

Stahl, Ferdinand Anthony (1874–1950)

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Ferdinand Stahl and his wife, Ana, served for many years as tireless missionaries among the indigenous people in Bolivia and Peru. If there is a missionary couple for which Peru is known in Adventism worldwide, it is Ferdinand and Ana Stahl.

Early Years

Ferdinand Anthony Stahl, German citizen, was born on January 3, 1874, in Pentwater, Michigan, United States. He had a difficult childhood, since he did not know parental love. His father died when he was eight months old and his stepfather mistreated him, forcing him to flee his home when he was ten years old. He did not return until his prayer of a child was answered: "Lord, make me strong so that I can hit my stepfather." That day he went home, sat down to eat, rolled his sleeves up to show his biceps, and saw that his father cringed, so he decided to abandon the plan that had been troubling him for years.¹ Ana Christina Carlson was born November 27, 1870 to a Lutheran family in Sweden.²

Education and Marriage

When Ferdinand was nineteen and Ana twenty-two they got married in a simple civil ceremony, with no gifts or relatives present. They met at a restaurant in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Ana was the waitress and Ferdinand a customer who received food services three times a day. At the time, Ferdinand was a store manager and studied at night.³ Later their first daughter, Frena, was born.

After being married for nine years, the Stahls met Nelson Hubbert, an Adventist canvasser. That contact convinced Ferdinand, who was 28 years old, that he should quit smoking. Then Nelson introduced Mrs. J. N. Anderson to give them Bible studies, and later James Campbell was father of one of the vice-presidents of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

At the beginning Ferdinand was reluctant to agree to study the Bible because of the hypocrisy of his stepfather, who used to read the Scriptures every day, however badly he was mistreated.⁴ Finally, he agreed to study and later started keeping the Sabbath; later such a decision made him lose his job.

Motivated by their new Adventist friends, the Stahls started their nursing course in Madison, Wisconsin, and then continued their studies at the Battle Creek Sanitarium, Michigan. Furthermore, influenced by worldwide missionary fervor in Adventism in the late 1890s and early 1900s, and by nursing courses with a missionary vision, the Stahls left the world's first Adventist institution focused on fulfilling the mission of preaching the gospel.

The First Mission: Ohio

After graduating in nursing, Ferdinand dreamed of donning his white apron and being in an operating room in order to watch doctors performing a surgery. Some years later they made him a proposal to take over a health post in Cleveland, Ohio, which belonged to the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Although Ana had not completed the nursing course, the health post offered to give her the credits of the two classes she could not attend due to the work in the



Ferdinand and Ana Stahl.
Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day
Adventists Archives.

rooms in Cleveland.⁵

When they arrived in Cleveland, they found sloppy environments and in addition, the rent had not been paid due to lack of patients. The Battle Creek Sanitarium asked whether the couple wanted to fix the situation and manage it. With the Stahl's hard work, the place was soon changed, and they became owners of that health center⁶ They were so successful in managing the place that they soon bought another house, which was 63 kilometers away from where they lived. As the time went by, that house became a sanitarium.⁷ Then a child was born to them, whom they named Wallace.

The Second Mission: Bolivia

Ferdinand felt that his mission should extend abroad. So, he wrote a letter to Ellen G. White saying that he wanted to go to the most difficult place in the world. His first option could be Madagascar, and the second, the Inca Indians of South America.⁸

The Stahls started to study Spanish and French. In the meantime, Ellen's response was that they should attend the Congress of the General Conference in Washington, D.C. (May 13 to June 6, 1909), to offer their services to the brethren there. They submitted their plans to the will of the Lord,⁹ and thus they attended the Congress with their seven trunks and a barrel. After talking to some Adventist leaders, the Stahl's decided to accept the proposal of the president of the Adventist work in South America, Joseph W. Westphal. They proposed to pay for their own trip because the South American church had no resources.¹⁰

On June 26, 1909, the Stahls, accompanied by Pastor Eduardo Thomann, left New York to the port of Mollendo, in Peru. Then they passed through Arequipa, Puno, and finally, La Paz, Bolivia, on a trip that lasted 20 days.¹¹ In Ferdinand's first visits to the Bolivian people, in Cochabamba and Quillacollo, he was accompanied by Thomann.

Then, he continued his journey alone, wanting to spread the Adventist message. Traveling on horseback and with two pack mules, he visited the tropical region of Bolivia. His first missionary enterprise was to sell Bibles, books, and magazines, in addition to medical work. The Stahl family worked with rich and poor. His entire family was involved in missionary work. Ana assisted women, indigenous children, and took care of sick people from wealthy families in Bolivia and abroad. Her daughter Frena, with a happy and spirited temperament, visited homes taking special interest in children. After learning the indigenous language, Wallace also participated in this enterprise as interpreter. They worked in Bolivia for almost two years, until 1911, visiting mining, tropical, and highland areas.¹²

The Third Mission: the Puno Highlands

The Stahl's third mission point was in the Puno highlands, from 1911 to 1918. In September 1910, along with the president of Misión Peruana (Peru Mission), Alvin Nathan Allen, Ferdinand visited for a week Manuel Z. Camacho, who had gathered many of his neighbors. On that occasion Pastor Allen baptized fifteen people, including Camacho.

As Stahl and Allen left the village, more than a hundred people accompanied them for almost a league carrying flags. Many tears were shed when they parted from them, and so the people asked them to return soon.¹³ This touched Ferdinand's heart, and then he asked the Board of Directors of the South American Union Mission to exempt him from his presidential position in Bolivia to be able to live among the indigenous people on the other side of Lake Titicaca, in Platería.¹⁴

Saturday, May 27, 1911, was an unforgettable day, said the president of Unión Sudamericana (South American Union Mission), Joseph W. Westphal.¹⁵ Seven days before, the entire Stahl family had arrived, accompanied by Westphal and Allen, to live among the inhabitants of Platería. That Sabbath morning 29 believers were baptized. In the afternoon the second SDA church was organized in Peru, with 46 members: 29 newly baptized and 15 who had been previously baptized, with Ferdinand and Ana. He was chosen as the elder of that church and Brother Camacho as a deacon.¹⁶

In the following days Camacho's house in Utawilaya, Platería, was the starting point of the mission. The Stahls' missionary work began in the health-education area. Observing the precarious way of life of their new neighbors (drunkards, coca leaf consumers, lack of hygiene, etc.), they concluded that these bad habits had extremely degraded the indigenous people, affecting their organism.¹⁷ One of the first things they taught was personal care, organizing hygiene classes for groups of fifteen or thirty people.¹⁸

In all places they visited, they healed the sick, extracted teeth, performed minor surgeries, and above all, they taught how to prevent diseases. On the other hand, the educational work that they carried out from the first official Adventist school, in 1911, spread throughout the Peruvian highlands. The Stahls' missionary work in the Peruvian highlands was not easy. It was full of threats, opposition, and there was no religious freedom among the Aymara people and the Quechua speakers. Despite that, the evangelistic results were flattering.

At the end of his stay in Puno, at the GC Congress, the so-called "apostle of the indigenous" reported the baptism of 500 believers in one year, a membership of 2,075 people in the highlands, and the operation of 46 missionary schools, of which 45 were directed by teachers trained in Platería.¹⁹ Unfortunately, even though Ferdinand was the first president of Misión del Lago Titicaca (Lake Titicaca Mission), the Stahls had to leave Puno for health reasons.

The Fourth Mission: Peru Mission

After attending to the Adventist World Congress in San Francisco, United States, from March 29 to April 14, 1918, and taking a few months of vacation, the Stahls returned to the land of the Inca Empire. This time they settled in the capital of Peru, Lima. Within 1920 and 1921 the Stahls collaborated with Peru Mission before their trip to central Peru. In July 1921 Stahl toured the north of the country, leaving the seed that would sprout with the presence of other missionaries.²⁰

The Fifth Mission: Ceja de Selva Central (Brow Forest in Central Peru)

On July 3, 1921, the board of directors approved the Stahls' trip to central Peru to investigate the opportunities for evangelistic work in that area.²¹ Stahl began his fifth mission point at the Brow Forest in Central Peru. He started his tour in Chanchamayo, being accepted by some Asháninkas and Yáneshas families²² Thanks to Ferdinand's report, the Inca Union Mission requested the South American Division, in November, to allocate funds for the establishment of a mission station.²³

In August 1922 the Stahls moved to the Brow Forest, creating the Metrado Mission Station and others. The work among the *campas* is well related by Alejandro Bullón. The title of his book summarizes Stahls' missionary work among the *campas*: *Él nos amaba* (He loved us). The "apostle of the *campas*," as he was called, had a "clean," "heroic," and "admirable" missionary adventure. Stahl's heroism was not fueled by applause or interest; it was a lonely, selfless, and disinterested heroism.²⁴

The Sixth Mission: Upper Amazon Mission of Peru

Before starting the next mission point, the GC invited the Stahl family to go to Europe to tell about their missionary actions across the old continent. They visited France, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Austria, Italy, and Sweden.²⁵

After this trip the Stahls' sixth missionary destination was the Amazon River, specifically Iquitos, and the area of influence along the rivers. This new missionary episode required a new team of collaborators, as follows: William Schaefflers and his family, Henry and Bárbara Westphal, and Ricardo and Georgiana Hayde. National workers such as Bernabé, Carmen and Raúl Chávez, Juan Ramos and Rufino Pacho also helped²⁶ The work of the Stahls in the Peruvian jungle represented an effort in the areas of health, education, and above all, spiritual hope, which were shared through their lives and preaching.

In 1927 Ana started a small maternity home that operated for almost thirty years. It was the beginning of the present Clínica Adventista Ana Stahl (Ana Stahl Adventist Clinic). The UI supported the purchase of the land for the offices and residences of the future mission. In 1938 H. B. Lundquist reported to the congress of the UI that due to Pastor Stahl's state of health, no new construction work had been started, but once it did, it was firmly established²⁷ In 1939 Pastor Stahl was persuaded to leave the mission field and return to his country as a retiree.

Later Years

In the Christian life, there is no retirement for the preaching of the gospel. That's what Ferdinand said when he returned to his country. The Stahls lived for a short time in Paradise, California, but their missionary restlessness did not allow them to stay at home. They moved to a community of Klamath Indians in Northern California.²⁸

There, with very good intentions, the Stahls began their medical work. But exhaustion stood in their way. They made all efforts, but Ana convinced Ferdinand to return home. Subsequently, he pastored a church near his home, in Oroville. He spent his last days under the care of Ana and his daughter, Frena. He died on November 30, 1950, at the age of 76. Ana Stahl died on October 5, 1968.

Legacy

The story of the Stahl couple shows seven different areas of evangelistic work. Their lives were attentive to the cry of those in need of physical and, especially, spiritual health. They lived for the mission. When Ferdinand finished his work in the Puno highlands, he decided to share his experiences in a book, which he titled *En el país de los Incas* (In the country of the Incas) and completed in 1919.

Almost at the end of the book he exhorted:

May the Spirit of God impel many young men and women to abandon their worldly ambitions and consecrate their lives to God, going to these needy fields, among people who have never heard the beautiful story of the cross. May the Lord move those who cannot go, to give generously the resources entrusted to them, so that the work of the gospel may progress.... Continue the work with these children of Christ who are in darkness.²⁹

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NOTES

1. Later, his mother married again, but this time to a church elder who would read the Bible in a solemn voice for the family every day. The young widow had probably thought that this devoted man would be a good father to her baby, but he was not! All the favors were for the younger stepbrothers and all the blows were for Ferdinand. Barbara Westphal, *Ana Stahl of the Andes and Amazon*, Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1960, 8.?
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3. *Ibid.*, 9-11.?
4. *Ibid.*, 12-13.?
5. *Ibid.*, 19-20.?
6. *Ibid.*, 20.?
7. Don F. Neufeld, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia M-Z*, second revised edition, Commentary Reference Series, Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996, 540.?
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9. *Idem.*?
 10. *Ibid.*, 22.?
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 12. Ferdinand A. Stahl, *In the Land of the Incas* (Brushton, NY: TEACH Services, [c. 1918] 2006), 68-104; Ferdinand A. Stahl, "Usando la cuña en Bolivia" [Using the wedge in Bolivia], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], December 1909: 12-13; Ferdinand A. Stahl, "Una expedición minera" [A mining expedition], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], December 1912: 10-11.?
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 17. Fernando A. Stahl, *En el país de los Incas* [In the country of the Incas], Lima: Editorial South American Spanish Publishing House - Peru Branch, 2006, 87.?
 18. *Ibid.*, 93.?
 19. Barbara Westphal, *Ana Stahl of the Andes and Amazon*, Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1960, 70.?
 20. Ferdinand A. Stahl, "Orando por luz" [Praying for light], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], July 1921: 9-10.?
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