

Yovan, Juan B. (1895–1981)

MARY GRACE LADION-DE GUZMAN

Mary Grace Ladion-De Guzman taught at Lipa Adventist Academy for eleven years, the first established academy within the territory of South Central Luzon Conference. She is a licensed science teacher and holds a master's degree in Science Education. She is particularly interested in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education and staff development. Her husband, Marlon De Guzman, is a senior auditor for the South Central Luzon Conference. They have two children. Guzman is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Education with a specialization in Curriculum and Instruction from the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies.

Juan B. Yovan was a literature evangelist, preacher, and church leader.

Early Life, Education and Marriage

Juan B. Yovan was born on May 18, 1895,¹ in the Philippines. As a young man, he joined the United States Army and became a non-commissioned officer assigned in Zamboanga, a city in the island of Mindanao, prior to his conversion to Adventism.² There are no available written records about his early life.

No existing records on Yovan's educational training currently can be found.

Jovan married Alejandra Cabuay Jovan, who was born on April 26, 1908, and shared his passion to serve in the ministry. On November 30, 1930, Juan Jovan and Alejandra Cabuay tied the knot. The marriage was blessed with seven children: one son and six daughters--Philip, Madjelia, Jilpn and Ritlyn (twins), Larin, Rose, and Victory³

Alejandra dedicated most of her time to supporting her husband's ministry and taking care of their children. In 1930, she served as a Bible worker in Northern Luzon Mission (NLM) for two years and temporarily stopped to care for their growing children. It was only in 1948, when Victory was already two years old, that she returned to work as a teacher at Mapandan church school. She served the school for two years.

Ministry

Yovan started his denominational ministry as a literature evangelist or colporteur in the Hawaiian Mission from January 1923 to December 1924. His work there was marked by success.⁴ In February 1926, he was called back to serve in the Philippines at NLM as an evangelist. He soon engaged in many tent efforts to proclaim the gospel in NLM territory. One tent effort he conducted at Pozorrubio, Pangasinan, was marked by blessing and challenges. He described how the first nine nights of the tent meeting were pelted with stones by those who opposed his preaching. This resulted in fewer attendees. However, he recalled this as a blessing from God since they still had an audience of more than 100. As the nightly meetings came to a close, the program gained audiences ranging from two to three hundred.⁵ He believed that challenges were used by God to richly bestow

His blessings.

In June 1929, his work in NLM was temporarily halted when he was called to work again in the Hawaiian Mission from July 1929 to October 1930 as a colporteur. W. E. Atkin identified Yovan's work with remarkable sales. He sold several hundreds of dollars each month, resulting in book orders of more than \$1,200 when December came. He started with a \$168 order in January of that year. With persistence and love for the ministry, his deliveries were usually 100%, reaching the goal at the end of the year.⁶

When NLM called him back again to serve as an evangelist in January 1931, he stayed until September 1935. After serving NLM for four years, he answered the call to work in East Java Mission in Indonesia to share his experiences in the literature ministry with other gospel workers in the Mission from October 1935 to September 1936. His love for the printed ministry can be seen in all his efforts including his genuine support to other colporteurs in the area that also strengthened them. The colporteurs were among the forerunners of the gospel work in the area. They were one of the sources of church inspiration especially during meeting reports when many souls were added to the church due to the selfless efforts of literature distribution.⁷

After a year in Java, he returned to the Philippines in November 1936, resuming his responsibility as an evangelist in NLM. One unforgettable experience he had as an evangelist was the casting out of the evil spirit from a young girl in Malasiqui, Pangasinan. It was a Sabbath, and many non-Adventist visitors had come to the church. The girl was also brought to the church as her family sought help. The girl looked pale because, for 10 days, the evil spirit did not allow her to eat. Yovan felt that this situation was to test the Adventist faith. Through a careful seeking of the grace of God and protection and calling upon the name of Jesus Christ, who has the power to cast demons, finally the evil spirit left the girl. Later, many who witnessed this event, including the girl's uncle and cousin, were baptized and joined the church.⁸ His work in NLM ceased temporarily in January 1939 when he was called to serve as an associate director in South-Central Luzon Mission (SCLM) in the Southern Tagalog area⁹.

As soon as Yovan assumed his responsibility in SCLM in February 1939, he readily offered his support to the colporteurs. A former colporteur leader, Brother Cudanin, conducted a tent effort in Malusak, east of Tayabas, Quezon, and he encountered severe opposition. After he had preached for a few nights, a typhoon came, destroying the tent he had erected. He set it up again only to be devastated by the next typhoon. However, he did not lose his determination. Instead, he put up the tent again, and this time, opposition came from a different Christian denomination. While he was preaching, they were also erecting their tent so they could preach, intending to disrupt the gospel work. This drew the attention of many people, including prominent locals!¹⁰

To defend the truth from the demeaning argument of the opposition, Brother Cudanin agreed to resolve the conflict with a debate.¹¹ Debate, during his time, was among the means of propagating the gospel work in this mission field. Many were converted to the Adventist belief earlier through debate.¹² As the people listened between two parties, they learned that the Adventist beliefs were grounded from the Bible truths, and the truth

prevailed. The gospel work progressed resulting in the erection of a chapel.¹³

Moreover, to empower the colporteurs, a colporteur institute was conducted at Isabang, Tayabas, from January 12 to 21, 1940, by Pastor R. G. Campbell, the field missionary secretary of the Philippine Union Mission (PUM). Thirty-one colporteurs joined the training, and their passion for God's work was re-ignited.¹⁴ This was among the efforts conducted in the SCLM territory that brought success to the gospel work. Yovan reported that a company of believers was added monthly to the Mission membership because lay workers, colporteurs, and teachers worked together in sowing seeds of truth in the area.¹⁵ Though Yovan only stayed for two years in SCLM, he was always remembered by the church members as their "third mission president."¹⁶ He left SCLM in February 1941 for another call of duty.

From March 1941 to August 1946, Yovan was sent to Mindanao Mission to serve as a district leader. The years 1941 to 1945 were war years (World War II), and some of the mission work of PUM was halted. Office buildings and churches were burned and destroyed when Japanese troops attacked Manila.¹⁷ The gospel work seemed halted as people hid from one place to another, escaping the cruelty of the rampaging enemies. However, despite the tumult of war, church membership continued to grow. Before the war in 1940, the church membership in Mindanao Mission was only 3,318. At the end of the war in 1946, it had grown to 3,843.¹⁸

Though churches were burned down or bombed, the brethren did not allow this to hinder their regular Sabbath meetings. When the liberation came, they built a small, temporary shelter for church meetings. When Elder W. B. Riffel visited Mindanao Mission after the liberation between February and March 1946, he found Yovan getting himself ready for a tent effort happening within the week in Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur.¹⁹

In September 1946, after five years and six months serving Mindanao Mission, Yovan returned to NLM and served as a pastor-evangelist. It was a time of a new beginning after the war. Churches, Missions, and Unions were reorganized and rehabilitated. His services as a church leader and evangelist under the denomination ended in July 1953. He suffered from a health issue that caused his disability to do active labor.²⁰ He spent most of his years serving the Lord in NLM as an evangelist. He served the denomination for 29 fruitful years.

Later Life

After retirement, he made himself available for church services despite his failing health. He continued to encourage the Church in the best way he could. On May 14, 1960, he joined the leaders of NPUM, NLM, and nearby church members in the dedication service for the new church building in Dagupan City, Pangasinan.²¹

On January 1, 1981, he breathed his last and joined those ahead of him who are waiting for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. After three years, on February 20, 1983, Alejandra rested with him.

Contribution

Yovan was one of the pioneering missionaries in his time who actively worked in various places through printed literature. He was also a contributor/writer of the *Far Eastern Division Outlook* magazine. His passion for the literature ministry impacted many lives both in the Philippines and abroad. Many heard the good news of Jesus Christ through his tent efforts and literature ministry.

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