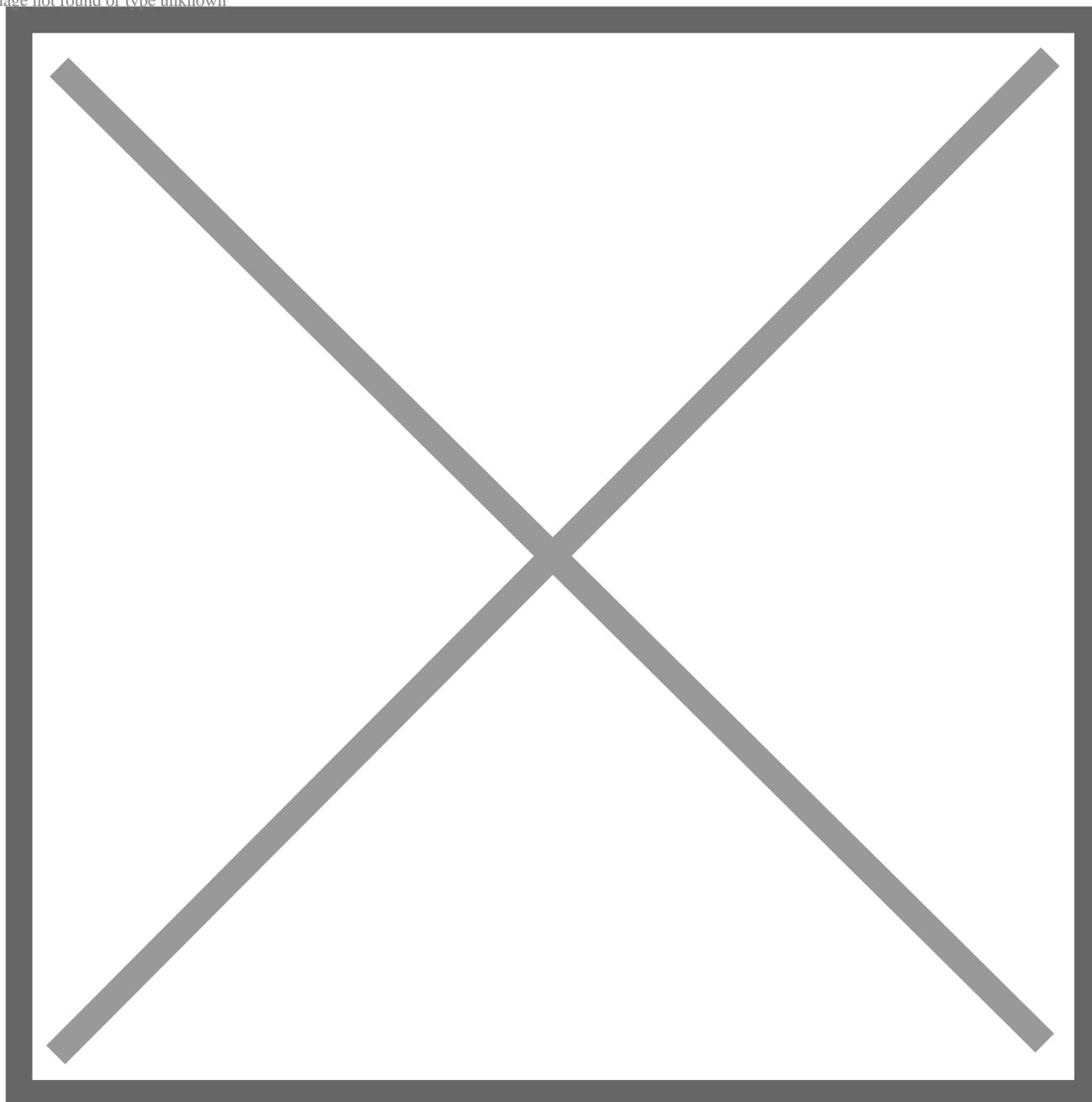


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## Del Amanecer Conference

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### JENARO JIMÉNEZ DE CASTRO ROMERO

Jenaro Jiménez de Castro Romero, M.A. (Inter-American Adventist Theological Seminary, Mayagüez, Puerto Rico), is president of Del Amanecer Conference. He is a third-generation Adventist, and has served the church for 33 years as district pastor, administrator, and professor. He is married to Eugenia Romero Abad and has two children.

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Del Amanecer Conference covers the provinces of Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo, located on the eastern side

of the Island. This area has been referred to as “the high eastern province” for its mountains, which cover the major part of the territory.

## Territory and Statistics

The provinces of Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo basically comprise of highlands and mountains. Sierra Maestra contains the highest mountains on the country (*Pico Turquino* at 1974 meters, *Pico Cuba* at 1874 meters, and *Pico Suecía* at 1734 meters), with the *La Gran Piedra* as the highest point with 1226 meters.<sup>1</sup> It also contains the *Las Cuchillas de Baracoa* with its *Viaducto de la Farola*, considered one of the seven marvels of Cuban civil engineering.<sup>2</sup> The territory is rich in culture and traditions due to the diverse ethnography of the region. Its three major cities have very peculiar cultures.

Baracoa – Is first in the timeframe since Admiral Cristóbal Colón discovered it in 1492 becoming the first Spanish villa in Cuba, founded by Diego Velázquez in 1511. Some remnants of its indigenous customs are still very much alive. The most genuine manifestation of their culture is their ancestral culinary traditions. At the end of the 18th century after the Haitian revolution, more than 100 French families settled there and influenced the region’s culture.<sup>3</sup>

Guantánamo – For its different migrations, it has developed a social conglomerate composed of people from diverse nationalities: French, Haitians, Catalans, Chinese, Africans, and from the Antilles, therefore, its people are mainly characterized as “mixed” and among them, are African and Haitian traditions.<sup>4</sup>

Santiago de Cuba – It was the first capital of the island, up to 1556. The home of Governor Diego Velázquez still exists and has been converted into a museum. The area still has the urban and architectural particularities inherited through the years – a mix of Spanish, African, and French cultures. Its historic downtown depicts places and environments very typical to this area and of high monumental value. Due to its strong Caribbean influence, it is known as the “capital of the Caribbean” and is a very frequented tourist destination.

The territory of Del Amanecer Conference has a population of 1,566,930<sup>5</sup> inhabitants and a church membership of 8,593,<sup>6</sup> making it one Adventist for each 182.3 inhabitants. The members meet in 61 organized churches and 68 companies or what would be churches on the brink of being organized. The ministerial body is comprised of 12 ordained pastors, 11 licensed ministers, and four female Bible workers.<sup>7</sup> The territory has three churches that are very difficult to reach. These churches are located in places almost impossible to reach by automobile.

## Origins of the Adventist Work in the Territory

The Adventist presence is reported to have existed since 1913, in the city of Santiago de Cuba, the second most important city in the country. On Tuesday, December 2, 1913 and on the front page of *La Independencia*, an informational newspaper edited in that locality, it was reported:

Before sunset, Pastor Allen gave another much appreciated speech at the new evangelical locale on the corner of the Bartolomé Masó (formerly San Basilio) and Reloj streets. The conference started at 7:30 p.m. with Pastor Anderson. ... Pastor Allen indicates that the series of speeches that he is offering will deal with some of the symbols in the book of Revelation.<sup>8</sup>

Genoveva Ramírez Echezarreta accepted the Adventist message in Santiago de Cuba in 1915 and was baptized on May 20, 1917, by Pastor Lane at age 17. She left a beautiful testimony as her legacy. She said that those who had accepted the Adventist faith before her had told her that the first missionary in that territory had been Adela Burgos. Even though her work appears to have been for a short time, Adela left a group of Sabbath observers among the high-class society. It is worth mentioning that one of Genoveva Ramirez’s sons, Vicente Rodríguez, was a pastor and also the last director of the *Colegio de las Antillas* in Santa Clara from 1962 until its expropriation by the government in 1967.

Hebert S. Moll, an evangelist and colporteur from North America, arrived in Santiago de Cuba in 1915 and became a notable transmitter of the Adventist message. He efficiently combined the sale of religious publications with intelligently sustained work of evangelizing and proclaiming the Biblical truths. Mr. Moll stayed in Santiago de Cuba for two years.<sup>9</sup>

Pedro Godoy Céspedes, who was a member of the Baptist Church, accepted the message of Jesus Christ second coming and was convinced that the Sabbath was the day of rest instituted by God. Several people also accepted the newfound faith. Among them, Eudisia Carbonell Araujo (Pedro’s wife), Andrea Díaz, Caridad Vallejo, Alejandro Dumas and his wife, Anita Rueda, María Ávila, and Adela Preval. These became the first people to observe the Sabbath in that city.<sup>10</sup>

The Adventist Church in Santiago de Cuba was officially recognized on Sabbath, November 24, 1917. The General Conference had suggested to the administrators of the Cuban Mission to purchase a property near Santiago de Cuba in which to build a house that could serve as a school and as a church, but it had not been possible. However, on May 7, 1920, John Emil Anderson as a legal representative of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church purchased a plot of land with the purpose of building the first Adventist church in the city that, later on, could also serve as a school.<sup>11</sup>

On January 22, 1922, Pastor Kelman dedicated the church of *Vegueta de Galo*, in the city of Santiago de Cuba that

became a center of proclamation of the Adventist message in the region.<sup>12</sup> The valuable contribution of Estela Bleisten, a missionary during those formative years, was remarkable.<sup>13</sup> The proclaimed message reached different regions of the territory and there, as in many other areas of the country, churches grew in numbers.

## Events Conducive to the Organization of the Conference

The provinces that today form part of the Del Amanecer Conference were previously part of the territory of the East Conference since the East Conference was organized in 1967. In the Quinquennium Congress of the Cuban Union Conference celebrated in 2005, after having observed the fast membership growth in the eastern region of Cuba and the need to have an administration closer to church members, it was voted to study the possibility and conditions that would allow the organization of a new field in that territory.

After studying and administratively evaluating the situation, on June 3, 2009 the Cuban Union Conference Board, in harmony with the policy manual of the Inter-American Division, voted to ask the East Delegation to convene a congress with its constituents for the purpose of considering the proposal. On August 27, 2009, the constituent congress voted the organization of a mission that would cover the Santiago de Cuba and the Guantánamo provinces.

On October 27, 2009, in Miami, Florida, the Inter-American Division Survey Committee met with the administrators of the Cuban Union Conference and the East Delegation. On November 3, 2009 the Inter-American Division Board approved the organization of the new field with the name Eastern Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Cuba.<sup>14</sup>

### Organization as a Mission

Once the approval was obtained from the Inter-American Division, the Cuban Union Conference Board met in *La Habana* on November 26, 2009 and named the administrators for the new field: Pastor Jenaro Jiménez de Castro Romero as president and Pastor Eduardo Arodis Lorenzo Rodríguez as secretary-treasurer. It was also voted to convene a congress for the constituents of the mission on March 23, 2010.

The new mission began to administratively and financially function independently from the East Delegation in January 2010. It began working on the organization and creation of an infrastructure that would allow the mission to function efficiently. On March 1, 2010, the mission's provisional office was established in Rey Pelayo No. 82 lower level, corner of Reloj, Santiago de Cuba, Cuba.

As it had been planned, on March 23, 2010, the constituents' congress of the Eastern Mission took place in the Fomento Church of Santiago de Cuba. Under the day's theme of "Born to Serve", the Eastern Mission was established as local field number 111 of the Inter-American Division.

When the mission was organized it had: 7,441 baptized members, 51 organized churches, 59 companies or churches in formation, 12 pastoral districts and four ministerial zones. It had one Adventist per 273 inhabitants. The mission began with seven ordained ministers (two in administration), nine aspiring ministers, six female Bible workers, and ten staff. Everyone worked intensively to create the conditions needed for a change of status.

In 2014, a church membership audit was held and the true membership total became known demonstrating it to be far less than what the initial numbers had been in statistical reports. Regardless of the setback, the church continued to grow, consolidate, and during this period, ten new congregations were organized.

### Official Organization of the Conference

After six years of the Eastern Mission making history, the change of status became possible. On August 30, 2015, the Second Congress of the Eastern Mission took place under the theme: "One people, one mission". The Eastern Mission became the Del Amanecer Conference, even though, for legal reasons, in Cuba is known as the Del Amanecer Delegation. The elected conference administrators were: Pastor Jenaro Jiménez de Castro Romero as president, Pastor Adaías Lores Rodríguez as secretary, and Pastor Eduardo A. Lorenzo Rodríguez as treasurer. The new office building on Calle 11 No. 214 in between F. Marcané and B. Correoso, Reparto, Santa Bárbara, Santiago de Cuba, Cuba, was dedicated on August 22, 2016.

### Development of the Conference

Presently, the Del Amanecer Conference territory is organized in four ministerial zones grouping 14 pastoral districts formed by 61 organized churches and 68 companies or groups that function as churches and are in route to being organized as such. Since the laws of the country, since the 1960s, does not allow churches to have new locations to conduct church services, only 13 church buildings are recognized by the State. Many congregations gather in particular homes, in some cases, for more than 25 years. This unusual situation makes it difficult to organize new congregations. Regardless of this, and with the modality of "houses of service", the church maintains sustained growth.

## Future Development of the Conference

Presently, the church continues to grow and conquers new places. Colportering has extended greatly throughout the territory and presents Adventist literature and books in an exposition at the Book Fair, an annual cultural event that is considered the most significant event of the Cuban editorial movement. The Book Fair was celebrated in the *Teatro Heredia*

in Santiago de Cuba, a convention center that is considered the second most important convention center of the country.

Health fairs are very well accepted and solicited by the community. Blood banks are very well received; they open doors to share the truth. Other activities of community impact related to lifestyle and benefits for the community are also very well received by the community and help promote the church's identity.

Several of the small groups or companies are getting ready to be organized as churches, however, more churches cannot be built. Many dedicated brothers and sisters are taking the message of salvation to new areas. Therefore, "our main problem is that we are growing, and to find and prepare homes in which to conduct church services constitutes one of our major challenges."<sup>15</sup>

## List of Presidents

Eastern Mission: Jenaro Jiménez de Castro Romero (2010-2015)

Del Amanecer Conference: Jenaro Jiménez de Castro Romero (2016- )

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