



Grijalva Conference headquarters.

Photo courtesy of Chiapas Mexican Union.

Grijalva Conference

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Grijalva Conference is a part of Chiapas Mexican Union Conference in the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Territory and Statistics

Grijalva Conference has as its territory the municipalities of Chicoasén, Coapilla, Copainalá, Osumacinta, San Fernando, and Tecpatán; the northern area of Berriozabal municipality; and the western part of Tuxtla Gutiérrez municipality in the state of Chiapas. Its office is located at 20a Poniente Sur, Colonia San José Libramiento, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, Mexico. It has 158 churches and 27,493 members in a population of 387,760.¹ It also has 129 groups, 24 pastoral districts, 22 ordained ministers, and 13 licensed ministers.² Grijalva Conference is a part of Chiapas Mexican Union Conference.

Highlights of the Region

The Chicoasén Dam is within this region. With five 300-megawatt and three 310-megawatt Francis turbine-generators, a height of 261 meters, and a length of 485 meters, it is the largest hydroelectric power station in Mexico and the tallest dam in North America.³

The Sumidero Canyon is also found in this region. It has vertical walls that reach as high as 1,000 meters. It was formed by cracks in the earth's crust and erosion by the Grijalva River.⁴

The area is rich in vegetation due to its forests and jungles. The soil is primarily used for farming, agriculture, livestock, and cultivated land. It sustains great biodiversity, as seen in its flora and fauna.

In Francisco León, northwestern Chiapas, is the active volcano, El Chichón. It erupted in 1982; prior to this, activity had not occurred since about 1360.⁵ An organized Sabbath School exists in Francisco León. Although the volcano is considered inactive, the people in the region need to have sufficient emergency measures in place in case of an eruption.

The official language in the Grijalva Conference territory is Spanish; however, the Zoque language is spoken by some in the municipalities of Copainalá, Francisco León, Tecpatán, and Coapilla.⁶ The Zoque people are thought to be descendants of the Olmecs who immigrated in pre-Hispanic times to the state of Chiapas, extending to Tabasco and Oaxaca. The Zoque language is recognized as a linguistic group from the *mixe-zoqueana* family and is the only non-Mayan language spoken in Chiapas.⁷

Schools

Colegio Rosario Castellanos Figueroa, located at 2ª Avenida Sur Poniente in Tecpatán, Chiapas, officially began operation at the elementary level with 32 students in September 1965. Currently it offers elementary, middle, and secondary school levels and has 299 students. Its staff consists of 18 classroom teachers and five others who work in administration and as service staff.

Colegio Vicente Guerrero, located at Avenida Central Oriente #350, Coapilla, Chiapas, officially began operations in September 1981 with 14 students and Bulfrano Pascasio Córdova as its director. The high school level was started in 1999, but closed in 2008. Currently the school offers elementary and middle school levels and has 94

students. Its staff consists of six classroom teachers and one administrator.

Colegio Narciso Mendoza, located in Copalar Poniente #18 of San Fernando, Chiapas, officially began operations in 1955 with a primary-level education program for its ten students. Currently it offers elementary and middle school levels and has 370 students. Its staff consists of 15 classroom teachers, one administrator, and two general services staff.

Colegio Adolfo López Mateos, located in Calle Niños Héroe in the Ángel Albino Corzo community, Tecpatán, Chiapas, officially began operations at the elementary level on February 19, 1981, with 50 students and Leonel Santos as its director. Currently it offers the elementary level and has 83 students with six classroom teachers.

Colegio Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, located in the Luis Espinosa neighborhood in Tecpatán, Chiapas, officially began operations at the elementary level with 55 students and Irel Acosta González as its director. Currently it offers elementary and middle school levels and has 74 students with six classroom teachers and one administrator.

Colegio Eliseo Mellanes Castellanos, located in the Ignacio Zaragoza neighborhood in Copainalá, Chiapas, officially began operations in 1968, offering first and second grade elementary-level education to five students. Its director was Esther Heleria Gutiérrez. Currently it has 49 students at the elementary level with four classroom teachers.

Origin of Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Territory

The presence of the Adventist faith in the territory of Grijalva Conference first occurred in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas. The first missionaries to arrive in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, had left the state of Oaxaca in 1913, taking the coastal route until they arrived in Tapachula and, on the return trip, in Tuxtla Gutiérrez. By the end of March 1914, among the 15 groups in Mexico that kept the Sabbath was one in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, which is where Catarino Jiménez sold magazines to spread the gospel.⁸

The gospel reached Tecpatán, Chiapas, on August 30, 1933, when Pastor Aurelio Jiménez arrived from Tehuantepec Mission in Oaxaca. He was accompanied by Antonio Gutiérrez from Agua Escondida and the brothers, Santos and Palemón de Velasco, from the community of San Juan Quechula. They met with the president of the municipality, Juan Damasceno Rodríguez Gómez, to request permission to hold a series of evening Bible study meetings. Once the request was authorized, they began on a Wednesday at the house of Librado Márquez Náñez, city council director, presenting the topic of "The Second Coming of Christ."

As a result of those Bible studies, the first Adventist group was established with five adults and a teenager named José Rosario Mancilla Rodríguez. The first two Sabbath meetings were held at the house of the town's medicine man *curandero*, Calixto Cerón López. The third Sabbath meeting was held at the house of Leovigildo Álvarez, who, with his wife, Prócula Esteban, and their children, Pedro and Leova Álvarez Esteban, accepted the

gospel. The first 12 members were baptized in December 1933 and the first Adventist church in Tecpatán was organized. It became a missionary center for the region.

The first local missionaries to leave Tecpatán and spread the gospel to surrounding areas were Samuel Mancilla Morales, José Rosario Mancilla Rodríguez, and Jesús Benito Rodríguez. In the community of Luis Espinosa, Tecpatán, Benito Rodríguez sold several Bibles and invited Samuel Mancilla Morales to preach at Celedonio Gutiérrez's home. Celedonio's six brothers and their wives attended this meeting as did Agripina, widow of a man whose last name was Jiménez. Joyfully, Mancilla Morales preached in the Zoque language and, by the grace of God, the group accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

Later Jesús Benito Rodríguez arrived at the Francisco I. Madero neighborhood, Tecpatán, to visit homes and look for people who would be interested in the good news of salvation. Once the outreach work had been finished, he invited Mancilla Morales to hold Bible studies at the home of Odilón Hernández Gómez, who became the first convert in the community.

Next Benito Rodríguez applied for a transfer to the Emiliano Zapata neighborhood, Tecpatán, where he carried the news of salvation. His nephew and niece, Manuel and Isabel Gómez, were converted as the first Adventist believers in that community.

When Benito Rodríguez was transferred to be a teacher at the community of Iturbide in Copainalá, he preached the truth with enthusiasm, and a widow accepted the gospel along with her three daughters and one son. Thus, the Adventist Church was established in that place.⁹

The preaching of the Adventist message continued throughout Chiapas. On September 22, 1949, a property was bought to build the first church at 7ª Poniente No. 18, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas. In the rear of the church, on the second and third floors, offices were built to house the South Mexican Mission. These offices served as its headquarters from 1950 until 1975.¹⁰

God directed the preaching of the Adventist message and used hard-working colporteurs, committed laymen, and dedicated pastors to fulfill the mission. All were moved by the Holy Spirit and full of faith; they spread the light of hope to towns and small communities through house-to-house visitation. In spite of challenges, they shared the message with hearts filled with satisfaction and joy for having preached the gospel.

Events that Led to Organization of Grijalva Mission

The proclamation of the gospel was taken to far-away territories, and it became difficult to pay close attention to the church members and manage the church work. Therefore, in 1944 Chiapas Mission was organized with 25 churches, 1,422 members, and the state of Chiapas as its territory. With this territorial adjustment, Tehuantepec Mission territory was reduced to the state of Oaxaca and the southern half of the states of Veracruz and Puebla.

¹¹ In 1948 the territory of both missions was reorganized, and South Mexican Mission (*Corporación del Sur*) was

organized with 33 churches, 2,215 members, and the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca as its territory.¹² In 1975 South Mexican Mission had a change of status, and it was renamed South Mexican Conference. It had 60 churches and 28,295 members. Jacob Zaviñon was elected president with Sergio Mejia as treasurer.¹³ By the next year Pedro Romero was elected secretary.¹⁴

In 1982 South Mexican Conference had 103 churches and 55,864 members.¹⁵ Because the church had grown in numbers and leadership, a territorial adjustment was necessary in order to form the Soconusco Mission. On January 6, 1983, in the presence of the Mexican Union Mission administrators and Inter-American Division president, George W. Brown, Soconusco Mission was organized. The mission had 36 churches and 18,762 members, and its territory included South Chiapas and two counties of Oaxaca. Carlos Uc was elected president and Irán Molina as secretary-treasurer.¹⁶

One of the highlights of 1989 was the reorganization of the South Mexican Conference, which led to the organization of the Central Chiapas Conference and the North Chiapas Mexican Conference. The Central Chiapas Conference main office was located in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, and David Javier Pérez was its elected president, with Juan Ramírez as secretary and Salomón Maya as treasurer. At the time it had 55 churches and 29,352 members.¹⁷

The Adventist work grew and strengthened, and it became necessary to form a new mission within the territory of the Central Chiapas Conference in order to serve and consolidate the church. On February 3, 2013, in a Central Chiapas Conference Constituency Congress, it was voted to authorize the ceding of the 11 Mezcalapa zone districts, namely Angel Albino Corzo, Campeche, Coapilla, Copainalá 1, Copainalá 2, Emiliano Zapata, Ignacio Zaragoza, Porvenir, Tecpatán 1, Tecpatán 2, and Tecpatán, to form a new mission, which would eventually be Grijalva Conference.¹⁸

On May 27, 2013, the Inter-American Division Evaluating Commission met for the purpose of analyzing the territorial readjustment and the formation of a new mission. The commission's members were President Israel Leito, Secretary Elie Henry, and Treasurer Filiberto Verduzco of the Inter-American Division; and President Ignacio Navarro, Secretary Dimas López, Treasurer Jairo Zavala, and department director Daniel Guzmán of Chiapas Mexican Union Mission.

After completing the corresponding studies, the Chiapas Mexican Union Conference decided to create a new mission.¹⁹ On April 28, 2016, it was voted to create Grijalva Mission with René Flores Bello as president and Nelson Cruz Gramajos as secretary-treasurer.²⁰

In 2016 Grijalva Mission was organized with the municipalities of Chicoasén, Coapilla, Copainta, Osumacinta, San Fernando, and Tecpatán, plus the northwestern part of the city of Tuxtla Gutiérrez in the state of Chiapas as its territory; There were 134 churches and 23,492 members in a population of 309,427. Its headquarters was located at 10ª Poniente Norte 141, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas.²¹

Challenges to Find a New Headquarters

On July 1, 2016, Grijalva Mission was organized within the office of the Central Chiapas Conference, located at 10^a Poniente Norte 101, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, Mexico. However, due to constant torrential rains, the building had visible structural flaws, cracks, and fissures throughout. The danger to the personnel working within was obvious. Professional real estate experts found that the building was not in acceptable condition and recommended its demolition.

This situation prompted the Grijalva Mission administration to look for a new workplace. The office temporarily moved to the *Centro de Vida Sana*, managed by Chiapas Mexican Union Conference, while necessary steps were taken to purchase a plot of land. The old office building that Grijalva Mission administrators used for more than 50 years will be demolished once the new headquarters is built.

The Grijalva Mission board of directors voted to purchase a plot of land and accepted a design for a new building that will meet official construction standards. The finances to achieve this objective were also voted.

Change of Status

Due to the advancement, maturity, and consolidation of Grijalva Mission, on June 25, 2018, the Central Chiapas Conference Constituency Congress was held at Camp Orion, where 53 general delegates, 115 regular delegates, and six mission church delegates met and unanimously approved the proposal to change the status of Grijalva Mission to Grijalva Conference. President Israel Leito of the Inter-American Division officially declared the change of status.²² The Grijalva Conference was organized in order to uphold the standard of truth and prepare a people to meet Jesus Christ at His Second Coming.

Mission and Strategic Plan for the Conference

Grijalva Conference works to fulfill the mission in the following ways:

Encourage all conference administrators and leaders to conduct home visitations to instruct, encourage, and strengthen church members' faith.

Promote events for pastors and church members to experience revival and reformation through a close relationship with God.

Provide free and subsidized literature as useful tools for the spiritual growth of the church and the proclamation of the good news of salvation.

Instruct and encourage the church to work through small groups, which fosters leadership.

Assist church members in developing their gifts and talents for God's service to fulfill the mission in their assigned territories.

Carry out neighborhood evangelism campaigns to establish new branch Sabbath Schools with the goal of organizing them into churches.

Organize services for the community, such as medical brigades, as launching points to spread the good news of salvation.

List of Presidents

René Flores Bello (2016-2018); Julio César Jiménez Martínez (2018-present).

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