
PROFILE

Claritza de Jimenez

Dialogue With a Chemistry Professor in the Dominican Republic



Dr. Claritza Heyaime de Jimenez coordinates the teaching of organic chemistry at the University of

Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic—the oldest university in the New World, founded in 1538.

Claritza was born in San Juan de la Maguana, in the interior of the country. After completing her secondary studies and the pre-university course, she entered the University of Santo Domingo, where she received her Ph.D. in Chemistry in 1968. That same year she won the competition to teach at the university and was later appointed laboratory director and chairperson of the chemistry department. Afterwards, she pursued post-doctoral studies at the University of Mexico.

In 1967, Claritza married Juan

Rafael Jiménez, a businessman. Four children have enriched their home: Roxana (23) has completed her degree in dentistry; Elka (21) will soon finish her program in elementary education; Luis (21) is studying civil engineering; and Hilcias (19) plans to become an aeronautical mechanic.

Besides her professional responsibilities, Dr. Jimenez is actively involved in the life of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. "I love working for the church," she says, "and I have worked in practically all the departments—youth, Sabbath School, home and family, lay activities.... There is so much good Adventists can do if we work together!"

Please tell us about your childhood.

My parents divorced when I was just two-and-a-half years old. My mother assumed the responsibility of raising my older brother and me. Three or four years later, she remarried. Her new husband was a very kind man who became a real father for us. Both gave us a happy home, where we were surrounded by love.

How did you come in contact with the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

My mother was Catholic, but she had many questions about religion. When I began high school, she started visiting other churches trying to find answers and spiritual peace of mind. She enjoyed her experience at the Adventist Church and, after checking the church's teachings against the Bible, decided that Adventists taught the truth. Although she joined the church, she never pressured my brother or me to do the same. We did, however, study the Bible together.

My conversion took place very simply, when I was 15 years old. One morning I was sitting in my high school classroom and began to think deeply. I felt attracted to wordly things, but at the same time, I sensed that God was calling me. "Why should I risk my salvation," I thought to myself, "if I know what I need to do?" Right then and there I decided to commit my life to God and to join the Adventist Church.

What did you do next?

As soon as I was baptized, I laid plans to attend the Dominican Adventist Academy. I did, but I had to work all through my school years, because my parents could not pay for my studies. It was a tough experience, but it strengthened me to face life with courage.

What led you to become a science teacher at the university?

My mother had been a teacher since her youth. When we were still small, she took us with her to the rural school where she taught, so my brother and I grew up playing with chalk and erasers.

While I was in high school, I really enjoyed the sciences and mathematics. First, I thought of studying civil engineering, but my mother encouraged me to get a degree in chemistry or pharmacology, which she thought more appropriate for a young woman.

In Latin America the number of women scientists is still small. How do you feel being a woman in that field?

It's true that there are more men than women in the sciences, but the proportion is changing. As for myself, when I was still in school I felt the support of my fellow women classmates and of my professors, especially my thesis advisor. Under his direction, I conducted experiments on the nitration of indane—a cyclical aromatic compound—and the results were published in several interna-

tional specialized journals.

Did you encounter any difficulties in your university studies because you were a Seventh-day Adventist?

Not really serious ones. I always felt that, as a Christian, I should aim to the highest academic achievements and never hide my religious convictions. My teachers always treated me with respect and never scheduled examinations on Saturday. Only one teacher did it, but in private told me, "Don't worry, Claritza, you can take the exam later."

Whenever the topic of Creation and evolution came up for discussion, I tried to share my beliefs with clarity and tact. On the origin of oil, for example, with the millions of years supposedly required to allow for vegetal decomposition, I presented the biblical perspective. Some laughed, but at least they heard what I believed. In my written exams, I was careful to write what the literature stated, but also explained my point of view.

Do your Christian convictions have any bearing on your scientific activities?

I thoroughly enjoy studying God's marvelous creation. I am moved when I think that I can manipulate the elements that our Creator brought into existence and the processes He established. I deeply admire Someone capable of creating something out of nothing, when I know how difficult is to work with the elements in the laboratory.

What would you say are the factors behind your professional success?

First, the fact that I thoroughly enjoy the sciences and especially chemistry. Second, I really like to explain things, to show and to teach others. Besides, I get along very well with my students. At times they ask me how can I like a subject as difficult as chemistry. It isn't easy for me to answer, because I feel naturally attracted to this discipline.

What can you tell us about the

Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Dominican Republic?

My country has approximately seven million inhabitants, and among them, about 80,000 Adventists. This gives a ratio of one Seventh-day Adventist for every 85 Dominicans. Many of my countrymen want to know God and to obey Him. The Adventist Church in the Dominican Republic is dynamic and progressive, with many members who love to do missionary work.

What impression do Dominicans have regarding our church?

They admire the work we do and expect the best from us. A few years ago, when we launched our radio station in the capital, my colleagues commented, "It's an Adventist project, so it must be good." These high expectations place the responsibility of representing both God and His church on the shoulders of leaders and laypersons.

Do people from all levels of society feel attracted by the Adventist message?

Yes, they do. It appeals to simple folk as well as to professionals. In the past, people thought that Adventism was mostly for the lower levels of society. Not now. We have in our church a broad spectrum of professionals—physicians, lawyers, engineers, teachers, scientists, business people, and so on.

What brings you satisfaction as a professional?

My personal relationship with the students, because I can help them not only by teaching them chemistry but also by guiding them in life. This frequently allows me to speak to them about God.

How do they react as you deal with religious issues?

Perhaps because I'm their teacher, they listen to me. When I discover a religious interest in them, I bring

magazines and books for them to read. Some of them ask for an appointment to talk about matters they deeply care about.

What have been the results of these conversations?

Several of my students have received Christ and have joined the Adventist Church. Two of my colleagues at the university have also become Seventh-day Adventists.

Would you describe a typical day in your life?

I usually get up at 5:30 or 6:00 and devote a few minutes to my personal devotion and Bible study. Then I go to the kitchen to have breakfast with my family. We have a short devotional and I'm off to the university. I work there until 12:30 or 1:00, when I come back home for lunch. I return to the university at around 3:00 and stay there until 6:00 or 6:30. My after-supper activities vary: family visits, Bible studies, church meetings, or rehearsals for a program. Our home is always full of young people practicing, singing, or doing other things. Afterwards I spend an hour or two reading. I usually go to bed at midnight, because I really love to read.

Finally, what advice would you give to Adventist university students?

To be faithful to God in their daily lives and to trust in Him completely. It saddens me to see how some students, when faced with a difficulty, abandon their Christian principles. I know by experience that if we ask, God solves our problems. That is why I would encourage them to remain faithful always and in everything. This will bring them personal satisfaction, will allow them to help others, and will prepare them for eternity.

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