



South Atlantic Nicaragua Mission

Photo courtesy of Héctor Isaac Avarado Aráuz.

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The territory of the South Atlantic Nicaragua Mission is composed of the departments of Boaco, Chontales, Rio San Juan de Nicaragua and the Autonomous Region of the South Caribbean Coast.¹ It was founded in 2014,² and by 2018 the field had 58 organized churches and 76 groups with a membership of 27,977 attended by 14 pastors.³ The administrative office of the mission is located in the city of Juigalpa, Chontales.⁴

Early Adventist Church in the Territory

God sent a missionary couple full of His spirit and committed to share the gospel of salvation in the region. Pastor Frank Hutchings, along with his wife Cora Ella, began their first missionary trip to Nicaragua in 1898

aboard a ship called El Heraldo.⁵ One October afternoon in 1898, Pastor Hutchings went to Brig Bay Harbor on Corn Island. He offered literature, medicine, tooth extraction, and other dental services.⁶ After all his efforts, he managed to sell a book *Beautiful Teachings of the Bible* to Mr. Dixon Hodgson who, along with other guests, was visiting his home. The Menzits couple decided to keep the Sabbath. The first Adventist church on Corn Island was established in 1916.⁷

Thanks to the missionary effort of brother Joseph Watson and his wife, in 1914, a small Adventist community in Laguna de Perlas with more than 20 members was reported. This was the second Adventist church in Nicaragua. In 1917, the construction of the church in Laguna de Perlas was completed, and there were more than 40 members at that time. The work was extended to the communities of Haulover, Orinoco, and Tasbapauni. In 1917, Joseph Watson was asked to go to the Corn Islands to pastor the new church.⁸

In 1916, the family of George Lucien Downs settled in the city of Bluefields. They had been influenced by Adventist preaching and soon accepted the gospel. They rented a house and started a Sabbath School class, and worship services on Sunday and Wednesday with family, some neighbors, and friends, who soon became interested in Bible studies.⁹ On September 24, 1930, the church in Bluefields was organized by the Nicaragua Mission, becoming one of the first organized in the country. Pastor Oswaldo Andream was the first official pastor of the church.¹⁰

In 1943, Pastor Arthur Morgan and his family from Jamaica started a school where preschool and primary school children attended. In 1950, through the management of Pastor Wilbert Oliver, the work of Adventist education was consolidated in the city and on March 4, 1951, the Bluefields School received the authorization of the Nicaraguan government for its operation.¹¹

The Bluefields church was supporting a small congregation in the community of Punta Gorda by 1970.¹² In the territory of South Atlantic Nicaragua, brothers Solomon and Sebastián Gatica were well known as outstanding laymen who won more than 6,000 souls and established a dozen churches.¹³

In 1973, in the community of Castillo Rio San Juan in Nicaragua, it was discovered that there were five Sabbath keepers, and so colporteur Antonio Selva was sent to that region of the country. In 1976, a small group of Adventists settled in the El Papayo and Las Azucenas communities. After several Bible studies Pastors Enrique Guzmán and Cesar and Erwin Beteta performed the first baptisms in these communities.¹⁴

After the eruption of Cerro Negro volcano in the city of León in 1971, many residents were forced to immigrate to other places. The government of that time gave them land in a community in the old department of Zelaya, which the new settlers named Nuevo León since most of them came from the west of the country. Among the migrants were some Adventists who shared their faith by establishing a congregation. Through the efforts of Pastor Roberto Eubanks with assistance from Maranatha Volunteers International, a church was built and inaugurated in 1980.¹⁵

The Adventist message continued to spread in the territory. In 1980, a group was established in the community of Boca de Sábalo and from this church the gospel was preached in the communities of Laguna Blanca, El Castillo, Laureano Mairena, and San Carlos. In 1981, the first baptisms were performed in the city of Juigalpa, Chontales as a result of the missionary efforts of Pastor Luis Carrero and brothers Sebastián and Salomón Gatica.¹⁶

In 1982, the message reached the sector known as Las Azucenas and in 1984, the missionary and visionary fervor of Pastor Luis Carrero led him to organize an evangelistic campaign in the town of Nueva Guinea. The result of the combined effort between pastors and laity was the gain of 120 souls. In 2012, a modern building for the Adventist school was built in the city of Nueva Guinea with the support of Maranatha Volunteers International. The Adventist message has penetrated many communities in Nueva Guinea including Naciones Unidas, el Almacen, and Puerto Príncipe, among others.¹⁷

Events Leading to Organization of the Mission

In 2007, Central Nicaragua Mission prepared a strategic growth plan which included dividing the field into three territories: the metropolitan area that included the capital city Managua; the southern part of the country that included the departments of Granada, Carazo, Masaya, and Rivas; and the third zone that integrated the entire territory of the South Atlantic.¹⁸

This strategic plan was prepared in several sessions involving all the pastors. It was presented for approval to the mission's board of directors, and then to the leaders of the local churches of the territory. By July 2007, it was presented to the administration of the South Central American Union Mission chaired by Pastor Wilfredo Ruíz Marengo.¹⁹

On February 18, 2008, a congress that included delegates from local churches throughout the territory was held in the city of El Rama, municipality of the Autonomous Region of the South Caribbean Coast. The new South Atlantic Nicaragua Region was organized and Pastor Juan Bosco Vanega was appointed as the first coordinator of this new region.²⁰ The region was organized with 18 districts and four zones: South Atlantic I, South Atlantic II, South Atlantic III, and Bluefields. The offices of the new region were located in the city of Santo Tomas, municipality of the department of Chontales. The determined support of the membership was a solid foundation for the development of the Adventist work in this region of the country.²¹

In 2009, Pastor Juan Bosco Vanega was called to serve in the new North Nicaragua Mission and Pastor Salomón Espinoza was appointed as coordinator of the South Atlantic Nicaragua Region.²² The National Assembly of Nicaragua granted legal status to the new region in 2010. In 2013, Pastor Juan Bosco Vanega was again appointed to coordinate this region and in 2014 it was reorganized as the South Atlantic Nicaragua Mission.

Institutions in the Territory

The South Atlantic Nicaragua Mission operates one secondary school and three primary schools. The Adventist High School in the city of Bluefields, founded on March 12, 2002, is located in the Loma Fresca neighborhood and offers grades seven to twelve. Bluefields Elementary School, founded in 1936, is located in the Beholding neighborhood; Nueva Guinea Elementary School, located in the city of Nueva Guinea, opened in February 2013; and El Almendro Elementary School, established in 2015, is located in the city of Almendro. All three elementary schools offer preschool and grades one through six.²³

Radio and TV Stations

Thanks to the missionary effort and support of members and friends of the church, there are two radio stations.²⁴ The Adventist radio station in the city of Juigalpa had its beginnings in 2015, but it was on February 17, 2017, that the regulator of communications in Nicaragua officially granted for the first time in the history of the local field a frequency of 100.5 FM radio.²⁵ On that same date a second frequency 98.5 FM was granted for the operation of a station in the municipality of Corn Island.²⁶ This was after an application was made on January 29, 2016.

The Church and the Community

Every year, the church participates in blood donation days.²⁷ Since 2010, the church has distributed literature to non-Adventist families in the territory including *The Great Controversy*, *Steps to Christ*, *Beyond Imagination*, *Health and Hope*, and *Hope for Today's Families*, among other books.²⁸

During 2018, through the women's ministries department, the church promoted the "Near to You" initiative, assisting in a personalized way in counseling, motivation, and improvement to families in the community.

Plans to Fulfill Its Mission

The Seventh-day Adventist churches in the territory of the South Atlantic Nicaragua Mission have established short and medium term goals. These include consolidating a spiritual and financial development plan for the entire local field; building and strengthening capacities in small group leadership and the multiplication of groups; spreading the Adventist message in places where there is no presence; increasing the number of organized churches; increasing the number of pastors to assist with projections in growth; strengthening the educational system and media; developing a medical missionary clinic; and continuing to work to achieve the change of mission status to conference.²⁹

Presidents

Juan Bosco Vanegas (2013-2015); Francisco Antonio Serrano Martínez (2015-2019); Juan Ángel Guevara Medina (2019-).

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