

# South Guatemala Mission

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The South Guatemala Mission belongs to the Guatemala Union Mission in the territory of the Inter-American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

## Territory and Statistics

The South Guatemala Mission includes the municipalities of Nueva Concepción and Tiquisate, which belong to the department of Escuintla. It also includes the department of Suchitepéquez, which is found in the southwest region of Guatemala and is made up of 21 municipalities.<sup>1</sup> In its geographical location, the South Guatemala Mission includes only 5 of the 24 municipalities that make up the department of Quetzaltenango: Génova, El Palmar, Coatepeque, Colombia, and Flores Costa Cuca. It also takes the following municipalities from the department of San Marcos: Ayutla, Catarina, El Rodeo, El Tumbador, Malacatán, Nuevo Progreso, Ocós, La Blanca, Pajapita, and San Pablo.

The towns of the department of Suchitepéquez mostly speak the K'iche' language. In the municipality of Chicacao, they speak Tz'utujil, and in Patulul, Kaqchikel. Languages such as Mam and K'iche' are spoken in some municipalities of San Marcos and Quetzaltenango. In the department of Escuintla, Kaqchikel and Poqomam are spoken. Nevertheless, Spanish predominates in all of the departments mentioned.<sup>2</sup>

The territory of the South Guatemala Mission covers approximately 5,212 square kilometers (about 2,012 square miles). This area has a variety of climates, but it is predominately warm because its territory borders the Pacific Ocean. The mission's headquarters are located at 7ma. Avenida 7-51, Zona 1, Mazatenango, Suchitepéquez. The South Guatemala Mission was organized in 2005.<sup>3</sup>

The South Guatemala Mission, at the end of 2018, had six pastors with ministerial credentials and 10 with ministerial licenses, three Bible workers, and 10 office and service personnel. The South Guatemala Mission comprises 41,325 members in 230 churches,<sup>4</sup> distributed among 21 districts, which makes it the second-largest mission in Guatemala in membership.

Guatemala has an Adventist radio station named Unión Radio, and the South Guatemala Mission has a repeater of that station that can be heard at 101.5 FM. In 2011, the plan to acquire that frequency was made, and a place was established in the municipality of Nuevo Progreso, department of San Marcos. Later it developed in the

Coatepeque municipality in the department of Quetzaltenango. Finally, in 2012, a departmental frequency was acquired at the cost of \$294,000.

All the activities of the South Guatemala Mission are monitored by the Guatemala Union Mission and the constitution of the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.<sup>5</sup>

## Institutions

Emanuel Adventist School is located in the Centro 2 village in Nueva Concepción, Escuintla. It began to operate in 1991 as an annex to the Bethel Adventist School of Nueva Concepción, Escuintla, and in 1992 it became its own entity. As of 2018, the school offered the levels of preschool, elementary, secondary, and higher education. It also has a computer laboratory. It offers a degree in business administration and offers the community education with a spiritual emphasis.<sup>6</sup> In 2018 the school had 11 employees working as administrators, office staff, teachers, and support staff and had an enrollment of 97 students.

Bethel Adventist School is located on Central Street, lot 187, of Nueva Concepción, Escuintla. It is accredited to teach the elementary level. This educational center started its work in 1977 with 24 students in the first grade and 15 students in second grade. In 1994, it expanded to offer all of the elementary and secondary levels. In 2019 a new school campus in the María Alejandra Colony was being built to better care for the Adventist and community children.<sup>7</sup> At that time, the school had 12 employees working as administrators, office staff, teachers, and support staff, and had 124 students.

Adventist Educational Center of the South is located in Independence Colony in Mazatenango, department of Suchitepéquez. It began in 2012 with 12 students at the preschool level, 38 at the elementary level, and 24 at the secondary level. Before, a house in Bilbao Colony was rented for the school. But with the effort of the members and the help of the South Guatemala Mission, it moved to a larger property where the Mazatenango Central Church is located. It is planned to build a sports area with a roof where various educational and recreational activities can be carried out.<sup>8</sup> In June 2019, the institution had 11 people working as administrative personnel, office staff, teachers, and support staff, with an enrollment of 87 students.

El Palmar Adventist School is located at 6-44 6th Avenue in Zone 1 of the municipality of El Palmar, Quetzaltenango. In 1998 the church had a vision for building a school and created a building committee to begin the work of building new rooms. On January 9, 1999, the first classrooms were inaugurated, housing the preschool and elementary levels, starting with 195 students. In 2001, a multiuse facility was finished. In 2012, the secondary level was added, in accordance with resolution No. 0109 2011 by the Education Ministry.<sup>9</sup> The school has 177 students enrolled and has 11 people working as administrators, office staff, teachers, and support staff.

Adventist College Orión was founded in 1986 in the municipality of Tecún Umán, Ayutla, San Marcos. In 1993, a property was acquired for the construction of more classrooms. In 1998, the secondary level began to be offered with an enrollment of 67 students. The school, with the help of the South Guatemala Mission, has expanded its infrastructure to accommodate the growing number of students. In 2019, it had 449 students benefitting from a holistic education, including morning and evening worship times. Within the school is a virtual library. The higher education level offers a degree in accounting.<sup>10</sup> Twenty employees work there as administrators, office staff, teachers, and support staff, providing an education to the 449 students.

Adventist Model School is located in the municipality of Malacatán, department of San Marcos. Its origins go back to 1981, when David Beber and his wife, along with a group of church members, had a vision for establishing a school. It began to operate in a rented house, but by 1992, a property was purchased in the Morazán Canton, in Malacatán. In 1996, a secondary level was added. In 2018 it was accredited by the Adventist Accreditation Association (AAA) for five years and also by the Ministry of Education.<sup>11</sup> In 2019 it had 16 employees working as administrators, office staff, teachers, and support staff and had 240 students enrolled.

Las Margaritas Adventist School is located in the village of Tocache, municipality of San Pablo, department of San Marcos. In 1966, church members Juan Bámaca and Hugo Ramírez were motivated by quotes from the Spirit of Prophecy that say each church should have a school to adequately educate its children and young people. The need for this became more evident as children from the church went to the public schools and were obliged to attend on Sabbath and were punished if they did not. Bámaca and Ramírez took the necessary steps, and in 1968, the school opened under the name Las Margaritas. It originally operated in the church building. Later, the church purchased a larger property where they built a church and school. The school offers preschool, elementary, and secondary levels. This educational institution is one of the oldest in the South Guatemala Mission.<sup>12</sup> In 2019 there were 17 employees there, including administrators, office staff, teachers, and support staff, with an enrollment of 120 students.

Maranatha Adventist School is located in the municipality of La Blanca, San Marcos. In 1977, nine church members formed a school board to offer a Christian education to Adventist children. The school started operating with 40 students. In 1982, the school was officially authorized to offer the elementary grades, and soon it was authorized to offer the secondary level. It also offers higher education plans for adults and Sunday courses. Its short-term goals include expanding the infrastructure and building more classrooms and a sports court that can be used for several sports.<sup>13</sup> In 2019 there were 25 employees at this school, among whom are administrators, office staff, teachers, and support staff, and there is an enrollment of 252 students.

## Origins of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Guatemala Mission

In 1915, J. B. Stuyvesant and his wife traveled through Quetzaltenango, Mazatenango, Retalhuleu, and Escuintla. As they went, they shared the message through printed material such as *Daniel and the Revelation*, *Signs of the Times*, *The Great Controversy*, *The Coming King*, and *His Glorious Appearing*. As they visited these places, they noticed the great need to make stronger efforts to preach the gospel.<sup>14</sup>

The Adventist Church established itself in the territory of the South Guatemala Mission during the 1920s when Orley Ford came into the country through Puerto Barrios. He traveled through Guatemala and arrived in San Antonio Suchitepéquez, where he started preaching the Adventist message. The first Adventists were the Ovalle Chacón family, the Padilla Natareno family, the Carranza family, the Obregón family, and the Chapetón family. The San Antonio Church was organized with about 30 members. Nevertheless, with the passing of time and the absence of a leader, some members became discouraged. However, a group remained faithful—the Ovalle family.<sup>15</sup>

In 1949, the superintendent of the Guatemala Mission, M. W. Sickler, planned to visit Mazatenango and Génova to baptize new members brought into the church through the work of lay members and colporteurs.<sup>16</sup> Besides, some members would travel there from the capital of Guatemala, such as Jacinto Cabrera and another brother whose last name was Pellecer. Both strengthened the faith of their brothers and sisters with their message. They carried out evangelistic campaigns of a month or two, where they explained the Adventist doctrines completely, and many persons were baptized.

Later, Canjura Aguilar and Salvador Monzón arrived and inaugurated the Mazatenango Church. The first to accept the gospel were the Rendón family and the family of Alba Quezada. The church grew as many persons arrived to work the cotton fields and the banana plantations on the south coast. At this time, the churches of Génova and Quetzaltenango were started.

In the same way, several members who had learned the Adventist message in the municipality of Ipala, Chiquimula, arrived in Nueva Concepción, Escuintla, looking for property to cultivate. Through missionary visits and evangelistic campaigns, they established the church in the western region of Guatemala. In 1989, Lida Rodas, Pathfinder Club leader for the San Felipe, Retalhuleu, church, with the help of pioneer evangelists and some Pathfinders, was able to convince 25 persons to accept the faith of Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup>

Between 1920 and 1930, the San Antonio Adventist Church was formed and organized in the San Antonio Suchitepéquez department, with a membership of approximately 30. Also in 1920, a church was organized in the municipality of Génova, Costa Cuca, with a membership of approximately 35. During the 1940s and 1950s, the Adventist message reached the villages of Tocache, San Pablo, San Marcos; Zelandia, San Pablo, San Marcos; and the municipality of Colombia, specifically the village of Chuvá y el Xab.

Thanks to the hard work of lay members and pastors, between 1960 and 1970, the Adventist message reached the municipality of Nueva Concepción. Later, in 1978, Julio Juárez came to the district of Frontera Sur, which included the municipalities of Coatepeque, Pajapita, Ayutla, and Catarina. A group of believers was also

established in the municipality of Tecún Umán.

God was working marvelously in this territory. On June 2 and 3, 1999, the Guatemala Mission was divided into two missions, one in the east and one in the west of the country, and the Central Guatemala Conference.<sup>18</sup> This reorganization was needed to care for the membership.

## Significant Events Leading to the Organization of the South

### Guatemala Mission

The South Guatemala Mission was organized in 2005<sup>19</sup> at a meeting attended by Israel Leito, president; Otoniel Perla, secretary; and Filiberto Verduzco, treasurer, from the Inter-American Division. Representing the North Central American Union, as it was called at that time, were Mario Calderón, president; Dennis Slusher, secretary; and Juan José Morán, treasurer. As president of the West Guatemala Mission, Guenther García attended, as well as Hilario Calderón, secretary-treasurer. At that time, the mission had 124 churches and 32,700 members.<sup>20</sup>

The districts assigned to the South Guatemala Mission in 2005 were Malacatán, San Pablo, Tecún Umán, Flores, Coatepeque, Pajapita, Retalhuleu, El Xab, San Felipe, Mazatenango, Nueva Concepción, and Escuintla.<sup>21</sup>

## Strategies for Fulfilling the Mission

The South Guatemala Mission uses several strategies to fulfill its mission:

1. Training the elders and leaders of small groups and the leaders of the different departments of the church.
2. Permanent training for the lay members, in cooperation with the Guatemala Union.
3. Giving new members in the faith a solid foundation for their beliefs.<sup>22</sup>

## What Remains to Be Done for the South Guatemala Mission to Fulfill Its Mission

The South Guatemala Mission has several challenges ahead of it:

1. Establish an Adventist presence in several municipalities of the department of Suchitepéquez, which belong to the South Guatemala Mission: Chicacao, Patulul, San José El Idolo, San Juan Bautista, San Lorenzo, San Pablo Jocopilas, Santo Domingo, Zunilito, and Santa Bárbara. Also, in the department of San Marcos, work has not yet begun in the municipalities of Ocos, San Rafael Pie de la Cuesta, and El Quetzal.

2. Maintain a permanent program for the retention of members so that they can live the experience of the Adventist faith.
3. Implement the health reform in the membership to better their quality of life.
4. Move the mission headquarters to Retalhuleu and build a retreat center with a capacity for 4,000 people, a medical clinic, a school with various educational levels, and an Adventist university.<sup>23</sup>

## List of Presidents

Eddy Hernández (2005–2009); Ramiro Hernández (2010); Irving Calderón (2011–2013); Otoniel Trujillo (2014–2018); Román Monroy (2019–).

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## NOTES

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