

# Central West Argentine Mission

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ANGEL JESÚS TORREL SHAPIAMA, EUGENIO DI DIONISIO, AND SILVIA C. SCHOLTUS

Angel Jesús Torrel Shapiama

Eugenio Di Dionisio

Silvia C. Scholtus

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The Central West Argentine Mission (Misión Argentina del Centro Oeste or MACO) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, located in the territory of the Argentina Union Conference (Unión Argentina, UA). Its headquarters is at General José de San Martín Ave., 1191, Zip Code M5501AAL, in the city of Godoy Cruz, Mendoza province, Argentine Republic.<sup>1</sup>

## Territory and Statistics

The territory of this administrative unit comprises the geographical area of the provinces of La Rioja, Mendoza, San Juan, and San Luis, with a total population of 3,276,053.<sup>2</sup> The number of Adventist members in this region is 10,176 with a ratio of one Adventist per 322 inhabitants. This mission field is organized into 14 pastoral districts and assists a total of 89 congregations (49 organized churches and 40 groups).<sup>3</sup>

MACO administers four institutions of the Adventist Education Network at the levels of pre-kindergarten, elementary, and secondary education. These schools are: Escuela Adventista de San Rafael (San Rafael Adventist Academy) (Maestra Cristina Zanelli de Pechero), located at Las Vírgenes, 3168, San Rafael, Mendoza, with 25 students;<sup>4</sup> Escuela Adventista de Tunuyán (Tunuyán Adventist Academy), located at Los Ceibos, 1050, Tunuyán, Mendoza, with 176 students;<sup>5</sup> Escuela Adventista de San Luis (San Luis Adventist Academy), located at San Martín, 1319, San Luis, San Luis province, with 118 students;<sup>6</sup> and the Instituto Adventista de Mendoza (Mendoza Adventist Academy), and Instituto Adventista Víctor Ampuero Matta (Víctor Ampuero Matta Adventist Institute), located at Nicolás Avellaneda Avenue, 55, in the capital of the province of Mendoza, with 458 students.

<sup>7</sup> In total, all these institutions serve 777 students and work with the purpose of “promoting the integral development of students to form autonomous citizens, committed to the well-being of the community, to the country, and to God.”<sup>8</sup>

In the area of communications, the Adventist message is transmitted in MACO territory through the Radio and TV Nuevo Tiempo (New Time Radio and Hope Channel, NT). In the city of Godoy Cruz, Mendoza province, the radio program *La Voz de la Esperanza* (*The Voice of Prophecy*) broadcasts through the 102.3 FM frequency. In the province of San Luis, there are two other broadcasters: Radio NT Villa Mercedes (New Time Radio Villa

Mercedes) at 97.0 FM, and Radio NT Quines (New Time Radio Quines) at 94.1 FM. In the province of San Luis, the complete programming of Hope Channel TV is broadcast on an open channel for the entire local population (channel three).<sup>9</sup> The potential audience in these locations is around 350,000.<sup>10</sup>

The Central West Argentine Mission takes the gospel to people throughout its vast territory through the fulltime work of 115 people. Among them are 13 pastors who have ministerial credentials and five who have ministerial licenses. There are also five workers who have missionary credentials. The other employees work in administrative or educational functions.<sup>11</sup>

## Origin of the Adventist Work in the Territory of the Mission

The Adventist message was first preached in Argentina in the late 19th century, and it took some time for all regions to be reached. Growth of the evangelistic work in the Argentine territory happened mainly as a result of the canvassers. Over time, the territory was reorganized to better serve the interest of the people as it emerged in different parts of the country.<sup>12</sup> Several canvassers who helped in the expansion of the church had been trained in the school established in the province of Entre Ríos, currently the Universidad Adventista del Plata (River Plate Adventist University).<sup>13</sup>

From 1911 through 1913, great interest was aroused by the Adventist message as it was taken to various Argentine provinces, including some areas that are currently part of MACO.<sup>14</sup> In 1912, L. Laconi informed the church that, due to the work of the canvassers, there were people interested in learning more about Adventist beliefs in the capital city of the province of Mendoza.<sup>15</sup> The following year the canvasser Manuel Alcayaga visited the capital city and noted the need of a pastor to attend to those interested.<sup>16</sup>

Later, Alcayaga visited the cities of San Juan and La Rioja. The last one was a town which had been visited by Mateo Meyer and another canvasser (possibly Marcelino Gómez) about a month before Alcayaga's arrival.<sup>17</sup> San Juan was visited by Alcayaga in March and June of 1913.<sup>18</sup> In the second half of 1913, Alcayaga continued his travels until he reached the capital city of San Luis province.<sup>19</sup> In 1914, Pastor Joseph Westphal reported that the territory near the Andes, including the city of Mendoza, had received repeated visits from different canvassers.<sup>20</sup>

It could be said that the history of the Central West Argentine Mission began on November 29, 1918, when the Asociación Argentina (Argentine Conference), now known as the Asociación Argentina Central (Central Argentine Conference), considered the church in the province of Mendoza as a local mission. On December 24, 1918, J. T. Thompson and his family traveled to that province to direct the work of the Misión Mendoza (Mendoza Mission).<sup>21</sup> Although the decision to send someone there to lead the Adventist work was made at an earlier date, the final approval for this configuration was given by the leadership of the church on February 12, 1919.<sup>22</sup> However, since Thompson became sick after a few months of work and had to return to Buenos Aires, the church had to delay the work in the town of Mendoza.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of 1919, Ernesto Tulin was asked to assume leadership of the Adventist work in Mendoza. In 1920, as reported by Pastor Roscoe T. Baer, Pastor Tulin began his work by canvassing.<sup>24</sup> On December 21, 1920, it was requested that the provinces of San Juan and San Luis be added to the Mendoza Mission. This was approved in February 1921.<sup>25</sup> Also that year, Pastor Baer, president of the Unión Austral (Austral Union Conference), now Unión Argentina (Argentina Union Conference), performed the first baptism in Mendoza. And as a result of the advances made, in mid-1922 there was an established church in Mendoza, with 24 members, as well as a Sabbath School with 11 members in Colonia Alvear. On January 16, 1923, the Mendoza Mission had its name changed to Misión de Cuyo (Cuyo Mission). This was due to membership growth and the fact that the mission covered three provinces.<sup>26</sup>

During 1923 and 1924, the canvasser Juan Navarro extended the work of the church to the province of San Juan and began a Sabbath School in the house where the Peralta family lived.<sup>27</sup> Later there were changes in the Cuyo Mission leadership. In May 1927, Ignacio Kalbermatter became director of the mission. The following year interest in the Adventist message increased in the provinces of San Luis and San Juan. M. Sánchez and S. Navarro were living in San Juan and M. de Molinari, who had been baptized in Mendoza, lived in San Luis and kept the Sabbath there with a couple of brothers. Then Molinari held a special meeting in San Luis with those interested in Adventism and found out that there were among them two pastors of the Iglesia de los Hermanos Libres (Church of the Free Brethren, or Open Brethren).<sup>28</sup> In addition, there were others who were friends of an Adventist man named Antonio Ferreras. Meanwhile, in San Juan, the canvassers knew several families who were interested in learning more about Adventist beliefs.<sup>29</sup>

The following years were remarkable for the Adventists of that region. In 1929 the Argentine SDA Church had a great advance in the area of publications, when the mission began to mimeograph a quarterly digest called *Centinel de Cuyo* (*The Watchman of Cuyo*).<sup>30</sup> In 1930 there was another change in the leadership of the mission, due to some health issues concerning I. Kalbermatter. Pastor Luis A. Rojas assumed direction of the work and a church was officially organized in San Juan. At that time there were two organized churches and 62 believers in the Cuyo Mission. By 1932, 120 people were baptized at six different locations in the mission territory—56 in Mendoza, 32 in San Juan, ten in Jachal, seven in San Luis, 13 in Colonia Alvear, and two in La Llave.<sup>31</sup> In addition, during the first four months of 1932, new Sabbath Schools were organized in the towns of Rivadavia, Mendoza, and Justo Daract, San Luis.<sup>32</sup>

In 1933 the Cuyo Mission expanded its territory. On December 11, 1933, the provinces of La Rioja and Catamarca were assigned to the mission. Between 1934 and 1937, there was no regular leader of the mission. Thus, the president of the Austral Union Conference, Walter E. Murray, was directly in charge of this field.<sup>33</sup> On February 7, 1937, Alfredo Aeschlimann was asked to take charge of this unit of the church. Although the financial area was still in the hands of the union, whose offices were in Florida, Buenos Aires, it was not until 1938 that the Cuyo Mission was authorized to directly manage its own finances.<sup>34</sup>

Under the administration of Pastor Aeschlimann and with the support of Pastor Abraham Berchin, by the first half of 1938 there were 216 Adventist members and seven congregations (two churches and five groups) throughout the territory. There were many others interested in the message in the five west-central provinces of Argentina, which were also covered by the mission. However, the large number of interested parties and the small number of workers generated one of the great challenges that had to be overcome.<sup>35</sup>

In 1942, the *Centinela de Cuyo* (*The Watchman of Cuyo*) digest, which kept Adventist members throughout that vast region informed, changed its name to *La Voz de Cuyo* (*The Voice of Cuyo*).<sup>36</sup> Missionary efforts continued and two new Adventist churches were organized. The third and fourth churches organized in this field—the San Martín and Misión churches in the province of Mendoza—were organized in 1942 after Pedro Brouchy was chosen as director of the mission.<sup>37</sup>

Although the Cuyo Mission had been in existence for a long time, it had not been definitively organized as an administrative unit. It had a superintendent, but it had no office, no treasurer, and no other administrator. All administrative work was done in the offices at Florida, Buenos Aires. It was only on February 1, 1943, that the Cuyo Mission was definitively organized, with 244 members. Its first president was Pedro Brouchy, and Arturo E. Thomann was appointed as the first secretary-treasurer and was also responsible for the Sabbath School and Missionary Volunteer departments. J. D. Replogle was appointed as secretary for publications and for local missionary work.<sup>38</sup> Until then, some of the departments had been run by the wives of some of the pastors who worked for the mission. For example, from 1931 to 1932, the Sabbath School department was directed by Elena de Rojas, and between 1933 and 1935, this same department was led by Fernanda de Arriagada.<sup>39</sup>

The newly organized Cuyo Mission rented a house for its office and to serve as a repository for books and Bibles. After that, the missionary work was even more successful. In October 1943, a church was organized at San Rafael in the province of Mendoza. On November 17 of that year, the mission leadership organized a philanthropic society under the name Sociedad Filantrópica Adventista de Cuyo (Cuyo Adventist Philanthropic Society) or Sociedad de Dorcas (Dorcas Society).<sup>40</sup> Enrique T. Block held an evangelism effort in San Juan, and in 1944 an Adventist Church was organized there.<sup>41</sup>

A few months after the organization of the Cuyo Mission, this institution faced a serious problem. On January 15, 1944, an earthquake destroyed a large part of the city of San Juan. One Adventist believer died and the church building was in ruins. Under the leadership of P. Brouchy and his wife, Adela, the Philanthropic Society (Dorcas Society) helped the population by caring for the wounded, sick, and homeless, and efforts were made to rebuild the Mendoza Church building.<sup>42</sup>

In 1946, Felipe Sittner, president of the mission, and church leadership purchased a property in Mendoza. Early in 1948, the Austral Union Conference authorized the mission to proceed with the construction of a building. The new church, with a capacity of 250, was inaugurated on November 24 of that year.<sup>43</sup> A few months earlier, on September 4, 1948, the mission had inaugurated a chapel in San Martín, in the province of Mendoza. Plans

continued to gradually extend the membership to other provinces of the mission territory. From 1948 to 1949, the total membership of the mission went from 400 believers to 434, meeting in six organized churches. These were times when great distances challenged the advancement of the Adventist work. However, with the strong missionary spirit and the blessings of God, these barriers were overcome.<sup>44</sup>

In the 1950s, the mission's main goal was to take the gospel to places where the Adventist message had not yet reached, such as Catamarca. Various evangelistic efforts were made in that city, which for many years had been known as "hard to reach." This was because renting a suitable room in which to hold meetings or a room in which workers could stay was very difficult. At that time, "fanaticism dominated not only the city itself, but also the surrounding territory." Thus, the mission leadership decided to build an attractive church in the community and immediately begin a series of meetings.<sup>45</sup>

The South American Division, Austral Union Conference, and Cuyo Mission provided the necessary funds for a church to be built with capacity of 200. The plan was that the church building would also include an apartment for the pastor of the congregation. The building was completed, and the dedication of the church and the first night of evangelistic meetings took place on May 14, 1955. Pastor Salim Japas was responsible for preaching every night. He was joined by a team of workers and other lay members from Mendoza and La Rioja. The strategy pursued by the church leaders brought results for the mission in the years that followed. By the end of the 1950s, the Cuyo Mission had 975 members. During the 1960, 214 additional people were baptized.<sup>46</sup>

In 1961 an Adventist school was established in the capital city of Mendoza, now known as Instituto Adventista Mendoza (Mendoza Adventist Academy).<sup>47</sup> In April 1964, the mission leadership held a series of evangelistic meetings in San Juan, the same city that 20 years earlier had suffered a terrible earthquake. Before and during that missionary effort, God worked several miracles. First, the administration planned to hold the meetings in the church in San Juan, but at the last minute the Lord provided an excellent and spacious venue, close to the main square of the city. For several weeks, more than 700 people gathered to hear and study the Word of God. When the campaign led by the union evangelist ended, the new converts and interested people continued to attend the church, as they were still eager to learn more. As a result of those meetings, by the end of the year, 118 people decided to join the Adventist Church through baptism.<sup>48</sup>

By 1971 there were 12 churches and a membership of 1,277 believers in the territory.<sup>49</sup> However, in 1973, the Cuyo Mission was discontinued, and part of its territory was integrated into the Asociación Argentina Central (Central Argentine Conference) which added the provinces of Mendoza, San Luis, San Juan, and La Rioja. The North Argentine Mission (Misión Argentina del Norte), now known as North Argentine Conference, added the province of Catamarca.<sup>50</sup> This change took place because the Austral Union Conference decided to reduce the number of local fields in Argentina, with the purpose of more efficiently using the financial resources for direct evangelization in each field. Thus, the administrative units were reduced from five to three.<sup>51</sup>

In the 1980s, the church set new missionary goals for the San Luis region. On November 5, 1983, a new church was inaugurated in that region. On that occasion, leaders of the Central Argentine Conference, members, and guests were able to participate in a great spiritual celebration. Another important initiative for the advancement of the work in the city of San Luis was a canvassing course offered to all youth and adults who committed themselves to act as messengers of hope by distributing books from house to house.<sup>52</sup>

Between the years of 1990 and 2000, the Central Argentine Conference experienced great growth in the number of members throughout its territory, going from 4,639 to 21,430 baptized members. Many of the Adventist churches in the west-central region of Argentina contributed to this advance.<sup>53</sup> June 2012 witnessed the installation of the Radio Nuevo Tiempo (New Time Radio) transmission tower in Godoy Cruz. Since then, due to voluntary contributions, the Adventist message is shared in that city and its surroundings through radio waves, which make it easier to reach the population of Mendoza.<sup>54</sup>

## Organizational History of the Mission

In 2010 the Adventist work in the Mendoza, La Rioja, San Juan, and San Luis regions continued to grow and strengthen through various missionary activities. Nearly 40 years had passed since those provinces were under the administration of the Central Argentine Conference. In 2012 that condition changed when the Central Argentine Conference Board of Directors decided to reorganize the territory of the Central Argentine Conference and establish a new administrative unit.<sup>55</sup> Church leaders decided that this new mission should officially begin to function on January 1, 2013, under the name of Misión Argentina del Centro Oeste (Central West Argentine Mission).<sup>56</sup>

On November 19, 2012, the Argentine Union Plenary Board appointed the first administrators of the new territory. They were: Iván Rosales, president; Juan Peralta, secretary; and Elwin Ernst, treasurer.<sup>57</sup> These men, commissioned to direct the work in the provinces of Mendoza, La Rioja, San Juan, and San Luis, settled in the capital of Mendoza, where the new MACO headquarters was inaugurated. Since December 8, 2012, the mission has been located on General José de San Martín Ave., 1191, Godoy Cruz, Mendoza.<sup>58</sup>

From December 6 to 8, 2012, the new mission, with the assistance of the Argentine Union and the Central Argentine Conference, held its first congress in the church in Mendoza, whose motto was *Vosotros los Pámpanos (You, the Branches)*. More than 70 delegates<sup>59</sup> were present at this event and during those days planning committees were formed, the names of the new department leaders were announced, and plans were made for the future. Among those plans, the following stood out: expansion of the television signal of Nuevo Tiempo (Adventist Media Center) in the region; conducting an evangelism school every six months and taking care of the new converts from these campaigns; growing Small Groups and Missionary Pairs by 20 percent;<sup>60</sup> conducting talks on the importance of publications; increasing the distribution of Adventist literature; and establishing new denominational schools.<sup>61</sup>

Once the MACO team was fully established, and with plans in place for the next few years, this administrative unit began to function in 2013 with 7,896 members, distributed in 83 congregations (39 organized churches and 44 groups). During the first year, with 20 ministers (15 ordained and five licensed) plus the help and involvement of local church members, 574 people joined the SDA Church through baptism; and the Escuela Adventista de Tunuyán (Tunuyán Adventist Academy Mendoza) was established, starting with three students in the first grade of primary school. Over the years this institution has grown and today it exceeds 140 students at the kindergarten and elementary level.<sup>62</sup>

Another of the mission's plans was the evangelization of large cities, localities considered especially challenging. In 2014 they worked for nine months in the city of La Rioja, with the presence of nine missionaries from the territory of the Argentine Union and an evangelization campaign that lasted for a month. As a result, there were 102 baptisms, requiring a total remodeling of the La Rioja Sur church.<sup>63</sup> In just two years as a new territorial organization, this local field had a growth rate of 8.18 percent, evidence the gospel was being taken to all corners of the Argentine Midwest.<sup>64</sup>

Later, MACO developed a communication project with the title *Programa Radio Nuevo Tiempo - Región Cuyo* (*New Time Radio Program - Cuyo Region*). An important donation was received to expand the radio band and prepare a voice-over room in the city of Godoy Cruz, Mendoza province, which allowed the broadcast of local programs and the transmission of the *Nuevo Tiempo* (*New Time*) signal. In addition, the existing equipment was used to start new radio programs in the cities of San Luis and Chilecito, in the province of La Rioja. With the intention of reaching more distant places with the gospel, a radio frequency was rented in the city of San Rafael, south of the province of Mendoza.<sup>65</sup>

In relation to the growth of institutional infrastructure throughout the field, from 2010 to 2015, the mission managed to build ten new churches. The establishment of new Adventist churches is part of the plan in South America to reach places where there is no Adventist presence.<sup>66</sup> Between December 15 and 17, 2016, in order to evaluate the progress of the work in the region during the previous three years and plan future missionary projects, the MACO administration held its second congress. Under the slogan *Jesús viene, ¡Resplandece!* (*Jesus is coming, Shine!*), the church leaders committed themselves to promoting Communion with God, Relationship between People, and the Evangelical Mission.<sup>67</sup>

Two years later, in the southern province of Mendoza, in San Rafael, the dream of inaugurating an Adventist school came true. This was possible thanks to the divine blessings on the efforts of the members and the support given by MACO administration. In January 2018, the Escuela Adventista de San Rafael (San Rafael Adventist Academy) began its school activities. This small school has plans to become an institution that can offer the Adventist community education at all levels and continue sowing the gospel in the hearts of children.<sup>68</sup>

In 2019, the year that Adventism celebrated 125 years of preaching in Argentina, MACO carried out various activities. An example is *Impacto Esperanza (Hope Impact)*,<sup>69</sup> which is a program that encourages reading and provides annual mass distribution of books by Seventh-day Adventists throughout South America. This event had its 12th edition with the theme *Viva la Entrega (Live the Submission)* and its main day was May 25. On that day, leaders and members participated in their communities by spreading hope and reaching people through Christian literature.<sup>70</sup>

Also, in 2019, the workers of this mission, aware that it is necessary to disciple the children and teenagers of the church, planned the Third MACO Pathfinder Camporee.<sup>71</sup> This event took place from October 11 to 14 at the Camping del Movimiento Familiar Cristiano (Christian Family Movement Camping) facility, located in the Valle Grande de San Rafael (Great Valley of San Rafael), with 480 members of the Pathfinder Clubs<sup>72</sup> attending from various cities in the region. During that time, the young participants had the opportunity to get closer to God, to refresh themselves, and to witness to the community the values learned in the club. At the end of this camp, ten Pathfinders were baptized, and many others decided to follow the example of Jesus.<sup>73</sup> MACO currently has ten Pathfinder Clubs and nine Adventurer Clubs.<sup>74</sup>

From March 2020 until the present, due to the pandemic caused by COVID-19,<sup>75</sup> many of the MACO churches were unable to meet as usual and many church activities were paralyzed. In order to reverse this situation and to better serve the membership, MACO began to broadcast, via Internet through its social networks, programs such as sermons, training seminars, Bible studies, and others. During this health crisis and social distancing, evangelistic activities have been adapted and continued. In difficult times, the members of the mission continue to share God's eternal love for humanity.

Throughout MACO's history, actions initiated more than 100 years ago by pioneers (many of them unknown), and promoted by members and leaders, confirm that the seed of the gospel that has been sown continues to bear fruit. The desire of the current leaders is that the members remain faithful to the principles and thus continue to fulfill the mission. The Central West Argentine Mission has sought to motivate and mobilize the members to study the Word of God constantly, to promote communion among the members, and to be faithful witnesses. This Adventist institution will continue to preach the eternal gospel in the central west portion of Argentina.

## Chronology of Administrative Leaders<sup>76</sup>

Presidents: Iván Rosales (2013); Horacio Rizzo (2014-2016); Gabriel M. Cevasco (2016-present).

Secretaries: Juan Peralta (2013-2014); Elwin Ernst (2015); Cesar Sifuentes (2016-2017); Horacio V. Fernández (2017-present).

Treasurers: Elwin Ernst (2013-2017); H. Uriel Garbini (2017-2018); Marcelo G. Sapia (2018-present).



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