



Central Llanos Venezuela Mission

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Janier Antonio Puerta Salazar, B.A. and M.A. in pastoral theology with an emphasis in youth ministry, has 17 years in ministry and has had worked in five fields as pastor, vice-president of the Southeast Venezuela Conference, Central Venezuela Conference, and East Venezuela Conference, and associate dean of *Instituto Universitario Adventista* in Venezuela "Venezuela Adventist University Institute's male residence. He is the current executive secretary, Personal Ministries and Sabbath School Departments' director of Central Llanos Venezuela Mission. He is married to Armelvis Zulymar Dimas, and they have three daughters.

Central Llanos Venezuela Mission is one of eight fields in the East Venezuela Union Mission under the Inter-American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Territory and Statistics

The Central Llanos Venezuela Mission territory comprises the states of Amazonas, and Guarico, Achagua, Biruaca, and Pedro Camejo municipalities; the state of Anzoategui, Valle Guanape municipality; the state of Apure, San Fernando de Apure municipality.¹

The geographical territory's general population is estimated to be close to 1,300,174² in a territory of approximately 290,000 square kilometers (about 112,000 square miles). The population density averages six people per square kilometer and is mainly concentrated in urban areas. Nearly half the population is between 10 and 40 years old.³

Many immigrants from Venezuela's Andes and Colombia come to the Central Llanos and Amazonas territories. An important aspect of the Central Llanos Venezuela Mission territory, specifically Amazonas, is that 45.8 percent of the population is indigenous, with 20 different ethnicities. Their languages and costumes are all different. Of those, the most representative are the villages of piaroa, jivi, yanomami, wayúu, and yekuana.⁴

Central Llanos Venezuela Mission has 14,031 members in 40 organized churches.⁵

Institutions

One educational institution and three radio stations stand out in the Central Llanos Venezuela Mission. Construction of the educational institution started in Camaguán, Guárico, in 1921 and 1922. A recently converted brother, José Antonio Lamas, as he was growing in his faith, was named church treasurer. Every time he sent funds to the mission, he included a note asking for a school for the Camaguán children. He believed that the parents would be reached through the children. To help realize the school project, Lamas bought a corner house, in front of the town square, and donated it to the mission. He contracted Catalina Rodríguez Vásquez to teach at a church school. Shortly after, Richard and Rebecca Greenidge, who had been in Caracas as foreign missionaries, left their work as hydro-therapists to work for Camaguán's education. With their help, a boarding school for young people was established. It was the first Adventist educational institution in Venezuela; the territory at the time was part of the Caribbean Union Mission. The school led the way for the first native Adventist workers, ministers, teachers, secretaries, and colporteurs that would share the message to the nation's territory and other regions of the country and continent.⁶

The Greenidges were in charge of the school Lamas had been financing. In January 1922, classes started with 56 students, not all of which were young children. The school had a wooden chalkboard, and the students wrote on small rock boards. The students' benches did not have backs or tables. Water was provided from a tank built to

store rainwater. Heat was provided by a wood stove, and there was a clay oven to bake bread.

The boarding school later was transferred to another place in Venezuela. Still, the Adventist work and education continued to grow in Camaguán. Others involved in the school were the Infante family, Zobeida de Correa, and Edith Rodríguez de García.⁷

The school still belongs to Central Llanos Venezuela Mission and is called Colegio Libertador Camaguán (Libertador Academy Camaguán). It is located in Camaguán, Guárico, Calle Fray Tomás de Castro, diagonal to Plaza Bolívar to the side of the Adventist Church building. Efraín Infante is the school director, and Yeison Quintero is the administrator. Norestilud Pérez is the chaplain. Additionally, the school has a subdirector, a cashier, security personnel, 2 elementary teachers, 7 primary teachers, 13 secondary education teachers, and 3 ministerial workers. Enrollment in 2019 was elementary 30, primary 177, and secondary 260, for a total of 467 students.⁸

The mission owns three radio stations. The first one is Plenitud Estéreo 93.7 FM, located in Calabozo City, Guárico. In 2019, the director was Corina Reverón, and Deibi Villa is pastor and founder.⁹ The second station is Renacer 103.1 FM, located in Guaribe, Guárico, next to the Central Adventist Church. Its first director was Maira Arenas, and Nohel Cuicas was the pastor and founder. It opened its doors on February 7, 2015. The third one is Plenitud Estéreo 104.1 FM, located in Puerto Ayacucho, Amazonas, located in the city's center, next to the Central Adventist Church building, diagonal to SAIME. William Suárez was its first director, and José López, its pastor and founder. It opened its doors on July 23, 2003. José Luis Medrano was its second director, and as of 2019, Lesvia de Medrano is the director.¹⁰

Origins of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Central Llanos Venezuela Mission

Evangelistic work started in Camaguán in mid-1920 with the work of the colporteur Rafael López Miranda. His work introduced the Adventist faith to three people who went on to expand the work in the region: Julio García, José Antonio Lamas, and José Alberto Acosta Hurtado.

López Miranda sold the book *Guía Práctica de la Salud* to Julio García. Soon after, García heard the Daniel and Revelation prophecies with special emphasis on the Sabbath as the day of the Lord. He accepted the teachings, and on July 2, 1920, accompanied by his family, kept the Sabbath for the first time.¹¹

In his eagerness to share the newfound truth, Julio García put López Miranda in touch with other businesspeople in town, among them José Antonio Lamas. In June 1920, López Miranda sold Lamas the books *Guía Práctica de la Salud* and *Nuestro Siglo a la Luz Profética* as well as a Bible. López Miranda taught him the Daniel and Revelation prophecies. On January 6, 1921, Pastors William Baxter and David Fitch arrived in Camaguán and stayed three weeks at Julio García's home while they presented an evangelistic series. That same

night, Lamas heard the first evangelistic sermon, in which Pastor Baxter emphasized the need to receive Christ as a personal Savior. When Lamas returned home, he decided to accept the message.

At the end of January, the evangelists returned to Caracas. But they were so excited about the experience in Camaguán that they decided to organize a second trip before the rainy season began. Therefore, at the beginning of February, Baxter returned to Camaguán accompanied by a missionary, Francisco Cabrera Rodríguez, who stayed in the city to prepare 105 baptismal candidates. On a third trip on April 22, Baxter baptized 21 candidates in the Portuguesa River, among them José Antonio Lamas, Julio García, Emilia de García, Isabel Quintana, Antonia Quintana, Ester Quintana, Pedro Ramón González, Mercedes de González, Juan S. Rebolledo, Jacinta de Rebolledo, Fermina Díaz, Ramón Carrizales, Carmen de Carrizales, Enriqueta de Fleitas, Aníbal Fleitas, Claudovina Pérez, Cruz María Vásquez, Francisco Meléndez, Francisca Meléndez, Víctor R. Sánchez, and Manuel A. Pérez. That first baptism in Camaguán was attended by almost the entire community. Camaguán Adventist Church, the second Adventist church in Venezuela, was organized that same day.¹²

Julio García soon sold his businesses and became a Bible worker for the mission. He worked among the numerous groups of new believers that were emerging throughout the nation's territory. The groups grew and became congregations, such as Camaguán and Uverito in Guárico Arismendi, Botucal, Campechano, and San Nicolás in Zamora (today Barinas), and San Fernando and El Brazo, in Apure.¹³

Meanwhile, as the faith of José Antonio Lamas grew, he sold his businesses and offered his services to the mission as a Bible worker. In this capacity, he visited and taught new converts along the river. The church leaders accepted his work with great enthusiasm. At that time, a building was needed to use as a church, but no one wanted to sell land to the Adventist church. With God's help, Lamas was able to buy a large home that was in front of the police station and the town square, which he then transferred to the church. Lamas also bought special wood and other lumber and materials that were used to build the Camaguán church under the direction of Greenidge. Due to the providential way in which the church was built, the inauguration ceremony was held in December 1923. After the church opened, many people attended services and were baptized.

In February 1924, Lamas was transferred to San Fernando de Apure to care for the first group of believers that had been evangelized by the brethren in Camaguán. At that time, a group of businesspeople decided to become Bible workers, colporteurs, or teachers. Some young people went abroad to continue studying and later worked for God in the rest of the country of Venezuela.¹⁴

In 1920, God was working on reaching José Alberto Acosta Hurtado, the son of General José Acosta Sánchez. Acosta Hurtado, who worked for a weekly newspaper, learned about the Adventist message through Rafael López Miranda's colporteur work. On May 3, 1923, he was baptized with his sister Martina in Camaguán. Then, both of them moved with their sister Sara to San Fernando de Apure and became founding members of that city's church. The church was organized by L. J. Borrowdale on January 20, 1924, after he baptized nine candidates in the Apure River: Manuel and Margot Tovar Pino, Delia Aponte, Clarisa Encinozo, Reneta Levinson,

Ramón Rivas Pino, Patricia and Rosa Pérez, and León Palomares. That was the third Adventist church in Venezuela and the second in Central Llanos Venezuela Mission territory.

José Alberto Acosta Hurtado abandoned his commercial business and immediately engaged with the missionaries. He was hired to become a Bible worker for the San Fernando church in Apure. He was also to look after the needs of the new converts who lived on both sides of the river, helping them spread the Adventist message in the field's territory.¹⁵

Structural Organization of Central Llanos Venezuela Mission

The Adventist work continued to grow in the states of Guárico, Apure, Amazonas, and the rest of Venezuela through pastors and missionaries led by God, who worked hard to spread the gospel message. The extraordinary growth led to considering the establishment of new missions to provide better care to church members and to continue expanding the eternal gospel in new territories.

With time, one of the new missions in Maracay became South Central Venezuela Conference. This conference was inaugurated in 2003 as the offspring of the Central Venezuela Conference, and it continued to develop and maintain the vision of expansion and growth.

The 2007 quadrennial session voted to ask Venezuela-Antilles Union Mission to establish a new experimental field in the states of Guárico, the eastern part of Apure, and the Amazonas states. The purpose of the request was to name the necessary commissions to help the field fulfill their aspirations by 2008, but the request was not approved. At the beginning of 2011, Benirde Almerida, president; Amado Marcano, secretary; and Osmar González, treasurer, made a strategic administrative decision for Amado Marcano to go to Calabozo, Guárico. Marcano gladly accepted, and even though he was the executive secretary, he moved from Maracay to Calabozo. He started serving the Calabozo district to enhance growth and consolidate the work in that strategic place, which later became the host city of the new field.¹⁶

In August 2011, after the South Central Venezuela Conference quadrennial session, Osmar González, president; and Lícido Vegas, secretary-treasurer, were still thinking of the idea and their desire to reorganize the territory and open a new field in the Central Los Llanos zone and Amazonas. Even though the desire to reorganize the territory existed, field finances were not optimal. The financial condition delayed the leaders and brethren's dream to establish a mission office.¹⁷

The leaders and church members continued waiting and working with the hope that it would be God's will, that the time and necessary conditions would be met. For several years, the dream was kept alive. Each time field departmental directors and administrators visited them, church leaders would remind the visitors of their dream to have a new field in that area. Four years later, the South Central Venezuela Conference quadrennial session on August 31, 2015, with Luis Paredes, president; Antonio Peña, secretary; and Saúl Brito, treasurer,

decided to start the necessary studies and evaluations to reorganize the territory and open a mission in Central Los Llanos, including Amazonas state.¹⁸

After two months of studying and reevaluating the project to open a new field, Luis Paredes, Saúl Brito, and Antonio Peña, as South Central Venezuela Conference's administrators, presented the finished study to the East Venezuela Union Mission's administrators. At that time, the president was Josney Rodríguez, Benirde Almerida was executive secretary, and Pablo Carreño was treasurer. The purpose was to demonstrate the territory had sufficient financial resources to cover the needs of the new mission and the feasibility of restructuring the field.¹⁹

Rodríguez, with other union administrators, supported the request. On August 19, 2015, the East Venezuela Union Mission board of directors voted to ask the Inter-American Division to make a study of readjusting the South Central Venezuela Conference territory and create a mission in the Central Llanos Venezuela region.²⁰

Rodríguez supported and oriented the South Central Venezuela Conference administrators to make the project a reality. He also kept communicating with Israel Leito, the Inter-American Division president, Elie Henry, executive secretary, and Filiberto Verduzco, treasurer, in support of God's will to create the Central Llanos Venezuela Mission.²¹

At the East Venezuela Union Mission year-end board meeting, under the direction of Josney Rodríguez, president; Jorge Atalido, executive secretary; and Pablo Carreño, treasurer, the board voted to continue with the plan to readjust the South Central Venezuela Conference territory. Effective January 1, 2016, it was to start on an experimental basis, adjusting to the established regulations. Also, on November 26, 2015, Amado Marcano was assigned as the regional coordinator, Janier Puerta as the executive secretary, and Saúl Brito as the treasurer. Brito was also the treasurer at South Central Venezuela Conference.²²

In January 2016, the mission started to work in a room in the upper part of the Calabozo Central Church, which functioned as headquarters. By the grace of God, and with financial support from the South Central Venezuela Conference and East Venezuela Union Mission, the purchase of a house for the headquarters in Calabozo's center was possible. It is located in Carrera 9 between Streets 6 and 7, Num. 6-54.²³

After six months of analysis and work on the experimental project, in 2016, the East Venezuela Union Mission board voted to recommend the restructuring of the South Central Venezuela Conference territory to the Inter-American Division. The Inter-American Division board, on May 9, 2016, accepted and approved the official inauguration of a new field named Central Llanos Venezuela Mission.

The approval was a victory and gave great joy to the church members of Guárico, Apure, and Amazonas states. The East Venezuela Union Mission administration agreed to open the inaugural session in Calabozo, Guárico State, on Thursday, May 26, 2016, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Attending the activity were Josney Rodríguez, Ministerial secretary and Inter-American Division representative; union administrators Jorge Atalido, president;

Luis Astudillo, secretary; Pablo Carreño, treasurer; and South Central Venezuela Conference administrators Luis Paredes, president; Antonio Peña, secretary; and Saúl Brito, treasurer. The session quorum of 100 percent was met with 36 churches' delegates, 8 pastors, and 300 church members from the territory who, with great joy, wanted to witness the victorious inauguration. Israel Leito, Inter-American Division president, could not be present but communicated through videoconference and gave prompt and edifying words of support, counsel, and best wishes. During the session, Amado Marcano, who had worked diligently for several years to fulfill the dream, was confirmed as president. Janier Puerta was named secretary, and Edgar Gómez, treasurer, from May 26, 2016, to July 30, 2017.

Development of Central Llanos Venezuela Mission

As of January 1, 2019, the administration consisted of Amado Marcano, president; Janier Antonio Puerta Salazar, secretary; and Mary Acosta de Ramírez, treasurer. Acosta de Ramírez is the second woman to be appointed as treasurer in East Venezuela territory. Office employees are Raimar de Meregote and Reinaldo Calderón, auditor. The first mission accountant was Arizay de Gómez.

In the 2016–2020 quadrennium, the pioneer district pastors were Edgar Mongua, Néstor Pildain, Antonio Zerpa, Ángel Agrinzones, Deibi Villa, Miguel García, Robinson Quintero, Jesús Bello, Josué Rondón, Jaime Puerta, and lay members Isaac Pérez, Jean Bejas, Wismant García, and Edgardo Paiva.

The first full-time departmental secretary, Iveth de Marcano, had been directing Women's Ministries, SIEMA, and Children's and Youth Ministries. The departmentals who accomplished their responsibilities are: Oscailer Bejas, Alexander Páez, Ima Guirado, Diógenes Belisario, Efraín Infante, Antonio Zerpa, Edgar Mongua, Jesús Bello, Mayerli de Bello, Edith de García, Wismant García, Miguel García, Deibi Villa, Néstor Pildain, Zobeida de correa, Arelis González and lay people and members of the board: José Luis Medrano, Lesvia de Medrano, Filemón Heredia, Manuel Rondón, Samuel Vegas, Dámaso Acosta, Guillermo García and Sumoy de Bolívar²⁴

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