

Sosa y Sosa, Pedro Javier (1913–2010)

BYRON OMAR BATZ

Byron Omar Batz, an Adventist from birth, is a church elder and works with the communication departments of several church fields in Guatemala. He was educated in Adventist schools and is married to Claudia Rodas and has two daughters.

Pedro Javier Sosa y Sosa was a pioneer of the Adventist work in the part of Guatemala that first received the Adventist message.

Early Years

Sosa, known as Javier, was born into a conservative Catholic home in Estanzuela, Zacapa, to the east of the Guatemala City, on May 13, 1913. The place where he lived and worked for many years, Puerto Barrios, Izabal, is one of the most important harbors in the country. His grandparents as well as his parents were fervent Catholics, and from the time he was very young they took him to the Cathedral of Esquipulas, a very important religious center in the region. Many of his early memories from childhood were associated with this cathedral.

Marriage

Sosa married María Lina Lemus, and as both were Catholic, they tried to be married by the Catholic Church, although it took them two tries to get this done. This happening is important for later, when María was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In 1936, some members of María's family invited her to a series of meetings held by Pastor José Aguilar Canjura. It was the first time that evangelistic meetings had been held in the region. Neither Sosa nor his wife knew any Adventists; nevertheless, María began to attend the meetings. Javier did not go to any of the meetings in this series, which lasted three months. At the end of the series, María decided to be baptized although she was disappointed Javier did not join her in this decision. At that ceremony, thirty-five people were baptized along with María Lina Lemus de Sosa.

Conversion

Once baptized, María began to pray that her husband would also be baptized. She fasted and prayed constantly, asking God to touch her husband's heart as he was opposed to receiving the message. An accident finally led to his conversion. Sosa was injured when a piece of wood fell on his foot. Because of this, he was unable to work

for a month. While he was recuperating, Sosa began to read his wife's magazines. She would take him pamphlets, and he would read them. During this month, Sosa began to realize that he had been mistaken in the beliefs that he had been taught and accepted without examining. Now, convinced of this newly-discovered truth, he began to go to the Adventist church on Sabbaths with his wife. He continued to avidly study the Bible. After six months of study, Javier was baptized by Orley Ford in a nearby river.¹

Missionary Work

A few months after Sosa's baptism, construction of the first church in Puerto Barrios, Izabal, was begun. A wood frame structure, it was built through the initiative of Orley and Lillian Ford.

A year after his baptism, Sosa requested time away from his employment in order to attend a lay workers training school in Guatemala City. During the four days of meetings, Sosa and other young men were taught how to visit homes, how to distribute magazines in public places, and the trainees were given lessons to study. Once prepared, Sosa held his first series of evangelistic meetings in a town called Corozo. As a result of these meetings, a church was organized in the town.

Sosa held several other series of meetings in other places, sowing the seed of the gospel in each place. His work focused particularly around Entre Ríos. There, besides holding the first series of meetings, he took part in a lay-member effort to establish one of eight new districts organized in Guatemala by 1942.²

God's Care in Entre Ríos

There is a very special story about what happened during the meetings that Sosa held in Entre Ríos, about thirteen kilometers from where he lived. A new manager at the place where Sosa worked decided to apply new policies to help resolve some problems in the work place, among them absenteeism from work. Many of the workers did not comply with their work schedules, and Sosa had been absent every Sabbath. The new manager began to call in all the persons who had been missing days of work, among them, Sosa. The manager's question to each of them was, "Why have you been missing work?" All of the workers began to justify their absences. Sosa was the last, but the question was the same.

Sosa answered, "Sir, I am a Seventh-day Adventist. The Bible says we should rest on Sabbath."

The manager said, "But Sabbath is not the day of rest; it is Sunday. I keep Sunday."

"Sir," answered Sosa, "Sunday is not the day God commanded us to keep, but rather Sabbath."

The manager answered, "Let's put an end to this. If you work on Sabbath, you can continue to have a job in this business, but if you miss again, you will be out of work."

Sosa answered calmly, but surely, "Thank you, sir, but I prefer to obey God by keeping Sabbath rather than have a job at a business that does not permit me to rest on the day that God sanctified." And having said this, he left his place of work.

When he got home, however, he was a bit worried. He told his wife that he had been fired because of keeping Sabbath.

She answered, "Are you worried about this? God will not abandon us; we will always be able to move forward. Don't worry."

With these confident words from his wife, Sosa remembered that he was supposed to start a series of meetings in Entre Ríos. He held his series of meetings, and the result was twelve people baptized. In spite of his joy in seeing all these people giving themselves to Christ and being baptized, Sosa returned home at the end of the month concerned because he still did not have a job or a way to support his family. He decided to visit his former boss and tell him what had happened at work.

On the way to the home of his old boss, Sosa ran into the manager who had fired him. This man said, "I found out that your absences had been authorized, so you can return to work."

"Thank you, Sir, but I will not work on Sabbath."

The manager answered, "Don't worry about that."

Through this experience, Javier again saw the hand of God working in his life. He continued to hold meetings and baptismal classes in the areas around Puerto Barrios. There were many of them, thanks to the work and effort of this untiring lay worker.

Churches and School in Puerto Barrios

As Sosa continued holding meetings in the towns and areas near his home, he remembered that there were blueprints for a church in Puerto Barrios created during the presidency of Jorge Ubico (1931-1944)³ He also remembered that the government had assigned them a property on which to build the church, although during the presidency of Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán

(1951-1954),⁴ the government had taken away half of this property. Sosa called together the members of the church that had been organized in Puerto Barrios. It was decided to make building a school a priority and a committee was set up to supervise the construction. The school was called Eben-Ezer. There were no Adventist teachers for the school, so Sosa went to the mission office in Guatemala City to ask for teachers. As a result of this request, the mission sent two young women from western Guatemala to Puerto Barrios; they were the first teachers at the new school. In the beginning, there was no building for the school, so classes were started at an English-speaking church. Sosa remembered that many students enrolled. Currently the school is called

Bethania.

Sosa later stated, "The members who were baptized back then are members who are persuaded of the truth and converted in Christ, and we all are committed to the progress of the church and carrying out the work."⁶

Pedro Javier Sosa y Sosa died on April 9, 2010.

SOURCES

Ford, Orley. "Good News for Guatemala, Central America." *Inter-American Division Messenger*, December 1, 1942.

"News from Our Evangelists." *Inter-American Division Messenger*, December 1954.

Rodriguez, Luis. "President Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán 1951-1954." Guatemala.com. 2017. Accessed September 13, 2020. <https://aprende.guatemala.com/historia/personajes/presidente-jacobo-arbenz-guzman-1951-1954/>

NOTES

1. Pedro Javier Sosa y Sosa, interview by author, Puerto Barrios, Izabal, Guatemala, May 18, 2008.
2. Orley Ford, "Good News for Guatemala, Central America," *Inter-American Division Messenger*, December 1, 1942, 5.
3. "News from Our Evangelists," *Inter-American Division Messenger*, December 1954, 2, 4.
4. Luis Rodriguez, "President Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán 1951-1954," Guatemala.com, 2017, accessed September 13, 2020, <https://aprende.guatemala.com/historia/personajes/presidente-jacobo-arbenz-guzman-1951-1954/>.
5. Pedro Javier Sosa y Sosa, interview by author, Puerto Barrios, Izabal, Guatemala, May 18, 2008.

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