



Olmecca Conference headquarters.

Photo courtesy of Olmecca Conference of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union.

Olmecca Conference

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Olmecca Conference was organized in 2001, when Tabasco Conference was divided into the Tabasco Conference and the Olmecca Conference. While Tabasco Conference remained in the Southeast Mexican Union Mission, Olmecca Conference became a part of the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference, which was organized that

same year. Its territory is composed of two counties of the state of Tabasco, which are Cárdenas and Huimanguillo.

As of 2017, Olmeca Conference had 22 pastoral districts, 162 churches, 22,316 members, 17 pastors with ministerial credentials, 13 pastors with ministerial licenses, and nine other employed workers with missionary credentials. The population of its territory is 372,282 inhabitants. The conference has two educational institutions, the “Olga Priego de Cintrón” school in Cárdenas and the “Ramón Galguiera Montuy” school in Huimanguillo.

Origins of Adventist Work in the Territory of Olmeca Conference

The work of the Adventist Church in Mexico started in 1891, when Salvador Marchisio arrived to preach the gospel, especially about the Second Coming of Christ, through the distribution of Adventist literature.¹ Three years later, Pastor D. T. Jones and Dr. Lillis Wood officially arrived with other missionaries to initiate Adventist work in Guadalajara.² In 1897, Pastor George Washington Caviness arrived to reinforce the team led by Pastor Jones and Dr. Wood. Since 1896, Pastor Jones had started publication of the first magazine in Mexico, “The Friend of the Truth,” which was later renamed “The Messenger of Truth.” This magazine would start a thread that runs through the history of the Adventist work in Mexico.

In 1899, Pastor Caviness with Salvador Marchisio and other missionaries moved to Mexico City to strengthen the work there. In 1904, they established the first printing press in Tacubaya. This became one of the most effective acts for the advancement of the preaching of the gospel as it created an army of ministers of the printed page that, little by little, would evangelize the territory of Mexico.

While the church was being established in Guadalajara and gradually consolidated in Tacubaya, the work of the Adventist Church in the southern part of Mexico providentially began in Ixtaltepec, Oaxaca. In 1905, two brothers, Juan and Aurelio Jiménez, had their first contact with the Adventist message through “The Messenger of Truth” edited by Pastor Caviness. Once they were convinced by the printed message, they contacted Pastor Caviness. In 1910, he not only baptized them but also organized the first Sabbath School in the south of the country. Once the work was established in Ixtaltepec, precious rays of light went out from there to other places as courageous members went to evangelize other places in the south of Mexico, which, unlike the center and the north of the country, is characterized by greater receptivity.

Start of Adventist Work in Tabasco

In the state of Tabasco, missionary work of the Adventist Church began silently, almost anonymously. Between 1919-1934, Governor Tomás Garrido Canaval carried out an anti-clerical campaign that prohibited the organization of any kind of religion. Since it was prohibited to preach openly, colporteurs, through the

distribution of Adventist literature, transmitted the Adventist message in various places in the state. In this way, small groups of believers of the Second Coming were formed. Some of these groups' members kept the Sabbath, even though they did not know of an organized church's existence.

It is believed that other ministers of the printed page included Aurelio Jiménez, who had converted to Adventism in 1910 in Ixtaltepec, Oaxaca. Jiménez worked in the mountains of Chiapas and in the plains of Tabasco.³

Adelaido Sulvarán and his companion with the surname Mendoza, in spite of government restrictions, also sowed seeds of the gospel in Tabasco. Additionally, Laureno Sauza, who learned of the Adventist message in Pachuca, Hidalgo, started work as a colporteur in the region of his birth. He started in Frontera, Tabasco, in 1922 and immediately began to sell "Patriarchs and Prophets," "The Great Controversy," and "Our Future Unveiled." Also, Rafael Aguilar, who had been an army captain for Tomás Garrido Canaval, converted to the faith in Mexico City because of the influence of his mother, who lived in Veracruz. He started work as a colporteur in Tabasco.

In 1923, at the height of Mexico's intolerance, Pastor Florentino Zainos, the first Adventist pastor in the state, arrived by boat and entered through the Port of Frontera, Tabasco, with the task of looking for the scattered believers who had begged for his help. In 1925, Pastor Zainos organized the first Adventist church in La Pigua. However, in 1928, Pastor Zainos was evicted from the state when they discovered that he was a church minister. In those difficult times, he was replaced by Pastor Faustino Aguilar.⁴

In 1929, Max Fuss, a minister of the printed page from Germany who would become a prominent leader of the Adventist Church in Mexico, visited Governor Garrido Canaval, whose government, besides being antireligious, was carrying out a campaign against the use of alcohol. Colporteur Max Fuss presented him with a special issue of "The Sentinel and Herald of Health," which addressed the issue of alcoholism and its effects and had a supplement from the President of the Republic. The governor was pleased and bought a bundle of the magazines, giving Fuss a letter of recommendation, which was used with much success by colporteurs.⁵ Nevertheless, during this period of tension and persecution, the mission of the church stagnated, and some believers moved to other states to practice their faith. Those that remained became discouraged. Still, the seeds sown in that difficult era germinated and bore fruit in the following years.

Origin and Development of the Adventist Mission in Cárdenas

In Cárdenas, some believers who were not aware of the existence of the organized Adventist Church still hoped for better times. Such was the case of Brother Pedro Sánchez, a baker, who, in 1930, gave Bible studies to the mother of Mayor Ramiro Chávez, a proponent of the ideas of Governor Garrido. Upon learning of these studies, the mayor put Brother Sánchez in jail. After he was released, Brother Sánchez moved to the state of Chiapas. Later, his children returned to Cárdenas to strengthen the work of the church there.⁶

In 1937, when the situation began to improve, José Castrejón came to Tabasco as a colporteur and ministerial student from the *Prosperidad* Commercial Institute, which had just opened in 1936. He arrived to work as an

associate of Pastor S. Conde, who worked in the states of Yucatán, Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Tabasco. After working in the *El Número Uno* Colony, Chiapas, Castrejón was invited to Cárdenas by Colporteur Adelaido Sulvaran, who had several interested people, including Candelario Ramos Colorado, a well-known businessman. They immediately began to study the Holy Scriptures. While he studied with the Ramos Colorado family, they were joined by Jaime Cintrón, who had received books from his mother, an Adventist in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz. The families of Ramos Colorado and Brother Cintrón became the first Adventist members in Cárdenas, Tabasco.⁷

Between 1940-1950, membership of Adventism in Cárdenas was strengthened. After organizing as a Sabbath School, the members began gathering in the homes of the first families. In 1945, with help from the Cintrón Priego family, a property was purchased on the street currently named Tomás Garrido Canaval between Juárez and Ramón Sosa Torres, and the first Adventist church in Cárdenas was built. This was also the first Adventist church in the territory of the current Olmeca Conference.

In 1960, Sister Angela Vera took the Adventist message to Huimanguillo, which is the second-most important city after Cárdenas in the Olmeca Conference territory. In Huimanguillo, the leaders of the church established two educational institutions. On a property donated by the Cintrón Priego family, the school now named “Olga Priego de Cintrón” was built, and, in 1980, the “Ramón Galguera Montuy” school was built.

Organization and Development of Olmeca Conference

The precursor to the current Olmeca Conference was the Yucatán Mission, which was organized in 1943 as a part of the Mexican Union Mission, organized in 1923. Its territory included the states of Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Campeche, and Tabasco and a part of the southeast section of Veracruz. It had 12 churches and 1,030 members. It is probable that it had only three districts.⁸ In 1948, it was reorganized as the South East Mexican Mission. In 1975, it changed its status to the South East Mexican Conference. In 1985, Tabasco Conference was organized to deal with the church work in the state of Tabasco. At that time, it had 83 churches and a membership of 24,679 members in a population of 1,200,000 inhabitants.⁹

The growth of the church work in Tabasco Conference allowed it to create a new mission field, Olmeca Mission, with offices in the city of Cárdenas, Tabasco, in 2001. The new mission’s territory was formed by five counties in the state of Tabasco: Paraíso, Comalcalco, Cunduacán, Cárdenas, and Huimanguillo; and by the following counties in the state of Veracruz: Las Choapas, Agua Dulce, Nanchital, Moloacán, and Ixhuatlán del Sureste. At its creation, it had 149 churches and 43,408 members. It became part of the new Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference, organized that same year. In 2004, Olmeca Mission’s change in status was approved, and it became Olmeca Conference.

Olmeca Conference is located in the region of Mexico with the most evangelistic growth, the states of Chiapas, Tabasco, Oaxaca, and Veracruz.¹⁰ For this reason, since its organization in 2001, it has grown considerably. In

2010, under the leadership of Pastor Aaron Omaña Pliego, the conference gave up the five counties of the state of Veracruz to the new Southeast Veracruz Mission with offices in Coatzacoalcos.¹¹

Continuing its growth under the leadership of Pastor Pedro López, in 2016, Olmeca Conference initiated a new field, Chontalpa Mission, whose territory included the counties of Paraíso, Comalcalco, and Cunduacán in the state of Tabasco. Its offices were established in the city of Comalcalco, Tabasco.¹² Olmeca Conference was left with two counties, Cárdenas and Huimanguillo.

Prospects for the Future

Currently, the work of the Adventist Church in Olmeca Conference continues to grow. Although it has a presence in most of the communities of its two counties, there are still small villages to reach. In those places with an Adventist presence, the goal is to plant new churches. If the current rate of growth continues, there may be a need to subdivide and create a new entity.

Challenges still face this conference as it plans for the future. Among these challenges is the academic level of new members who are being reached in the areas of greatest growth. There is also a need to maintain a good financial balance, which has been made possible through the fidelity of the members up to now. These challenges should lead Olmeca Conference to strengthen its sense of identity and the prophetic mission of members based on the total authority of the Scriptures.

The history of Adventism in Olmeca Conference leaves a lesson for posterity: Growth does not depend on one means alone but on the integrative work of the church's different forces. It depends on the efficient work of trained pastors, the enthusiastic work of lay disciples, and the power of the printed word. To have trained workers, there must be strong support for all the departments of the church, especially in strengthening educational institutions.

List of Presidents

Julián Gómez Morales (2001-2005); Abraham Sandoval Jiménez (2005-2009); Aarón Omaña Pliego (2009-2011); Pedro López Ruiz (2011-2018); Obed Adorno Arias (2018-).

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2. M. Ellsworth Olsen, *A History of the Origin and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1925), 553-554.
3. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Mexico."
4. *Documento Inédito de la Historia Adventista de la Asociación de Tabasco*, 1.

5. Dora Breyther de Fuss, *"Desde el Rhin hasta el Grijalva!" Fieles al llamado* (México: CEPESA), 45.
6. David Sánchez, interview by author, Cárdenas, Tabasco, August 8, 2017.
7. Félix A. Cortés, *Suspenseo al filo del agua!* (Montemorelos, Nuevo León, México: Editorial Montemorelos, 1999), 124-128.
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