, and Western Mindanao Conferences; Davao Mission, Central Mindanao Adventist Mission, Northeastern Mindanao Mission, Southern Mindanao Mission, and Zamboanga Peninsula Mission.

South Philippine Union Conference is located at Masterson Avenue, Upper Carmen, 9000 Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines, with mailing address P. O. Box 208, 9000 Cagayan de Oro City.¹

Statistics as of June 30, 2018: organized churches 2,069; membership 551,941, population 26,024,764²

Institutions: Hospitals and sanitariums, 4: Adventist Medical Center, Iligan City, Adventist Medical Center, Valencia City, Gingoog Sanitarium and Hospital, Gingoog City, and Adventist Hospital, Davao.³

Number of schools: colleges, 3: Mountain View College, South Philippine Adventist College, and Adventist Medical Center College; 9 academies; 78 elementary schools.⁴

Total number of pastors 313, ordained ministers 223,⁵ and non-ordained ministers 87.

Organizational History

South Philippine Union Conference came into existence through the pioneers who entered the Philippines in 1905. A lonesome, dedicated literature evangelist (colporteur) from Australia, Robert A. Caldwell⁶ began to sow the gospel seed in the country through the printed page. In 1906 Philippine Mission was organized under the Asiatic Division with headquarters in Shanghai, China.⁷

From this humble beginning the Lord blessed the canvassing ministry. People who read the books wanted to hear more of the gospel story. The country was such fertile ground for the gospel that a couple of missionaries came to reinforce Caldwell. In 1906, Elder J. L. McElhany and his wife came from Australia to start evangelistic work in Manila with the motive of organizing a church for the Americans, but soon left due to the illness of Mrs. McElhany. The Lord sent another couple, Elder and Mrs. L. V. Finster. They arrived on December 17, 1908⁸

Finster conducted the first public evangelistic meetings that resulted in the organization of the first Seventh-day Adventist church in the country, located at Santa Anna, Manila, in 1911. There were 22 members; 18 were the first Filipino converts and 4 were missionaries. The church was organized during the visit of Elder I. H. Ivans, Asiatic Division president. Philippine Mission was then established in 1906⁹ under the Australasian Union.

The Gospel Reach in Mindanao

The pioneer missionaries longed to reach the whole area of the Philippines. They sent truth-filled literature and workers to different places in the country and trained Filipinos to help spread the gospel. In 1911 the Southern Publishing Association sent 12 copies of *Daniel and Revelation* to Jolo, addressed to the "third Infantry stationed at Augur Barracks, Jolo, Mindanao, Philippine Islands."¹⁰ In 1918 medical missionaries, Dr. Carlos Fattebert and his wife, went to Mindanao,¹¹ and settled in Misamis Occidental. They later established a church in Cabungaan, now Balingbangkao, Clarin. Also, in 1918, two young Filipino colporteurs, Diosdado Liwag from Southern Luzon Mission and Tirzu Jamandre from Panayan Mission,¹² volunteered to enter the Muslim islands of Mindanao in Zamboanga city¹³ and nearby provinces with truth-filled literature as their instrument in reaching the people with the message of salvation. Coincidentally, the migrant family of Carlos Singuillo arrived in Sindangan, Zamboanga del Norte, and started to share their newfound faith. Later they established a church.¹⁴ From 1919 until 1937, Mindanao and Sulu Archipelago were part of the Cebuan Mission, which later became the East Visayan Mission.¹⁵

First Mission in Mindanao

As the work of the Lord continued to grow in Mindanao, there was need to organize a mission. The Mindanao Mission was organized in September 1937 and was located in Cagayan de Oro City, Misamis Oriental. The mission managed the work in the territory of the island of Mindanao and all adjacent small islands included in the province of Sulu Archipelago, with 32 churches and 2,544 members.

The Officers: director, W. B. Riffel, secretary-treasurer and auditor, D. B. Ladion. Executive Committee members: W. B. Riffel, D. B. Ladion, A. Somoso, A. Cometa, A. N. Anderson, R. S. Llaguno, A. Sumicad. Department secretaries: Book and Periodical Agency, L. L. Villanueva; Education and Young People's Missionary Volunteer, A. Macasiano; Field Missionary, A. Cometa; Assistant, P. Lobitania; Sabbath School and Home Mission, A. Somoso; Religious Liberty and Home Commission, J. D. Cristobal. This new mission was under the supervision of the Philippine Union Mission.¹⁶

The membership in Mindanao increased rapidly and soon required the reorganization and split of the Mindanao Mission into two missions. In 1950 Mindanao Mission became Northern Mindanao Mission (NMM) and the new mission was Southern Mindanao Mission (SMM).¹⁷ The headquarters was based in Davao City, with J. O. Bautista, president, and P. S. Arriola, secretary-treasurer. It had 35 churches with 2,583 members.¹⁸ These two missions in Mindanao were still under the Philippine Union Mission.

The Lord blessed His people in the Bisayan-speaking islands of Visayas and Mindanao. Due to the vast territory and a need for closer supervision of the work, the church leadership of the Far Eastern Division saw a need to divide the Philippine Union Mission into two unions. A request was forwarded to the General Conference and was approved during the General Conference Executive Committee meeting held June 8-30, 1941.¹⁹

South Philippine Union Mission in Cebu City

Ten years after the approval, in January 1951, Philippine Union Mission gave birth to South Philippine Union Mission (SPUM) with headquarters located in Cebu City to administer the work on these two big islands of Visayas and Mindanao including Sulu Archipelago. It was comprised of the East and West Visayan, and Northern and Southern Mindanao Missions. Gil de Guzman was called to serve as president; V. M. Montalban, as secretary-treasurer; R. C. Mills as financial advisor and auditor; and H. L. Dyer, as assistant auditor.²⁰ The work of spreading the gospel grew rapidly in Mindanao and new territories were opened and new mission headquarters created.

In 1958 another mission was born, known as Western Mindanao Mission (WMM), located at Ozamis City, Misamis Occidental, to manage the work in the western part of Mindanao which comprises the provinces of Misamis Occidental, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga Sibugay, Basilan, Jolo, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi.²¹ Pastor Juanito O. Obregon became the first president.²²

Reorganization of South Philippine Union Mission

The Lord wonderfully blessed the South Philippine Union Mission. For the work to become more progressive and to penetrate more territories in this large area, the leaders who met during the Far Eastern Division Council in 1963 approved dividing the territory and creating another union. The action was agreed to during the South Philippine Union Biennial Session of the same year. Effective January 1, 1964, the South Philippine Union Mission was reorganized, and the Central Visayan Union Mission was created to focus on the work in the Visayas area, and the South Philippine Union Mission transferred its headquarters to Davao City to manage the great work in Mindanao. The new leadership included president, V. M. Montalban; secretary-treasurer and auditor, P. T. Reyes; Sabbath School and Home Missionary secretary, R. G. Garcia; Educational and MV secretary, B. U. Danato; Publishing secretary, F. D. Lao; Ministerial and Radio secretary, P. P. Ramos; and union evangelist, A. A. Villarin.²³

The preaching of the gospel in Mindanao continued to reach more people for God's kingdom. As the growth continued it became necessary to establish new mission headquarters to better manage the work and the workers. In 1965 Southern Mindanao Mission was reorganized and Davao Mission was established. The mother mission transferred its headquarters to General Santos City.²⁴

From the moment of the split up of the Mindanao Mission, Southern Mindanao Mission experienced a scarcity of finances and membership. Their very slow growth resulted in only 62 organized churches, 42 companies, and 5,573 total members. However, by 2004 the Southern Mindanao Mission had the highest membership in the South Philippine Union Mission and throughout the Southern Asia-Pacific Division with 102,904 total members.

The Northern Mindanao Mission continued to do its task of preparing people for the coming of the Lord by reaching into unentered places and establishing more missions. In 1966, the Northeastern Mindanao Mission was created, with headquarters in Butuan City, and was responsible for the work in the provinces of Agusan, Surigao del Norte, and Surigao del Sur in Caraga region. It had 35 churches and 3,522 church members. T. C. Cabaluna was elected as president and C. P. Ranario secretary-treasurer. This was the third mission produced by the Northern Mindanao Mission.²⁵

South Philippine Union Mission Transfer to a New Location

Mindanao had five missions at this point and kept extending its boundary by reaching people with the gospel even in the remotest areas. Since Davao City was located at one of the farthest ends of Mindanao, a visionary leader, Paterno M. Diaz, longed to move the union headquarters to a location that would be more accessible to the membership and to the workers. So, in 1975 the leadership and the executive committee of the union approved transferring the location of the union to Upper Carmen, Cagayan de Oro City, in the central part of the main island of Mindanao.²⁶

First Mission to Become Conference in Mindanao

Northern Mindanao Mission was blessed both in membership and finances with three health institutions and two colleges: Mountain View College in Mt. Nebo, Valencia city, Bukidnon, and Adventist Medical Center College in Iligan city. Healthcare institutions are the following: Adventist Medical Center (formerly Mindanao Sanitarium and Hospital) located in Iligan city; Gingoog Sanitarium and Hospital at Gingoog City; and Adventist Medical Center Valencia, in Valencia City, Bukidnon. All these institutions contribute to the propagation of the gospel and the financial stability of the mission. Northern Mindanao Mission became the first mission in Mindanao to be upgraded to conference status on December 13, 1994, under the leadership of Rodolfo R. Yap, president, and Pastor James Ramos, secretary/treasurer.

Western Mindanao Mission Upgrade to Conference Status

Western Mindanao Mission was blessed with a total membership of 66,617 and financial stability. As Pastor Violeto Bocala, the Far Eastern Division secretary, described, "the mission contributes financially to the worldwide work of the Adventist church." He further stated that this accomplishment gave the mission the new designation as "the largest conference in the Philippines." On December 12-14, 1995, the constituents organized the mission into Western Mindanao Conference with the approval and authorization of the higher organization. Pastor Rodolfo R. Yap, president, and Baltazar B. Aca-ac, secretary-treasurer²⁷ served as the first administrators.

South Philippine Union Mission Upgraded to Conference Status

On August 4-6, 1995, the Southern Asia-Pacific Division and the General Conference conducted an evaluation and survey of the South Philippine Union Mission to determine its readiness for a change of status. The survey team concluded with a recommendation to the General Conference that it be given conference status.²⁸

On November 20, 1995, the South Philippine Union Mission became a conference with the strong leadership of Pastor Paterno M. Diaz, president; Dr. Remilito Tabingo, executive secretary; and Pastor Ulysses Camagay, treasurer. On June 29, 2000, during the General Conference Session, the South Philippine Union Conference was voted and accepted into the sisterhood of union conferences worldwide under the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, effective November 20, 1995.²⁹

Zamboanga Peninsula Mission Was Born

The Western Mindanao Conference occupies the largest territory of all the missions and conferences in the southern Philippines. The Executive Committee of the South Philippine Union Mission, under the leadership of Dr. Remilito Tabingo, recommended to the Southern Asia-Pacific Division that the mission be reorganized by creating a new mission to manage the work in the westernmost part of Mindanao, the provinces of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga Sibugay, Zamboanga del Norte, and part of Misamis Occidental and Lanao del Norte.³⁰

On November 19, 2003, during the 4th General Constituency meeting of Western Mindanao Mission held at Western Mindanao Academy, a new mission was created known as Southwestern Mindanao Attached Field,³¹ located in Zamboanga City which is known as "Asia's Latin city in the Philippines."³² Later it was upgraded to mission status and became Zamboanga Peninsula Mission, transferring its headquarters to Tiayon, Ipil, Zamboanga Sibugay, for the benefit of accessibility for workers and members. Ephraim O. Paquibo became the first president and Teofilo C. Alcorin the secretary-treasurer.³³

A Newly Born Mission

On November 14, 2018, a new mission was created in the South Philippine Union Conference, namely, the Central Mindanao Adventist Mission (CMAM), the fourth mission derived from the Northern Mindanao Conference which is now called North Central Mindanao Conference. Pastor Jerry C. Patalinghug, former president of Davao Mission, and then Ministerial Secretary of the union, was called to serve as the pioneer president of this newly born mission. Pastor Porperio Lagunday was called to serve as executive secretary, and Edgardo D. Torñado to serve as treasurer.³⁴

The Literature Ministry Seminary

The largest number of volunteer workers throughout the union field are the 1,003 literature evangelists. They were influenced and motivated to faithfully serve the Lord by the past and present instructors of the Publishing

Development Center later officially known as Literature Ministry Seminary. Manuel Mollonida, Pastor Cecilio Lagra, and Pastor Vevincio R. Bermudez, who later became the SSD Publishing Director, are considered the pioneers of professionalizing the literature evangelists and publishing leaders. They started the training center on May 1, 1982. Following them came Pastor Benjamin Arat, Pastor Emmanuel Jardeñano, Pastor Onofre S. Flores, Pastor Florante P. Ty, and Dr. Remwil R. Tornalejo, who now serves as one of the professors of the Theological Seminary of the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in Silang Cavite. Pastor Rey Cabañero recently served as SSD Publishing Ministries director, and Pastor Danny Inato and Pastor Demitrio Taotao are presently serving.

This humble institution was built during the time of Pastor Paterno M. Diaz, president, and Pastor Florante Ty, Publishing Ministries director, of the South Philippine Union Conference in 1989. A year later it was dedicated and inaugurated in October 1990 with Elder Rudi Henning from the General Conference as the guest speaker.³⁵ From its beginning until the present, it continues molding the bookman armies for the Lord. This institution plays a very important role in reaching people with the gospel message in Mindanao.

The South Philippine Union Conference has prospered through the concerted effort of the departments and directors who at present are: Pastor Sigundino Asoy, Sabbath School/Personal Ministries and ASI; Pastor Nildo Mamac, Publishing; Pastor Alex Necesario, Ministerial; Pastor Bernabe Dahunan, IEL and NDR; Pastor Roger Jimenez, Stewardship; Pastor Hesbon Buscato, Communication, with Mrs. Jade Soreño his associate; Pastor Reynald dela Cruz, Health and Temperance; Dr. Bobby Asis, with Dr. Diosdado Catalan his associate, Education; Pastor Jemsley Lantaya, Youth; Danita Caderma, Children's Ministries; Rufina Gulfan, Shepherdess International and Women's Ministries; Pastor Eugene dela Peña, 1,000 Missionary Movement; and Pastor Ephraim Pitogo in Sulads, with the secretaries and all office staff. We join our forces with administrators and department directors in all the missions and conferences, along with the wholehearted commitment of our beloved district and church pastors, and the support of all local church officers and members within the territory with the strong leadership of the president, Pastor Roger O. Caderma; executive secretary, Pastor Danielo D. Palomares; treasurer, Chemuel U. Almocera; and associate treasurer Cirilo Godilano.

Significant Leaders of the Union

G De Guzman, the first president of South Philippine Union Mission.

V. M. Montalban, the first Filipino called to serve the General Conference headquarters.

Paterno M. Diaz, the longest serving president of the union. He served for 24 years.

Rodolfo R. Yap, local conference president organizer.

Leonardo R. Asoy, president of South Philippine Union Conference, who became the first president of Southern Asia-Pacific Division to come from Mindanao.

Roger O. Caderma, a visionary leader in Mindanao who is now serving as president of South Philippine Union Conference.

Vision for South Philippine Union Conference

The vision of the South Philippine Union Conference leadership and members is for workers and members to continue to reach every individual with the gospel utilizing the Total Member Involvement initiative³⁶ and embracing the Integrated Evangelism Lifestyle³⁷ program as the tool in the Care Group ministry with the application of Christ's method of reaching the people by mingling with them.

The total membership reached 551,941 as of December 2018. In 2018 South Philippine Union Conference had 3,216 churches, 310 pastors, 1,003 literature evangelists, 2 local conferences, 5 missions, 4 hospitals, 3 colleges, 9 academies, 78 elementary schools, and a Literature Ministry Seminary. In 2017, the Lord blessed this union field with the highest membership and highest finances in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. The present leadership plans to reorganize this union by adding another union in Mindanao to speed up the growth and to reach everyone with the gospel message.

Executive Officers Chronology

Presidents: G. De Guzman (1951-1956); V. M. Montalban (1957-1968); M. M. Claveria (1969-1975); Paterno M. Diaz (1976-2000); Remilito A. Tabingo (2001-2007); Wendell M. Serrano (2008-2010); Leonardo R. Asoy (2010-July 2015); Edwin C. Gulfan (August 2015-2017); Roger O. Caderma (2017-present).

Executive Secretary: S. L. Llaguno (1976-1985); Ulyses M. Camagay (1986-1995); Remilito A. Tabingo (1996-2000); Wendell M. Serrano (2001-2007); Wilson C. Catolico (2008-2010); Edwin C. Gulfan (2011-August 2015); Nelson D. Paulo September-December 2015); Roger O. Caderma (2016); Danielo D. Palomares (2017-present).

Treasurers: P. T. Reyes (1964-1970); C. T. Legaspi (1970-1971); Paterno M. Diaz (1972-1975); M. L. Donato (1976-1995); Ulyses M. Camagay (1996-2006); Levi B. Baliton (2006-2016); Chemuel U. Almocera (2017- present).

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