

# Central Adventist Church of Cali

## JUAN CAICEDO

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Cali is among the oldest cities in Colombia and of South America.<sup>1</sup> The “Central Seventh-day Adventist Church” in Cali is the first Seventh-day Adventist church in Colombia.



Central Adventist Church of Cali.

Photo courtesy of Juan Caicedo Solis.

## Events that Led to Church Establishment

Oral tradition states that an American SDA missionary entered Colombia through the port of Buenaventura in 1923 and settled for a few months in Cali to sell books. Continuously, this missionary crossed two important bridges in Cali – *Puente Ortiz* and the bridge of the Pichincha battalion, two icons of the Caleña society – to sell books from the Adventist Church. His work spread the Adventist message. The books he sold had a great impact on their readers, who expressed interest in the written topics.<sup>2</sup>

In 1923-1924, Physician Norman M. Brayshaw and his wife arrived from California in Cali, performed medical-missionary work for an unknown amount of time, and departed for Bogotá to settle in the capital and continue their work there.<sup>3</sup> In July 1926, “The Inter-American Division Messenger” reported the first colporteur to arrive in Cali. Reports in the newspaper correspond to events from months or the year prior.

Brother F. A. Brower, formerly Field Missionary Secretary of the Atlantic Colombia Mission, has recently reached Bogota, Colombia, from which place he will work out in pioneering the work in the Central Colombia Mission. He will depend very largely on literature, having ordered a large supply of Spanish Patriarchs and Prophets, as well as several hundred copies of recent numbers of the *El Centinela*. Our last note from him is to the effect that he is leaving for Cali, where he will work with books for upwards of two months time. Let us remember Brother

Brower in that great field. Let us pray that God will help him overcome the obstacles and difficulties that he is bound to meet. He is giving himself unreservedly for service, and we believe the Lord will stand by him in every experience.<sup>4</sup>

From this, it can be established that missionary and canvassing work were the basis for establishing the Adventist presence in Cali.

## Establishing the Church

In 1926, Elder George C. Nickle arrived from California in Bogotá to assume responsibility for the work in Central Colombia Mission.<sup>5</sup> In 1927, Central Colombia Mission changed its headquarters from Bogotá to the city of Cali<sup>6</sup> Pastor Nickle, his wife, and their young daughter, June, moved there. Nickle was the first pastor to live in Cali and develop his ministry to serve those who had become interested in the Adventist message thanks to the missionary work from 1923. His preaching work was accompanied by the book sales from his Volkswagen vehicle known in the city as “Cucarachas.” From there, he would conduct visits to Cali, the entire Cauca Valley, and the annexed departments.<sup>7</sup>

In 1928, a group of brethren gathered in Cali.<sup>8</sup> Meetings were held at Pastor Nickle’s house, and about eight people attended. The first recorded baptism in Cali was of a young man on June 23, 1928, in Cali River. Pastor Henry Baasch reported a group of believers 80 miles from Cali that he and Pastor Nickle visited. Baasch states that the Sabbath School “was conducted in much the same way as Sabbath keepers hold it the world over: the opening song, prayer, a good secretary’s report, the review, the lesson, and closing song and prayer. All had their song books and joined heartedly in the singing. Those who could read had Bibles.”<sup>9</sup>

Pastor Nickle’s wife also wrote about the church’s missionary task: “After endeavoring for several weeks to rent a hall in which to conduct meetings here in Cali, we have finally secured a place and have leased it for a year. ...this location has many advantages, one of which is that the owners are Syrians...favorable to our work.... We have it seated now and all is ready for our opening meeting tonight. This is to be a series in English, and we are hoping for a good attendance. ... Please remember these meetings in your prayers, and pray that the Lord will give us a goodly number of converts to His cause.”<sup>10</sup> The missionary event would be held months before Colombia’s first national Olympic games in Cali, between December 20, 1928, and January 10, 1929.<sup>11</sup>

By the end of 1929, seven colporteurs gathered in Cali to attend the colporteurs’ institute directed by Fred Brower, Pastor Henry Baasch, and Pastor George Nickle. Their goal was to continue opening doors for the gospel starting in 1930. The book to be used for colporteur work would be “Our Day in the Light of Prophecy.” Days after the 1929 colporteurs’ institute, Fred Brower’s wife performed a “Health and Temperance” program, in which 23 non-SDA people signed a commitment to make changes to their habits.<sup>12</sup> The printed page, lectures, and “Health and Temperance” program played roles in preaching the message in the city of Cali.

In the early 1930s, the Puerto Rican Sister Justina Colón, a Bible worker in Barranquilla, arrived in Cali to join the missionary team.<sup>13</sup> As time passed, the group of believers grew and had to move to the city's center. They acquired a lot in the neighborhood of San Nicolás, Cali, a significant zone of the city. In 1930, the property was paid for with \$1,500 COP.<sup>14</sup>

On May 2, 1931, the Central Seventh-day Adventist Church was officially organized in Cali. Pastor N. H. Kinzer, president of Pacific Colombia Mission, recounts: "Now we have just had the pleasure of organizing the first church in this part of Colombia, with twenty-three residents of Cali as members. 'To God be the glory! Great things He hath done!'"<sup>15</sup> After the church was organized, N. H. Kinzer baptized the following people in 1931: Abel Londoño on May 31; Regina de Izquierdo on June 12; Dolores Valencia in August; Juan Díaz and Graciela de Díaz on October 10; and Teresa Forende, Ana Rosa de González, and María de Madrigal on December 5.<sup>16</sup>

## Church History

The church continued to grow. Amid economic difficulties, Pastor Kinzer began building the church on the new property. Pastor Douglas C. Prenier was in charge of finishing construction around 1947. Pastor Prenier was responsible for the development of the work in Cali. With the arrival of Pastor Olson and Pastor Roberts, new groups in Cali were established. Between 60-80 people were baptized annually, resulting in groups being organized as churches. Baptisms multiplied in the early 1960s, and work in Cali continued to grow steadily.

In 1975, an unprecedented evangelization campaign was carried out in Cali. José Osorio Braña, a Spanish pastor and evangelist of Colombia-Venezuela Union Mission; Pastor Norberto Carmona, who led a group of five pastors and 22 youth who graduated in theology; and the staff of Pacific Colombia Mission held a 90-night-long campaign in a parking lot on Roosevelt Avenue in Cali. They raised a tent that could hold almost 1,000 people, which was an extraordinary number at the time. They held sessions with topics like "How to Quit Smoking," "Home and Family," and "Thirty Religious Orientation Conferences." The campaign ended with 250 people being baptized.

## Church's Role in History

Missionary activity helped make new members of new churches and led to the creation of Eden Church. Initially, this church met at Cali's Central Seventh-day Adventist Church at an earlier time than its regular congregation. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Central Seventh-day Adventist Church grew, preserving its role as the historic start of the Adventist work in Cali. From this church, some groups were started in the sector of *Distrito de Agua Blanca* to the east of Cali.

In the 1970s, the Central Seventh-day Adventist Church became the strongest congregation in terms of finances, economically helping the mission in times of crisis. The church was also the strongest in membership and

missionary work. Through public and personal evangelism, the number of annual baptisms was surpassed in the Central Seventh-day Adventist Church and in all the later churches. In this way, the Central Seventh-day Adventist Church gained over 300 members from different sectors of Cali. Because of new congregations being created, many Central Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders moved to the newer churches.

Despite difficulties, the Central Seventh-day Adventist Church survives thanks to its attachment to history, the love for its origins, and its pioneering spirit. Its members wish to keep the work of the founders intact and continue fulfilling the mission. The stories of young people who grew up, brought their strength to the Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, and then set out to study theology is written in memory of the church's members. Today, they serve as pastors and administrators of missions, associations, unions, and division departments.

The memoirs of the Central Seventh-day Adventist Church of Cali are marked by ministerial success. As new campaigns were conducted and missionary work bore fruit, membership books recorded about 1,500 members. However, due to people congregating in other churches, this church's attendance had a constant of about 300, the church's true basis of membership.

## Vision for Future

The Central Seventh-day Adventist Church of Cali has the vision to strengthen discipleship and media evangelism through means such as radio and television; to help the church preserve and deepen the pioneer's missionary spirit; and to maintain hope in Christ's Second Coming.

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## NOTES

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