

# Dominican Union Conference

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Dominican Union Conference was organized in 1994 and reorganized in 2012. It is part of the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists. Its headquarters is at Ensanche, Piantini, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

Dominican Union Conference occupies the east part of La Española Island, known as the Dominican Republic. It lies in the Greater Antilles Archipelago in the Caribbean Sea, between North and South America and east of Central America. The Dominican Republic is a free state, with a republican presidential government in a representative democracy. Its capital is Santo Domingo, and its official language is Spanish.<sup>1</sup>

[Statistics](#) (June 30, 2019): Churches, 929; membership, 353,763; population, 10,400,000.<sup>2</sup>

Dominican Union Conference is divided into various local fields: the Central Dominican Conference, which includes the national district and the municipality of West Santo Domingo in the province of Santo Domingo, as well as the province of San Cristóbal; the North Dominican Conference, which covers the seven provinces in the north of the country; the South Dominican Conference, which includes the nine provinces in the south; the East Dominican Conference, which includes the five provinces of the east; the Southeast Dominican Conference with the Santo Domingo province and the Monte Plata province; and the Northeast Dominican Conference, which includes the seven provinces in the northeast of the country.

Dominican Union Conference has six organizations that provide services: the Dominican Adventist University, located in Sonador, Bonao, along with its extension campus in Santo Domingo, the capital; the Dominican Fiduciary Association; the National Union of Adventist Schools, which is the umbrella organization for all Adventist schools in the country; the Vista del Jardín Adventist Medical Center; *Radio Amanecer*, a radio station with transmitters throughout the whole country; and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). At the end of 2018, Dominican Union Conference had 347,408 members in 1,372 congregations divided among 875 churches and 497 companies cared for by 148 ordained ministers.<sup>3</sup> The ratio of members per inhabitant is one Adventist for each 30 inhabitants of the country.

## Origins of the Organization

The Antillian Union Mission was organized in 1923 and covered most of the islands in the Caribbean. The growth of the church in these islands made it necessary to reorganize and create unions by country, leaving the Antillian Union Mission with only Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.<sup>4</sup> The growth of Adventism in this territory became a challenge for the leadership of the Antillian Union Mission, with headquarters in Río Piedra, Puerto Rico. Most of the growth was in the Dominican Republic (87,490 members), and each year there was a need for more help for this growing membership. This growth motivated the Inter-American Division administrators at the annual council on June 12, 1991, to vote the reorganization of the union so as to create the Dominican Union Mission. This union mission would consist of the Central Dominican Conference, the North Dominican Conference, and the missions: East Dominican and South Dominican. The Puerto Rican Union Conference would be composed of two conferences: East Puerto Rican Conference and West Puerto Rican Conference.<sup>5</sup> Two years later, on November 2, 1993, the Inter-American Division would accept the recommendation of the nominating committee to have Pastor Aristides González as the Dominican Union Mission president and Germán Lorenzo as secretary-treasurer.<sup>6</sup>

A year and a month later, the last meeting of the Antillian Union was held in the Dominican Republic on January 12-15, 1994. There the Inter-American Division's decision to reorganize the union was carried out. The first meeting of the Dominican Union Mission was held, having been organized with two conferences, two missions, and the Dominican Adventist University as its institution. The union was created with a membership of 87,490 meeting in 432 congregations, cared for by 107 pastors, of which 42 were ordained. There were 591 employees in the union, including teachers, secretaries, and others.<sup>7</sup>

## Organizational History

At the first session of the union in January 1994, the department heads were voted, with Pastor Orlando González as director of church ministries for the youth; Pastor Carlos Reyes as department head for Sabbath School and lay activities; Carlos Acosta as head of publishing, home and family, health and temperance; Professor Marino Contreras as head of education and religious liberty. Pastor Cami Bolívar Cruz was made director of ADRA International.

At the end of these meetings that set up the Dominican Union Mission, on Sabbath, the 15<sup>th</sup>, there was a solemn ceremony at the sports complex in Santo Domingo, with representatives from the membership throughout the country. Pastors Robert S. Folkenberg, president of the General Conference, and Israel Leito, president of the Inter-American Division, encouraged the members to support the newly elected leaders and to work for the growth of the church throughout the whole union. The service concluded with the baptism of several hundred persons.

The work of the Dominican Union Mission started in a rented facility at 58 Mexico Avenue in the Gascue sector of Santo Domingo. In the beginning the administrative board meetings were held in the offices of the Central Dominican Conference, in some nearby churches, and at the Adventist university in Sonador, Bonaó, as the rented facility did not have the space necessary for these meetings. A few months later a two-storey house was acquired at 1 Prolongación Fantino Falco, almost at the corner of Abraham Lincoln Avenue in the Piantini Sector, and this became the definitive location for the union offices where they are to this day.

Among the challenges that the new union leaders took on from the very beginning were the plans to establish a medical center, a national campsite, and a food factory.<sup>8</sup> At the first annual session of the administrative board held in the newly acquired location on November 28, 1994 they also proposed “the possibility of establishing a national radio station in order to spread the message to all parts of the country and so that the Dominican people could be blessed by Christian programming.”<sup>9</sup> The meetings lasted three days. By November 29, 1994 a committee had already been formed to study the operating costs of *Radio Amanecer*, the Central Dominican Conference’s radio station, with the idea that the cost would be shared by all four fields. The committee was to report its findings by February 1995.<sup>10</sup>

At first, the financial situation of the church in the Dominican Republic created a challenge for growth. Nevertheless, the General Conference had approved, in Bangalore, a certificated training course for the stewardship leaders. This course was adopted at the beginning of the new union’s operation as an intensive course for all the leaders of the union, to be held at the Adventist university. The decision was taken on February 3, 1994, by vote 94-28.<sup>11</sup> Later the Inter-American Division, at its mid-year meetings in 1994, voted to reaffirm the Personal Giving Plan Model for Inter-American, a program of education in stewardship that emphasized a format for regular offerings in addition to a faithful tithe, a format called 60 20 20, and a thanksgiving offering to be taken up once a year.<sup>12</sup> This program would change the history of the church’s financial situation in the Dominican Republic. At the union year-end meetings, it was voted to accept this plan and to establish a school of stewardship for the leadership of the church. The results were immediately evident.<sup>13</sup> Dominican Union Conference has seen growth in its offerings, and today it is one of the highest conferences in ratios of offerings to tithe.<sup>14</sup>

## Growth

The growth of Dominican Union Conference was evident from the very beginning, with a strong evangelistic program and growth of membership. The evangelistic thrust of the union leadership was carried out in the conferences and missions, and the focus on an evangelistic program that would reach every corner of the country created a contagious enthusiasm. In the first two years, the union had 20,233 new baptisms, surpassing their own goals for baptisms. At the same time, the new focus on stewardship and the schools to train its leaders in the 60 20 20 program, plus the yearly offering for special projects taken up on the third Sabbath in

December—all these gave a great boost to the finances of the union. These programs have continued and have permitted the union to reach and surpass all of its projected goals, including challenging ones like the huge one of making *Radio Amanecer* a national program, the establishment of a medical center, and the building of new churches each year.

Dominican Union Mission started with four local fields and the Adventist university as their institution. As soon as they began their work, the leaders took into account the obligation of the church to render service to the community, so the first institution that they added was ADRA.<sup>15</sup> They immediately formed an administrative board and proceeded to incorporate the organization legally as an NGO. Very soon ADRA began to show results, as it helped meet the needs in various regions. Among the other projects voted by the leadership was that of creating a national camp to serve the whole church. For this project, the union purchased property measuring 67,000 square meters in the community of San Felipe, Villa Mella.<sup>16</sup>

Because of the positive results of the fiduciary committee of the Central Dominican Conference, the leaders decided to create another organization to serve the church in the area of finances, thus giving birth to the Dominican Fiduciary Association, whose purpose was to serve as the “bank of heaven,” administering resources that would finance the union’s and the local fields’s projects. To this day the finance organization has been a vital support to the development of the local fields in providing resources for the building of churches, schools, and other projects. Together with the Dominican Fiduciary Association, which serves only the church projects, cooperative groups of workers in the fields were organized, giving greater solidity and functionality to the finances of the church employees.<sup>17</sup>

The Central Dominican Conference had its radio station, *Radio Amanecer*, which basically served only the city of Santo Domingo, on the 1570 AM frequency. The leaders saw the necessity of taking advantage of this radio resource to spread the gospel, to reach places where it was not easy to go in person, and it was decided to make this station one that would reach all parts of the country and would be managed by the union instead of the conference.<sup>18</sup> When this decision was taken, the name of the station was changed to *Radio Amanecer Internacional*.<sup>19</sup>

Later it was decided to expand, and the union bought the 610 AM frequency in Santiago.<sup>20</sup> In January of 1997, it was voted that the churches participate in supporting the radio station with 5 percent of their local funds. Also, the thanksgiving offering for that year was given to *Radio Amanecer* with the purpose of modernizing it and expanding its reach throughout the whole country. On December 4 of that year it was voted to purchase the frequency 1060 AM in San Pedro and later the frequencies 900 AM and 100.3 FM in the regions of the south. This newest frequency was the first FM station for *Radio Amanecer*, and as such, began to change the way the radio station expanded.

Some years went by, and technological changes were leaving the AM frequencies behind, and the church leadership did not hesitate to invest heavily in order to prevent *Radio Amancer* from being displaced in other

regions for lack of having FM frequencies. They began to look for a way to acquire an FM station in Santo Domingo, and so purchased 98.1 FM for the city. In July of 2011 they purchased FM 90.0 in Santiago, which could reach all of the territory of the North Dominican Conference and what was then the Northeast Dominican Mission. The leaders continued to work, and the Dominican Telecommunications Institute authorized *Radio Amanecer* to install emitters on 100.3 FM for the southern and eastern regions. Currently *Radio Amanecer* broadcasts on FM stations in the whole country, with 13 transmitters on 100.3 FM, on 90.9 for the whole north and northeast region, and on 98.1 for Santo Domingo, thus reaching almost all the country.<sup>21</sup> In this way Adventists are known throughout the whole Dominican Republic.

The publishing work arrived in the country before the church was even established. There has always been Adventist literature used in the growth of the church there. When the union was organized, the publishing work was run by each local field, obtaining the printed material and distributing it to individuals through the ministry of the printed word. The leadership of the church saw the necessity of institutionalizing this important area in order to give it the greatest reach and impact. It was then that the union organized its publishing department, and all the agencies of the local fields were brought under union management. This project began in July of 1996 and was consolidated a few years later.<sup>22</sup> Later, in an agreement of the union and the Inter-American Division, the publishing work in the Dominican Republic came to be a part of the division's publishing organization.

Among the projects voted right at the beginning of the union's existence was establishing a medical center that would serve the church and the community. Several years went by, and at the beginning of 2002, the first steps were taken in establishing a medical center.<sup>23</sup> A request was made to the Inter-American Division to approve the plans for carrying out the first phase. The next year the union took out a loan to finance the first phase of what is now the Vista del Jardín Adventist Medical Center, with the motto "Prevention, Healing, and Hope," which offers its services across from botanical gardens, something that influenced the choice of a name.<sup>24</sup> The medical services offered have continued to expand, and two other properties in the Los Ríos sector near the medical center were acquired. There they created a clinic called *Vida Sana*-- Healthy Living. At this clinic alternative medicine is provided as a means to healthy living. The union also acquired two properties on 27 de Febrero Avenue in the El Millón sector where there is a clinic for diagnosis and treatment.<sup>25</sup> Together with *Radio Amanecer*, the Vista del Jardín Adventist Medical Center gives the Adventist church a positive identity in the community.

The growth of the church did not cease. The constant growth in the number of members required new places to worship. Thanks to the implementation of the Personal Giving Plan that the division had provided to all the local fields of the church in the Dominican Republic, the weekly offerings grew as did the yearly thanksgiving offering. This made possible the expansion of *Radio Amanecer*, as well as the building of new churches. The radio station itself creates growth at all levels. It has become, as was its purpose, an institution of the union itself, and it gives out the message to all of the people in the Dominican Republic, who are benefited by its healthy Christian programs.

Today *Radio Amanecer* is the main evangelistic tool of Dominican Union Conference. It takes the Adventist message everywhere that radio waves can penetrate. Great evangelism series held at central locations in Santo Domingo are broadcast throughout the whole country. For example, the series “Our Hope Is Jesus,” given by Alejandro Bullón, was made possible by satellite transmission. The same thing happened with the series “The Three Americas for Christ,” with Gery Patzer. And some years later, the series “New Year, New Life,” given by Mark Finley, resulted in a marked growth in membership. The Adventist Church is present in all of the provinces of the country, and in some conferences, such as the East Dominican Conference, in all its municipalities.

As a result of this growth, the East Dominican Mission in 1997 changed its status from mission to conference.<sup>26</sup> The impact of the message in the capital also brought about the reorganization of the Central Dominican Conference. This created the Southeast Dominican Mission, which occupies the province of Santo Domingo with the exception of the municipality of West Santo Domingo and the province of Monte Plata.<sup>27</sup> The advances of evangelism in what was then the largest territory, the North Dominican Conference, brought about a reorganization that gave birth to the trial mission, the Northeast Dominican Mission.<sup>28</sup> This field occupies seven provinces—La Vega, San Francisco de Macoris, Bonaó, Cotuí, Salcedo, María Trinidad Sánchez, and Samaná.

To meet the challenge of bettering its services, Dominican Union Conference acquired a publishing house (*El Remanente*) with the purpose of providing the necessary literature for evangelism in its territory. They also established a vegetarian restaurant (Arvi II) to provide the employees of the union offices, as well as the local neighborhood, with vegetarian food. The restaurant was well accepted by its clients. In addition, an auto insurance service was created to insure the vehicles used by the workers and by Adventist institutions.

The growth of all the institutions of the church in the Dominican Republic has been possible thanks to the climate of religious liberty that we enjoy. The government has sometimes facilitated the building of churches and granted the Central Dominican Conference authority over the camp facility in Najayo, San Cristobal. Today the union has a modern camp facility built by the Dominican government.

The responsibility for the church educational system used to lie with the local conferences and missions. There had been efforts to improve Adventist education, but new regulations on the part of the government and the financial needs of an Adventist teacher—which often led them to accept invitations to work for the public sector where the positions were more financially rewarding—these things were eroding the stability of Adventist education. To face this challenge, the union decided to create an umbrella organization that would manage all the schools from the elementary level through the secondary. In this way the National Union of Adventist Schools was born, and it changed the picture of the Adventist educational system in the Dominican Republic.

The growth and maturing of the union as a whole motivated the leadership of the Inter-American Division to change the union’s status from union mission to union conference. Of the six local fields, four had achieved conference status. The existing institutions were moving forward adequately. A special session was called in order to carry out the change of status. This meeting took place in September 2012. Along with the growth of

the union, the two local fields that still had mission status were growing and developing. In January 2018 both the South Dominican Mission and the Northeast Dominical Mission changed status and became conferences.

Today Dominican Union Conference is made up of six conferences: Central Dominican Conference, North Dominican Conference, Southeast Dominican Conference, East Dominican Conference, South Dominican Conference, and Northeast Dominican Conference. Its institutions are: Dominican Adventist university, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), *Radio Amanecer* Vista del Jardín Adventist Medical Center, National Union of Adventist Schools, and grouped together in the Adventist Corporation of Industries and Services, the publishing house, the restaurant, and the insurance company.

The growth of the union in number of congregations and churches has been marked. When the union began, it had 432 congregations/churches; two years later it had 474. By 1997 the number was 858. At the end of 2001 there were 1,125, and by 2005 (the year the union mission became a union conference), 1,158. At the end of 2018, there were 1,338 congregation/churches. The membership when the union was organized was 87,486. By 1997 it had already grown to 93,911, by 2000 it was 127,108. At the time it became a union conference, membership was 284,789, and at the end of 2018 it was 319,421.

This growth has been possible because of a continuous program of evangelism that has produced many baptisms. In 1994 there were 7,296 new baptisms. At the end of 1997 there had been more than 10,000. In 2000 there were 17,386, and in both 2002 and 2003 baptisms were over twenty thousand yearly, reaching 21,001 and 28,356 respectively.

## What Needs to be Done

Dominican Union Conference still needs to strengthen its educational system and establish an Adventist presence in several municipalities in the South, Northeast and Southeast conferences. There are still a few regions where *Radio Amanecer* cannot reach because of limitations on radio coverage.

## List of Presidents

Aristides González (1994-1996); Pablo Perla (1996-2000); Cesario Acevedo Del Villar (2000-2018); Paulino Puello (2018-Present).

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## NOTES

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6. *Ibid.*, 93-140 and 93-141, November 8, 1993, 140-142.
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9. *Ibid.*, 94-42.
10. *Ibid.*, 94-104.
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21. Ibid., 96-153; 96-162, p. 153, 162.
22. Ibid., 02-010; 02-013.
23. Ibid., 03-051.
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26. Ibid., 96-207; 97-246, p. 249.
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