



Vida Sana Popayan headquarters.

Photo courtesy of Danilo Céspedes Rodríguez.

# Centro de Vida Sana (Healthy Lifestyle Center)

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## DANILO CÉSPEDES

Danilo Céspedes Rodríguez, B.A. (Colombia Adventist University Corporation, Medellín, Colombia) is the president and director of several ministries of South Pacific Mission in Colombia. He is also the legal representative of Centro de Vida Sana. He had previously served as a district pastor and field secretary in Pacific Colombian Conference. He has also completed master-level courses in family relations at Peruvian Union University in Lima, Peru.

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Centro de Vida Sana (*Healthy Lifestyle Center*), an Adventist wellness center in Colombia, officially opened its doors in 1999 and has continued to function and develop without interruption.

## Origins of the Institution

At the beginning of 1994, Robert and Elizabeth Chapman turned over a property by the name of Hacienda Buena Vista to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Colombia as a donation with the purpose of developing it into a project that would benefit humanity.<sup>1</sup> The leaders of the Adventist Church in Colombia immediately began work on a project for that property that would focus on preventative health and teaching the community the habits of healthy living – the eight natural remedies taught by the Adventist Church. The board of directors of the Union voted to create the Vida Sana Center and name its administration.<sup>2</sup>

The ceremony celebrating the official transfer of property was held on September 17, 1995. Dr. Álvaro Ordoñez was named its first director, and he faced the challenge of taking the first steps in organizing the new institution. He and his family moved from Bucaramanga to Popayán and then from there to the Hacienda Buenavista. The institution was originally named Vida Sana Buenavista Center, but was later renamed to Centro de Vida Sana. Locally, it is known as Vida Sana Popayán.<sup>3</sup>

In 1996, Pastor Enrique Duarte and his wife, Doctor Elvira Cubillos de Duarte, arrived at Vida Sana Popayán with their two daughters. With the arrival of Mrs. Sonia Gómez and her family, the institution began to focus on becoming a center to train missionaries. For this purpose, a nine-month seminar was created in which members of the Church from all over Colombia took part. The education was not formal, but it focused on practical living, the eight habits of health, and therapeutic massages, and it also included classes in public and personal evangelism and some theology classes.<sup>4</sup>

## General Information

Vida Sana Popayán is located in Colombia in the Cauca Department at Kilometer 6 on La Honda Road, the road that links the town of Popayán with the town of Timbío. This has been its location from its establishment up to the present day. The center has been in operation under the supervision of Colombian Union Conference starting in 1995, then the South Colombian Conference and Pacific Colombian Conference in 2008, and currently the South Pacific Mission starting in 2014.

The land that was donated consists of 43 hectares of which 26 are a natural forest, six are used for farming, and five are used for stables and open fields. Three hectares have buildings on them, and the last three hectares of property have roads and paths.

The Hacienda Buenavista still has its original home, which was remodeled to have ten rooms, each with a private bathroom. It has a kitchen, a living room, a dining room, an indoors open atrium, and a covered patio

that has been adapted to serve as a greenhouse. A second home has two bedrooms that share a bathroom with shower as well as two other rooms with private bathrooms and showers. A third house has two rooms, a kitchen, a dining room, and a private bathroom with shower. A fourth house with two bathrooms with showers has been converted into one large room with cots which is used as a dormitory for male students. Another separate building has two rooms which have been furnished with cots to serve as a dormitory for female students.

In 1998, a sanitarium was built to provide therapy rooms. Rooms were set up for the application of hydrotherapy treatments: hand treatments, foot treatments, Turkish baths, individual and group vapor treatments, and individual and group saunas. There are also rooms with sitz baths, tub baths, and a jacuzzi. The center provides treatments using medicinal clays and facial masks and offers therapeutic massages and general massage treatments. The building has a reception area and a series of bathrooms and showers.<sup>5</sup>

In 2014, the construction of a church with a capacity of 100 people began. It is planned to have a baptistry and will command a panoramic 250-degree view. At the time of this writing, its construction was 90 percent complete. In 2019, a one-story building was added to serve as the headquarters of South Pacific Mission. It has six offices, a main office, a conference room, and separate bathrooms for men and women.

In addition to these facilities is a restaurant with the capacity to serve 120 people and a bakery with its own store. The bakery has commercial quality equipment: an oven, mixers, and a bread slicer. The property also has an outdoor amphitheater that seats 1,000 people and a wooden meeting room that seats 60.

Originally, the bakery made whole-wheat bread to be used on campus. The restaurant was established to serve people on location, but it and the bakery have grown so much that they now serve people who come in from the community. The bakery has prepared whole-wheat bread, bread in loaves, bread for baking, olive bread, fig bread, cinnamon rolls, Colombian sweet bread, cheese bread, croissants, whole wheat rolls, toasted bread, peanut bars, granola, peanut butter, and whole chocolate.

The restaurant offers a fully vegan daily menu for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. These meals are prepared for the staff, students at the seminary, and administrators. On Sundays, the restaurant offers a varied vegetarian lunch menu alongside fast foods. The sanitarium has its own restaurant that serves a specialized menu.

The treatments provided by the center are based on the eight natural remedies, and the emphasis of the institution is preventative health education for students and for those who arrive for treatment and education.

The Vida Sana Popayán officially opened its doors in 1999 and has continued to function and develop without interruption. Its activities have served and benefited the general community, students, church leaders, and institutional leaders.<sup>6</sup> This project that had started with the arrival of missionary families has had a great impact on the community. The churches in the district have grown in all levels of Payanesa society. In 1995, the district of Popayán had six congregations; as of this writing, it has 18. The majority of these congregations received

support and influence from Vida Sana Popayán. The center has been visited by church members and friends at the national and international levels.

## Important Events

In 2009, the Colombian Union Conference turned over the center's administration to the Pacific Colombian Conference with headquarters in Cali. The Pacific Colombian Conference named Pastor Alejandro Francisco Atencia Medina its general director. Pastor Atencia led the center from 2009 to 2013, during which the center trained 350 young people. These people worked on the campus infrastructure and helped make the whole-grain bakery and the vegetarian restaurant commercially successful, which enabled the center to become self-sustaining. There were also positive results for missionary work in the various fields of Colombia. Although these numbers are only estimates, about 1,200 baptisms are believed to have taken place, and 13,000 people heard the health message during that time.

Starting in 2012, the property of Hacienda Buena Vista (now Centro de Vida Sana) was turned over to the South Pacific Mission, a field created from the restructuring of the Pacific Colombian Conference.<sup>7</sup> Teamwork over the following years resulted in the training of 720 young people in their Missionary Formation seminars. Some of these people trained at the center visited conferences in Colombia, the United States, and Ecuador, where they conducted missionary work with pastors and lay members. From this development, 600 souls were baptized, and approximately 5,000 people heard the Adventist health message. The students also helped to establish the churches Alfa y Omega, Jehová Jireh, Nueva Jerusalén, Buenavista, and Filadelfia in the city of Popayán.

## Future Plans

The mission of the Vida Sana Popayán is "to provide a better relationship with God through natural remedies that promote a healthy life." Their objective is for all who go to Vida Sana Popayán to leave with the conviction and attitude of putting into practice a better lifestyle which will influence their minds to enjoy a personal transformative relationship with God.

To improve the work of Vida Sana Popayán, cell phone service and Internet reception both require improvement. Also, the rooms in the hotel house need remodeling, and an outdoor restaurant and other facilities need to finish construction as described in the strategic plan for development.

## List of Directors

Álvaro Ordoñez (1995-1996); Enrique Duarte and Elvira de Duarte (1997-1998); Sonia Gómez (1999-2008); Aljandro Atencia Medina (20009-2013); Eladio Andrade (2014); Nicolás Bedoya (2015); Álvaro Orozco (2016); Oscar Minayo (2017-2021); Leonardo Benavidez (2022- ).

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## SOURCES

Colombian Union Conference Board of Directors. November 21, 1995. Folder 1995. Colombian Union Conference archives. Medellín, Antioquía, Colombia.

Colombian Union Conference Board of Directors. March 28, 1996. Folder 1996. Colombian Union Conference archives. Medellín, Antioquía, Colombia.

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## NOTES

1. Oscar Minayo Vargas, interviewed by author, Popayán, Cauca, Colombia, February 16, 2020.
2. Colombian Union Conference Board of Directors minutes, November 21, 1995, 61, Folder 1995, Colombian Union Conference archives.
3. Colombian Union Conference Board, March 28, 1996, 16, Folder 1996, Colombia Union Conference archives.
4. Oscar Minayo Vargas, interviewed by author, Popayán, Cauca, Colombia, February 16, 2020.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Alejandro Francisco Atencia Medina, interviewed by author, Popayán, Cauca, Colombia, February 25, 2020.

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