

# East Guatemala Mission

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The East Guatemala Mission's main office is located in the main city of Chiquimula, and it covers the whole east area of Guatemala.<sup>1</sup> Chiquimula is a department in east Guatemala. It shares borders on the north with the department of Zacapa, on the south with El Salvador and the department of Jutiapa, on the east with the Republic of Honduras, and on the west with the departments of Jalapa and Zacapa. This area of Guatemala is known as the "Pearl of the East."<sup>2</sup>

East Guatemala is characterized by a variable climate and areas formed by wide plains, such as in Zacapa, Jutiapa, Jalapa, El Progreso, and Chiquimula, while other areas, such as those of Jalapa, Chiquimula, and Jutiapa that form part of the famous Sierra de las Minas, have extensive forests.

The territory of East Guatemala Mission is rich in culture and native languages, such as Chorti, Xinca, Poqoman, Ladina Parada, and Ladina.<sup>3</sup> However, these cultures also all speak Spanish. Through this, the gospel has reached them, transforming them by the precepts and commandments of God.

East Guatemala Mission is composed of 141 churches where 42,562 members congregate. It has three ordained ministers and nine licensed ministers. The mission's headquarters is located at 5-66 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Zone 1, Chiquimula, Guatemala. East Guatemala Mission is a part of Guatemala Union Mission and is located in the territory of the Inter-American Division.<sup>4</sup>

## Institutions

Amanecer Private Co-Educational Adventist School is located at 9-81 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Zone 1, Chiquimula, Guatemala. The members of Chiquimula Central Adventist Church in 1985, among whom were Orfelinda Villela, Rudy Espino, and Belismel Chichilla, perceived the need to start an Adventist school and impart the gospel in this manner. It began as a preschool and elementary school. Over time, it expanded and currently offers three preschool levels, six primary grades, and the secondary level. The personnel consists of 14 employees, of which 12 are teachers and two are administrative and service personnel.<sup>5</sup>

Redención School is located at 3-11 14<sup>th</sup> Alley, Zone 2, Colonia Villa Lorena of Villa de Quezaltepeque, Chiquimula, Guatemala. It officially began operations in January 1996 with preschool and elementary levels, five teachers, and 72 students under the leadership of Professor Eliseo Albanés. To build the school, the youth

group named "Maranatha" gave a worthy donation, which, in addition to the members' offerings and support from the mission, made construction of the school's building possible. The personnel comprises 17 employees, of which 14 are teachers and three are administrative and service personnel.<sup>6</sup>

El Sinaí School was established in 1975 and located at 2-32 First Diagonal, Zone 1, Ipala, Chiquimula. The school began in two rooms that belonged to the church. Years later, Brother Juan Girón felt the desire to share his belongings and donated a property next to the church, where a warehouse and classrooms were built. In 1994, the school began offering the secondary level. In 2016, the school was rebuilt at the initiative of East Guatemala Mission. In 2017, a property was purchased, which allowed for the expansion of school facilities. Thanks to God, in 2019, the school had three preschool levels, six primary grades, three secondary grades, and the full preparatory level. The personnel comprises 13 teachers and three administrative and service personnel.<sup>7</sup>

Moria School officially began operations in 1980 with 50 students, and it offered the preschool and primary levels in the facilities of Jalapa Central Church at 0-84 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, Zone 2, Barrio San Francisco, Jalapa. As time passed, necessary changes were made to broaden services and offer secondary and preparatory levels. In 2016, all the facilities of the school were remodeled. Thanks to God, as of 2019, the school had 408 students, three preschool levels, six primary grades, and complete secondary and preparatory levels. The personnel is made up of 24 people, of which 18 are teachers and six are administrative and service personnel.<sup>8</sup>

A Youth Camp is located in Aldea San Isidro, Zone 0, El Morro Sector, 8224 José TR, Ipala, Chiquimula. It was officially inaugurated on September 2, 2018. It consists of nine hectares of land, six of which were donated by Brother Mynor Martínez, two of which were purchased by East Guatemala Mission, and one of which was purchased by Guatemala Union Mission. The facilities consist of a gymnasium with fine gravel around it, a kitchen, a warehouse, a house for the caretaker, two bathroom facilities (one for women and one for men), 28 showers (14 for women and 14 for men), a soccer field with fine gravel, a camping area, a generous parking area, a swimming pool, a garden, and ten cottages.<sup>9</sup>

Adventist Medical Clinic started as an idea to create a medical clinic to impact the community in 2017. The field president transmitted the idea to the elders of the churches throughout the mission. After prayer and organization, and with unconditional support from members, the decision was made to build the medical clinic as a part of the mission headquarters' facilities since its location was strategic and accessible. On February 20, 2017, after receiving donations from church members, construction of the clinic started. Other special donations came in from church members, employees, and ADRA. The medical clinic was inaugurated on September 1, 2018, with Pastor Elie Henry, president of the Inter-American Division, and the administrators of Guatemala Union Mission present. After eight months, to the glory of God, the clinic has become well known and has taken care of 800 patients with whom the message of hope has also been shared in prayer and through giving them the message of salvation.<sup>10</sup>

## Origins of Church in East Guatemala Mission Territory

Jalapa, Chiquimula, and Zacapa are among the first departments in the territory of East Guatemala Mission in which the Adventist message entered. In 1919, Oscar Colman and Huberto Rodríguez, Adventists from Puerto Barrios, Izabal, arrived in Jalapa with a special mission. They began to teach various people about the love of God and the doctrines of the Adventist Church. In time, nine people gave their lives to Christ through baptism. Sometime later, Pastor Enrique Larabee arrived in Jalapa from the United States and formed a friendship with Juan Castañaza, teaching him new ways to plant crops. Pastor Larabee brought seeds for crops that did not yet exist in Jalapa. One day, Juan, intrigued by Pastor Larabee's kindness, asked him why he was so kind. Pastor Larabee commented that he was a member of a church that taught him to help his neighbors. Juan wanted to know more about that, as he liked to help young people who wanted to get ahead. In this way, they started to study the Bible. After some time, Juan was baptized along with his brothers.

Pastor Larabee, with his wife, Berenice, and Brother Juan, began to work with the González family, who lived in Aldea La Fuente, and the Gómez family, who lived in Aldea Los Llanitos. Each family had four members.

Around 1930, the first Adventist church in Jalapa was built out of wood in Barrio Chipilapa with a room in which to teach Christian classes to children. Years later, Pastor Orley Ford and his wife joined this evangelistic work.<sup>11</sup>

In 1933, Pastor Ford continued to preach the gospel in Chiquimula. He conducted an evangelistic campaign in Barrio el Molino that lasted for two months, and, as a result, seven people were baptized into the faith of Christ. Among the first Adventist members were Dolores Morales and her husband in Chiquimula; Juan Coronado in San Diego, Zacapa; and, in Palo Blanco, Manuel Romero, father of Guillermo Romero, currently one of the oldest living Adventist members in Chiquimula.<sup>12</sup> Belarmina González Cortez, who was born in 1919, was baptized into the Adventist Church on June 26, 1937.<sup>13</sup>

In 1933, Juan Castañaza began studying the Bible on his own, and he was baptized in 1935. It is interesting to note that, before he was baptized, he prepared 11 others, who were baptized on the same day he was.<sup>14</sup> According to Cristóbal Castañaza, son of Juan Castañaza, the first Adventist members in the east of Guatemala were Anastasio Reyes and Marcos Salazar.<sup>15</sup>

In 1952, Dinecio Portillo originally from Tierra Colorada, Chiquimula, took the message to the municipality of Ipala. There, Bruno Girón received the message with his wife and two children. They then gave the message of salvation to Juna Girón, who was influential in the Adventist work in Ipala. He and his wife started preaching the Adventist message in San Luis, Jilotepeque, Jalapa, in 1956. Some members from San Luis took the Adventist message to the inhabitants of the municipality of San Diego, Zacapa. The members from Ipala took the message to Las Cruces, Ipala, currently one of the largest congregations in that area. Consecutively, they took the message to Villa de Quezaltepeque, Chiquimula. God used and continues to use the members of the church to preach the gospel in the East Guatemala Mission territory.<sup>16</sup>

In 1955, something new happened in Chiquimula – an evangelistic campaign in a tent. Those in charge were Pastors Iván Ruiz, Alvarado Monzón, and Francisco Claros.<sup>17</sup>

## Organization of East Guatemala Mission

In 1997, Central American Union Conference led by Pastor Otoniel Perla and the Guatemala Mission's administrators, Pastor Oswaldo Magaña as president, Pastor Mario Calderón as secretary, and Silas Martínez as treasurer, presented a plan to divide the geographic area so that the work of the gospel in Guatemala could be better supervised and organized.<sup>18</sup> They decided to create two trial missions in the east and in the west of the country. In June 1997, the East Guatemala trial mission was organized.<sup>19</sup>

On June 2, 1999, the organization of East Guatemala Mission was approved with 95 churches, 24,745 members, and a population of 3,158,016. Its territory covered the departments of Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz, Chiquimula, El Progreso, Izabal, Jalapa, Jutiapa, Petén, and Zacapa. Its president was Pastor Mario Augusto Calderón, and the secretary-treasurer was Manuel Antonio Lazo Melgar. Its headquarters were located in Santa Cruz, Río Hondo, Zacapa, Guatemala.<sup>20</sup>

This action was registered in the minutes of the Inter-American Division with a vote that says:

Guatemala Mission: Territorial Adjustment

Voted: To accept the recommendation of the territorial study committee to approve the readjustment of the territory of the Guatemala Mission into three fields: the Central Guatemala Mission, the East Guatemala Mission, and the West Guatemala Mission, subject to the results of the 1998 audit and the first quarter of 1999. If finances permit, in place of the three missions, there will be two missions and a conference. After the audit, the administration of the division will review the financial state of the entities and take a final decision. The territorial readjustment will be carried out from June 2-5 of 1999.<sup>21</sup>

In 2003, due to the growth of the gospel in East Guatemala Mission and in order to give better care to the membership, the field president, Pastor Jaime Torres, proposed the division of the mission to create North Guatemala Mission. The initiative was approved in 2006. At that time, there were nine schools, 115 teachers, 21 colporteurs, seven ordained pastors, 11 licensed pastors, and 31 theology students among 23 districts. After the readjustment, there were 26,248 members and 95 churches in East Guatemala Mission, whose territory included the departments of Chiquimula, Zacapa, Jalapa, Jutiapa, and El Progreso, which comprised the districts of Quezaltepeque, La Calera, Central Jalapa, Pinula, Altupe, San Yuyo, San Luis, Santa Catarina, Chiquimula I, Chiquimula II, Zacapa, El Porvenir, and Las Cruces.<sup>22</sup>

The reorganization of East Guatemala Mission was carried out. It was voted to request Central American Union Conference to reorganize East Guatemala Mission into two fields, North Guatemala Mission and East Guatemala

Mission, effective January 1, 2003.<sup>23</sup> This initiative was approved by the Inter-American Division during its mid-year session on May 15, 2006. It was voted to accept the report from the territorial study committee on the readjustment of East Guatemala Mission into two local fields, North Guatemala Mission with headquarters in San Benito, Petén, and East Guatemala Mission with headquarters in Santa Cruz, Zacapa.<sup>24</sup>

## Strategies to Complete the Mission

1. To motivate through prayer and the teachings of the Holy Scriptures all pastors and church members to fully commit themselves to God and to experience a true revival.
2. To encourage each church member to commit to preaching the gospel message.
3. To enter areas of the mission where there is no Adventist presence as pastors train and motivate leaders to fulfill the great commission given by Jesus Christ.
4. To continue preaching the gospel through the written word via colporteurs and to motivate students who take Bible classes and receive Christ as their personal savior.
5. To access people on medical days while treating health concerns and to access people at evangelistic meetings.
6. To make the Adventist Church known through the medical clinic as it gains patients' confidence and invites them to receive Bible studies.

## Recent Events

The geographic area of the field is vulnerable to droughts in the *Corredor Seco* area, and there is a high level of illiteracy in the field. Members are mostly involved in agriculture and businesses related to the sale of agricultural products, and therefore depend a great deal on receiving rain in the area. In 2018, the area was impacted by several natural disasters, which caused a scarcity in crops, bringing as a consequence less access to food and resources necessary to survive.<sup>25</sup> With thanks to God, the mission was able to survive this crisis.

## What is Still Needed

East Guatemala Mission has great challenges. The main one is to reach the villages and 15 municipalities that the Adventist message has not yet reached.

1. Strengthen in our members the knowledge of the Word of God and its principles.

2. Fortify a spiritual awakening in church members and all pastors.
3. Improve the financial aspect of the field and hire more pastors and Bible workers to serve members in a more personal way and work together to spread the message of salvation.
4. Instruct pastors to help members be faithful to God in witnessing and stewardship.
5. Preach the message of salvation in the municipalities where it has not yet been heard.
6. Work through the program of ministry of reconciliation to attract members who left the church. In the last four years, 9,850 members changed from active to inactive status.<sup>26</sup>

## List of Presidents

Mario Augusto Calderón Miranda (1997-2001); Sergio Efraín Miranda Lemus (2001-2002); Jaime Eduardo Torres (2001-2009); José Otoniel Trujillo (2010-2013); José Román Monroy Villela (2014-2018); José Guillermo Solís Mayorga (2019- ).

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