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## Sonora Mexican Conference

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Sonora Mexican Conference (formerly Northwest Mexican Conference) is part of North Mexican Union Conference in the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Sonora Mexican Conference is in the state of Sonora, which is the second largest in Mexico and located in the

northwest part of the country. The conference includes 71 of the 72 municipalities in the state (excluding San Luis Río Colorado) and covers a territory of 170,942.25 kilometers.<sup>1</sup> In 2015, the territory had a general population of 2,732,652 inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> Among its most important cities are Hermosillo (the capital), Ciudad Obregón, Nogales, Navojoa and the Port of Guaymas.<sup>3</sup>

In 2018, the conference had 18 districts, 58 organized churches, 47 groups, and a total of 12,433 members cared for by eight ordained pastors and 12 licensed ministers.<sup>4</sup> The conference headquarters is located in the capital of the state and has three administrators, four department heads and seven office employees.<sup>5</sup>

The Sonora Mexican Conference has six schools, and in the 2019-2020 school year had a total of 995 students (40 percent of whom are Adventists) with 99 teachers and administrative staff.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the conference has a camp with an area of 30 hectares. Also within the conference territory are Navojoa University, the ColPac Food Factory, and two Adventist bookstores that distribute material from GEMA, the Adventist publishing house in Mexico.

## Organization History

In 1903, the work of the Adventist church in Mexico was organized, under the nomenclature Mexican Mission, which reported directly to the General Conference.<sup>7</sup> In 1906, a Sabbath School of 13 members was organized in San Luis Potosí.<sup>8</sup> It was here that Leonides Leyva was prepared to take the gospel to Sonora. In 1922, the Inter-American Division was organized, in 1923 the Aztec Union, and in 1926, the Mexican Union.<sup>9</sup>

The original entity has gone through several processes of reorganization, and hence the current territory of the Sonora Conference has been included in entities with different names. In its plenary session on May 21, 1924, the Aztec Union Mission voted to form the Sonora Mexican Mission with headquarters in Tepic, Nayarit, and later in Navojoa, Sonora. This name was maintained until 1928.<sup>10</sup> The mission covered the states of Sinaloa, Sonora, Nayarit and the territory of Baja California.<sup>11</sup>

From 1928 to 1931, the territory was called the Sierra Madre Mission, with headquarters in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua (1928-1930) and then in Chihuahua, Chihuahua (1930-1931).<sup>12</sup> This mission included the states of Sinaloa, Sonora, Nayarit, Chihuahua and the territory of Baja California.<sup>13</sup> From 1931 to 1939, the entity was called Lake Mission. The states of Sinaloa, Sonora and the territories of Baja California were transferred from the Sierra Madre Mission to the Lake Mission. The new mission's headquarters were in Guadalajara, Jalisco (1931-1932 and 1935-1939), but in Nogales, Arizona, USA from 1932 to 1935. The Lake Mission included the states of Jalisco, Guanajuato, Colima, Nayarit, Sinaloa, Sonora, and both territories of Baja California.<sup>14</sup>

In 1939, by recommendation of the Inter-American Division, the name of Lake Mission was changed to Pacific Mexican Mission. Its headquarters were in Guadalajara, Jalisco (1939-1949), Hermosillo, Sonora (1949-1955), and in Nogales, Sonora (1956-1977).<sup>15</sup> In 1948, the name was again changed from Pacific Mexican Mission to Pacific Corporation, and it included the states of Colima, Jalisco, Nayarit, Sinaloa, Sonora and the Baja California territories.<sup>16</sup> In 1959, at the Third Quadrennial Session of the Mexican Union Mission, the name reverted to Pacific Mexican Mission.<sup>17</sup>

At the administrative session of the Pacific Mexican Mission held in 1977, the mission was reorganized and became the Northwest Mexican Conference with headquarters in Nogales, Sonora (1977-1987) and in Hermosillo, Sonora (1987 - present). The new conference included the states of Sinaloa, Sonora, Baja California Norte, and Baja California Sur. It had a total of 4,974 members, 38 churches and 88 Sabbath Schools.<sup>18</sup>

At the triennial session of the conference held in July 1988, a territorial reorganization took place, and the Baja California Mexican Conference was formed. It included Baja California Norte, Baja California Sur including the municipality of San Luis Río Colorado, the northern part of Sonora, which currently is the free zone part of Sonora.<sup>19</sup> At the first quadrennial session of the conference held in Hermosillo, Sonora, June 13-14, 2001, it was voted to divide the conference and form the Sinaloa Mexican Mission.<sup>20</sup> In order to have the name of the conference correspond with the territory it included, it was voted in 2007, to change the name to the Sonora Mexican Conference.<sup>21</sup>

## Origins of the Church in Sonora

In 1906, when there were only 58 Adventists throughout Mexico, there was a mention of people who were keeping the Sabbath in Cananea and in Nogales, Sonora.<sup>22</sup> In 1907, the Mexican territory was divided into six districts, one of which was the Northwest District; it included Sonora, Sinaloa, and the territory of Baja California.<sup>23</sup>

In 1910, the Mexican Revolution broke out, creating great problems for the church, which had just begun to establish itself. The government of the United States asked its citizens who resided in Mexico to leave the country. The ministry of the Adventist church in Mexico was left in the hands of five workers employed by the church. At that time, there were 15 companies scattered throughout the whole country.<sup>24</sup> In about 1912, there was mention of a colporteur named Christian Schulz who was working in Sonora.<sup>25</sup>

There were four places in Sonora through which the gospel entered the state. One of them was Ciudad Obregón. A man by the name of Leónides Leyva met Salvador Marchisio, an Adventist worker in San Luis Potosí, and through his witness became a colporteur and subsequently a pastor. He then moved to Ciudad Obregón, Sonora, arriving on Wednesday May 4, 1927. There he met Francisco Valenzuela and Brother López, with whom he shared the truths of the Sabbath and of the Second Coming. These men accepted those beliefs and became the first Seventh-day

Adventists in the city.<sup>26</sup>

In 1930, the first Adventist church was built at 321 Puebla Street. Leónides Leyva returned to San Luis Postosí in 1939. A school called the Amado Nervo Adventist School was started with a teacher named Amparo. Brother Juan García donated a piece of property at 323 Puebla Street, where the Nueva Esperanza Clinic was built. It was administered by Dr. Jesús López and a nurse, Conchita de Pérez. In 1929, Dr. Reynolds arrived from Loma Linda, California and led the clinic until 1939. His secretary and assistant was María Luisa Lara de Acosta. Patients would come from as far away as Hermosillo and Culiacán.

With the growth of the church it became necessary to erect a new building. In order to do this, the old church and the clinic had to be demolished. On Sabbath, March 12, 1955, the new church and conference center were dedicated.<sup>27</sup> In 1953, there were 269 Sabbath School members and by 1955, there were 560.<sup>28</sup> Currently in Ciudad Obregón and its surroundings, there are four districts, 13 churches, 12 congregations, three community centers, a clinic, and a school.<sup>29</sup>

A second point of origin for the gospel in Sonora was in the mountains of Sonora. In 1925, an itinerant vendor named Juventino arrived at the El Capulín Ranch (in the southern mountains of Sonora), and stayed as a guest at the home of Don Tomás Tineo. The seller gave him a Bible. In 1926, Delfino Zazueta came and organized religious services on Sundays. After being gone for a time, he returned in 1935, and settled in Curea; but in the meantime, he had learned the Adventist message, and he began to share this new doctrine. He left, but when he returned, he brought with him Pastors Anastasio Salazar, Cleofas Valenzuela, and Florentino Zainos, the leaders of the Lake Mission, which had its offices in Guadalajara, Jalisco.<sup>30</sup>

In 1941, Pastors Salazar and Zainos returned, and on March 7, in Tepoca, the Vázquez sisters were baptized, the first baptism in the region. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of the same month, the first group of members in Capulín was baptized. Among them were Don Tomás Tineo and his children - Manuel Tineo and his wife Eulalia, Severiano Tineo and his wife Josefa, Salvador Tineo and his wife Rafaela, Francisco Barceló and his wife María Jesús, María Jesús Barceló (sister of Francisco), and Doña Simona.<sup>31</sup>

In 1934, Dr. Iner Sheld Ritchie from Loma Linda University in California was traveling by train through Sonora. He could see the great need for medical help that the Yaqui Indians had, and with assistance from the authorities, a group of doctors formed a legal entity called "La Liga." They traveled through towns and ranches where they built air strips on which to land their small planes. Brother Manuel Tineo was invited by the members of "La Liga" to be the coordinator of the schools in the mountains of Sonora. He was the principal of the first school in La Quema, Sonora. Sometime later, teacher Artemisa Espinoza came to El Capulín and was the principal of the first school on the ranch there.<sup>32</sup>

Toward the end of the 1940s, as part of an Adventist missionary effort, it was proposed that a school be established in Yécora, Sonora as the best means to evangelize the region. A retired pastor, Francisco Chaney, was asked to direct the project and Norma Trinidad Gracia, a young woman from Guisamopa, Sonora, was invited to be the teacher. Other pioneer teachers were Juan López from San Luis Postosí and Héctor Portillo from Ciudad Obregón, Sonora.<sup>33</sup> By 1953, there were 121 Sabbath School members in the Mountain District<sup>34</sup> and by 1965, there were 164. In 1956, a church was organized in Yécora. Currently there are two districts in the area, Sierra and Tesopaco, four organized churches and seven groups.<sup>35</sup>

Nogales, Sonora was another area where the message reached. Aurora Logan brought the Adventist gospel to the border town of Nogales, Mexico. Married to Juan Logan, she became acquainted with the gospel in Arizona, United States, and came to visit her sister, Margarita Verdugo, at her home on Abasolo Street in Nogales. There the first meetings of the church began about 1947.<sup>36</sup> Subsequently, the meetings were held in a warehouse until a church was built at 146 Jesús Siqueiros Street, in Bolívar Colony.

In 1955, the mission's offices were moved to Nogales, Sonora.<sup>37</sup> In 1958, the idea was proposed that starting a school would be beneficial to both of the Nogales cities.<sup>38</sup> A church was organized in Nogales, where the elders were Miguel Quiroz and Elías Molina.<sup>39</sup> Currently the city of Nogales has two districts, six churches and two groups (one of them in a prison), a school, and a community center.<sup>40</sup>

Agua Prieta, Sonora was another point of entry for the gospel. Sometime in the 1950s, Doña Juanita shared the Adventist message with Herlinda Katibb in Agua Prieta, Sonora. Herlinda married Amado Alejandro García, whose family had come from Autlán, Jalisco, and who had heard of the gospel in Cananea. Soon Lupita Katibb, Conchita Katibb, Reynalda and sister Cheno joined the group.<sup>41</sup>

In the summer of 1967, Daniel Loredó and Josué Quiroz, students from Montemorelos, were assigned to canvass as colporteurs in Agua Prieta and its surroundings. In Cananea there were only two Adventist families, and on Sabbaths they would meet in the living room of the Acosta home. In Agua Prieta the meetings were in the Katibb home, and there were about 15 to 20 people who attended. With the goal of covering the large area assigned to them, Josué went to Caborca, and Daniel went to Nacozari, where there were no Adventists. Daniel canvassed in Fronteras, Cumpas, Banámichic, Cuquiárachic, Mazocahi and Moctezuma.

In 1969, the family of engineer Abelardo Urdiales arrived in Agua Prieta. His family would meet with the members at the Katibb home and at their own home, and on Sabbaths they would go to the small church in Douglas, Arizona. With a donation from the Urdiales family, a property was purchased where the first church was built in 1976. The lower floor of the church was used for classrooms, and the upper floor for religious meetings.

The main base for the district was in Cananea. The families who met on a regular basis and those who formed the church in Agua Prieta were Katibb, García-Katibb, García, Vázquez, Martínez, Madrid, Leal, Matrecitos, Cheno, Sierra, Valdivia, Eduviges Parra, and later Medrano, Holguín and Lastra, among others.

In 1976, the *Colegio Sonora* school opened its doors to the community, with Professor Isaías Medrano as the principal, assisted by Idalia Piedra, Elizabeth Valles de Cortés and Ana María Segovia de Urdiales. Later Professor Elizabeth and Professor Nuñez arrived, the latter being the next principal. In 1977-78, Maranatha Volunteers International built the church. By 2019, the church had grown, and currently there are five organized churches and one group in Agua Prieta, two more churches in Cananea and in Nacozari, a community center and a school.<sup>42</sup>

## Growth of the Sonora Mexican Conference

The growth of the church in general, has been the result of a consecrated administration in the hands of God, and of a church that is committed to fulfilling its mission. Outstanding elements of this growth have been the colporteurs, the establishing of schools and clinics, and the general plans for evangelization that the administration has put in practice each year.

Currently there are two groups that minister through the printed page, one in Ciudad Obregón and another in Hermosillo but there is a need to create a group in the northern zone. There are six schools in the conference and a clinic in Ciudad Obregón but the goal is to make them self-sustaining. In addition, there are community centers in Agua Prieta, Nogales, Imuris, three in Hermosillo, Guaymas and three in Ciudad Obregón. The challenge is to strengthen them in such a way that their influence on the community will be effective.

Initially, the radio program “La Voz de la Esperanza” took the gospel to many homes. Currently there is a radio program out of Ciudad Obregón, “Horizontes de Esperanza,” and another in Hermosillo called “Palabras de Vida” run by lay members. Evangelistic meetings by pastors and lay members, Bible studies by correspondence, personal Bible studies, vacation Bible schools—these have all been means of sharing the gospel and winning people to Christ. For many years Maranatha Volunteers International have given their support in the building of churches.

The majority of the municipalities of the state that are located in the mountains, do not have an Adventist presence. The churches are all located along the federal highway, which crosses the state from north to south, from Nogales to Estación Don; and in the northwest, from San Luis Río Colorado to Santa Ana.

With the goal of finishing the mission of the church, several programs have been implemented over the years. These include the *Healthy Church*, Plan CRECE, small groups, and community centers. Currently, there is *H-18* (based on Acts 1:8), which has as its goal the building of 18 new churches and the organization of 18 new congregations during the current administration. The quadrennial operating plan 2017-2021 “Lord Transform Me,” has as its objectives: to strengthen the devotional life of members, train them for leadership, promote a friendly church, proclaim the gospel with clarity, and develop disciples for the fulfillment of the mission.<sup>43</sup> There is still a great task to complete, and there are challenges to face.

## List of Presidents

C. E. Moon (1924-1927); W. R. Pohle (1928-1929); E. E. Pohle (1930-1931); J. B. Nelson (1931); O. C. Nickle (1932); C. L. Dinius (1933-1938); E. E. Pohle (1939); J. A. Salazar (1940-1942); V. A. Sauza (1943); M. E. Olsen (1944-1946); Juan Plenc (1947); Max Fuss (1948-1950); Eustanio Hernández (1951-1952); Francisco Reyes (1952-1955); Rafael Arroyo y Z. (1955-1957); L. E. Concepción (1957-1958); José Castrejón G. (1958-1963); Raúl M. Sánchez (1964-1966); José Morales O. (1967-1973); Jaime Castrejón S. (1973-1976); Félix Cortés A. (1976-1979); César Gómez J. (1979-1980); Eliazaib Sánchez J. (1980-1983); Carlos T. Salomé (1983-1985); Ismael Ramírez M. (1985-1988); Gregorio Dzul T. (1988-1994); José M. Espinoza (1994-1999); Gabriel Camacho B. (1999-2002); Francisco J. Flores G. (2002-2005); Saúl Barceló G. (2005-2009); Pablo Partida G. (2009-2011); Blas Cabrera H. (2011-2013); David Maldonado H. (2013-2016); Guillermo Méndez M. (2016- ).

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