

East Elementary Adventist Academy

(Primary Adventist Academy)

MIRIAM HERNÁNDEZ

Miriam Hernández Pérez, Ed.D. (Universidad Interamericana, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico) retired as director of education for the Puerto Rican Union Conference in 2015. She also served as university education department director, university graduate programs director, university professor, and elementary school teacher. She is married to Pastor Germán Cortés and has three sons.

Primary Adventist Academy (Academia Primaria Adventista del Este) is an elementary school operated by the East Puerto Rico Conference in Villa Prades, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico. Pre-kindergarten through sixth grade are taught both in Spanish and English and it is licensed to operate by the Puerto Rico General Council of Education. In addition to academics, the academy offers psychological counseling services, speech therapy, and occupational therapy. On September 23-24, 2015, Adventist Primary Adventist School received one of the highest accreditations granted by the Puerto Rican Union Conference.

Developments that Led to the Establishment of the Academy

After the conversion of Rafael López Miranda in 1912, the Adventist church in Santurce experienced significant growth. In 1914, a series of evangelistic meetings resulted in the baptism of eleven people. With the growth it was agreed to buy a property that served as a church, office, and school. A two-story building was soon built and opened in 1915 at Parada 14 in Santurce.¹

By 1915, classes had begun in a small classroom with an enrollment of twenty students. It was known as the Puerto Rican Adventist Academy until the school was relocated to Río Piedras. After a humble beginning as an elementary school, plans were outlined to expand classes into a high school. By 1949 it achieved its first graduation at this level.

History of the Academy

In 1933, it was decided to merge the Puerto Rican Adventist Academy with the workers' preparatory school, which had been discontinued when Aibonito College closed in 1928. The academy's elementary grades, first through eighth, received their first accreditation by the Department of Public Instruction of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 1934. In that same year, the first eighth grade graduation was conducted. As enrollment continued to increase, church leadership desired to move part of the academy to a place in the countryside. In

1957, the high school grades were relocated to *Finca La Rosita* in Mayagüez, next to the workers' preparatory school. There it was known as Puerto Rican Adventist College.

In 1961, Puerto Rican Adventist College was authorized as an institution of higher education. Its name changed to Antillian College in 1962.² By 2020, then known as Antillean Adventist University, it had an enrollment that exceeded one thousand students. Meanwhile, in Santurce grades kindergarten through eighth continued to be offered. Due to its increased demand, this school continued to add grades until in 1965 all high school grades were offered. Also, in 1965 the government decided to expropriate the school grounds to build an avenue. The elementary level moved to the first floor of the Río Piedras Adventist church and was renamed Primary Adventist Academy.

In 1968, as all segments of the educational work continued to grow, the East Puerto Rico Conference acquired a property on Calle Julio Andino in Villa Prades, Río Piedras where the present Primary Adventist Academy continues to operate.

Historical Role of the Academy in the Community and in the Church

Under the direction of Clelia Utz of Bernhardt, the Adventist Primary School's choir has achieved territory-wide acclaim. It has participated in music festivals both in and outside of Puerto Rico. It has also performed before former Governor Pedro Rosselló. The choir also presented a Christmas concert for the Department of Public Education of Puerto Rico which "received the highest praise." Widely recognized and admired for its church programs, the children's choir has performed in many of Puerto Rico's cities and famous theaters such as the Yagüez Theater in Mayagüez, the Perla Theater in Ponce, and the Center for Fine Arts in Juana Díaz and Cayey. Where the choir performs, it seeks to "to bring souls to the feet of Jesus."³

Academy Mission

The Primary Adventist Academy operates with the vision of creating a learning community where every student grows physically, mentally, and spiritually by the grace of Jesus. Its mission is to offer each student the necessary experiences that lead him or her to the knowledge and fear of God, who is the source of wisdom and power; and to serve the community with love, respect, and integrity, and at the same time focuses on celestial citizenship.

In relation to the mission, chaplains have been essential in transmitting the word of God through the study of the Bible. Their excellent chapel programs, weeks of spiritual emphasis, and evangelistic campaigns, in which the children were the preachers, have achieved many baptisms among the student body. The chaplains' meritorious work also includes sponsorship of community service and other projects involving students and teachers.⁴

Significant academic events include the Day of the Bible, the living museum, ADRA program, public presentations by the children's choir, and graduation of The Voice of Hope. In addition, for three consecutive years the school's science fairs have won the "Kenya Nieves" award. The choir also won second place in a singing contest sponsored by the Puerto Rican Union Conference.

With the constant desire to help in the community, the school is distinguished by developing humanitarian projects for the benefit of those in need as a "Love Offering," "Sheltering a Soul" (aiding the homeless), "Sharing Love," and others.⁵

List of Principals

C. R. Olmstead (1946-1948); Albin J. Stewart (1948); C. G. Bushnell (1949); H. S. Méndez (1950-1952); R. W. Prince (1953); Eugenio Valencia (1954-1955); Luz M. Padró (1956-1957); Fernando Cardona (1959-1962); Alberto Rodríguez (1963); Esther Brignoni (1966); Iris Santos (1966-1974); Manuel Velázquez (1975-1978); Neftalí García (1979-1982); María del Carmen Quiñones (1983-1989); Edith Pérez (1989-1990); Gladys Andino (1990-1993); Noemí Guzmán (1993-1996); Grícer Díaz (1996-1999); Luis Felipe Viera (1999-2000); Gloria Miranda (2001-2010); Luis Felipe Viera (2010-2011); Lourdes Custodio (2011-)

Academy address: Academia Primaria Adventista del Este, Calle Julio Andino 501, Villa Prades, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico 00924.

SOURCES

Hernández, Miriam. *Reseña Histórica de la obra educativa Adventista en Puerto Rico*. Canovanas, PR: CG Printing Group, 2015.

Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia. Second Rev. Ed. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996. S.v. "Antillian Adventist University."

Vega, Francisco J. *Avance Adventista en Puerto Rico*. Mayagüez, PR: Antillian College Press, 2000.

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1. Francisco J. Vega, *Avance adventista en Puerto Rico* (Mayagüez, PR: Antillian College Press, 2000), 159.
2. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, second revised edition (1996), s.v. "Antillian Adventist University."
3. Miriam Hernández, *Reseña Histórica de la obra educativa Adventista en Puerto Rico* (Canovanas, PR: CG Printing Group, 2015), 12.

4. Ibid., 15.

5. Ibid., 14.

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