The São Paulo Conference is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, located in the Central Brazil Union Conference. It is headquartered on 2949 Santo Amaro Avenue, in the Brooklin neighborhood, in the city of São Paulo, in the state of São Paulo, Brazil.

The São Paulo Conference covers the capital of São Paulo and some cities in the west of São Paulo, with an estimated population of 6,161,829 inhabitants. The conference has 35,965 baptized members, organized in 63 districts, with 261 congregations. The average is 1 Adventist per 171 inhabitants. The conference has 1,930 employees, including 179 workers and 92 ordained and licensed ministers.

The conference has 15 educational institutions from the Adventist Educational Network, with 15,182 students. They are Araçariguama Adventist Academy, located in Araçariguama, with 443 students; Cotia Adventist Academy, in Cotia, with 1,317 students; Granja Viana Adventist Academy, also in Cotia, with 1,060 students; Vila Yara Adventist
Academy, in Osasco, with 1,734 students; Ibiúna Adventist Academy, in Ibiúna, with 339 students; and São Roque Adventist Academy, in São Roque, with 898 students. In the city of São Paulo are Brooklin Adventist Academy, with 688 students; Campo Grande Adventist Academy, with 461 students; Cidade Ademar Adventist Academy, with 1,101 students; Interlagos Adventist Academy, with 1,097 students; Lapa Adventist Academy, with 981 students; Liberdade Adventist Academy, with 1,875 students; Pedreira Adventist Academy, with 691 students; Americanópolis Adventist Academy, with 1,060 students; and Santo Amaro Adventist Academy, with 1,437 students.

The São Paulo Conference also manages several welfare institutions, including Day Care Center Araçariguama, in Araçariguama, with approximate daily service capacity for 120 children and 30 adults; Day Care Center Helena Maria, in Osasco, serving around 50 children and 40 adults; Day Care Center of Cotia, in Cotia, with capacity for 120 children and 100 adults; Day Care Center of Ibiúna, in Ibiúna, with an approximate capacity for 50 children and 45 adults; Day Care Center Caueia do Alto, in Cotia, with capacity for about 55 children, served daily; and Day Care Center of Vila Clara, located in the city of São Paulo, with approximately 70 children and 60 adults. The Adventist Natural Life Clinic is also located in São Paulo Conference mission field, in the city of São Roque, directly administered by the Central Brazil Union Conference.

The Origin of Seventh-day Adventist Church Work in the Conference Territory

In 1891 the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church sent canvassers to South America to sell literature. Not knowing Portuguese, they began working only with German and English language literature. “In May 1893, Albert B. Stauffer came from Uruguay to Brazil, where he began to canvass in the city of Rio Claro,” and in other cities in the São Paulo countryside. In Rio Claro Stauffer sold the book Der Grosse Kampf (The Great Controversy) to the family of Pastor Luis Waldwogel, and then left for the south of the country.

With the arrival of Pastor Frank H. Westphal in 1895, Stauffer joined him, and together they went to São Paulo countryside. Through their preaching, Guilherme Stein Júnior was baptized in Piracicaba; the first Adventist convert in Brazil. The two canvassers went to the city of Rio Claro, where they also baptized Guilherme Meyer and Paulina Meyer. Soon “Rio Claro was already the city where there was the greatest concentration of Adventists in the state of São Paulo.”

The arrival of two new families, Augusto Carvalho, his wife, Margarida, and the couple’s seven daughters, and the canvasser José Lima, his wife, Angelina, and their three daughters, increased the number of members of the newly formed church. The Limas opened their own home for regular meetings of Adventist members and those interested in learning more about the church. Members asked God to expand the spread of the Gospel in the city and the region.

On March 14, 1906, the South American Union Conference was established, composed of Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Peru. That same year, missionary Emílio Hoelzle moved to Rio Claro to direct the efforts committed there. The Adventist organization in Brazil was divided into four regions, Rio Grande do Sul Conference, Santa Catarina and Paraná Conferences, North Brazil Mission, and São Paulo Mission, the current São Paulo Conference.

Pastor Emílio Hoelzle wrote how he found the newly formed Adventist community in Rio Claro, and the challenges that arose.

I set up my residence in Rio Claro, where we already have some brothers. I visited the brothers in Santos, as well as the brothers Stauffer and Stein, finding them excited in the Lord. Here too, the work is progressing. [...] There are some interested souls who attend our services. [...] Despite the small number of people in the church we can praise the Lord, for the activity that it manifests in the work for the Lord.

Conference Organizational History

In 1906 São Paulo Mission was established, headquartered in the city of Rio Claro. “The administrators were: Emílio Hoelzle, president; Guilherme Stein, secretary-treasurer; and Guilherme Meyer Jr., licensed minister. The administrative board was composed of the following members: Emílio Hoelzle, Guilherme Stein, Guilherme Meyer Jr., João Mossmann, and Walter Meyer.” In the statistical report of late 1906, the mission had one organized church and 23 frequent members in Rio Claro.

In 1907 Pastor Emílio Hoelzle recorded the baptism of four people and noted the interest of several more. The first Sabbath School records in Rio Claro indicate nine members enrolled. Approximately a year later, that number increased to 40, showing the effects of the fearless preaching and evangelism work carried out there. The evangelist canvasser Antônio Clemente de Lima provided great help for the advancement of the gospel in the city. In 1908, two more congregations were organized in the cities of São Bernardo and Itararé.

In 1909 Brazil Publishing House was founded in the city of Santo André, and the headquarters of São Paulo Mission was transferred there. In 1910, Pastor Jacob G. Kroeker was elected the new president of the mission. At that time, the missionary work of the field was more focused in the São Paulo countryside. The first baptism in the city of São Paulo occurred August 10, 1912, in the waters of the Tietê River. Adventists from São Paulo and São Bernard.
joined the celebration, which attracted the attention of pedestrians and people in vehicles passing through the highway.

In November 1915 Brazil experienced financial difficulties due to insecurity caused by the “European war,” yet the church found itself on firmer financial ground. Canvassing sales had already surpassed the previous year, and tithes and offerings had increased. An evangelistic series, begun that in January in São Paulo, had increased the number of believers. Meanwhile, the first Adventist church in the city of São Paulo was established, in Santo Amaro.

In 1916 São Paulo Mission baptized 75 people, including 43 in the capital. The Sabbath School report for that year showed 244 members, adults and children, spread among 40 classes. In 1918 São Paulo Mission served a total of 323 members. In 1920 the American pastor H. B. Westcott took over leadership of the mission, replacing Pastor Sussemann, who took over leadership in the southern region of the country. In 1921, despite facing the language barrier, Pastor Westcott continued to develop plans for evangelism in the region, encouraging the growth of São Paulo Mission.

In 1922 membership reached 750. Now able to support itself financially, São Paulo Mission changed its status to São Paulo Conference. The new leadership team were H. B. Westcott, president; C. L. Bauer, secretary, treasurer and Tract Society secretary; Manoel Margarido, canvassing director; E. V. Moore, secretary of the Field Missionary and Sabbath School departments; and W. E. Murray, secretary of the Young People’s Missionary Volunteer and Education departments.

The conference was now made up of six churches, one at the headquarters, another at the academy, and in the cities of São Paulo, São Bernardo, Itararé, and Nova Europa. The conference’s mission was “to bring the eternal gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to all the inhabitants of the respective territory, and to contribute to the preaching of the truth among all the nations of the world.”

In 1929 São Paulo Conference headquarters moved to the Central São Paulo Adventist Church, located on Taquá Street, in the neighborhood of Liberdade, in São Paulo. This move occurred in the midst of the global economic crisis, which had caused serious effects in Brazil. In 1942 the church established São Paulo Clinic (now São Paulo Adventist Hospital). The “Lancha Samaritana” [Samaritan Medical Missionary Launch] aimed to serve the population of Vale do Ribeira. This project was created by Pastor Benito Raymundo and led many people to Christ. Missionary work progressed on all fronts, and after some time, land was purchased in southern São Paulo for a new conference headquarters. This location was strategically chosen because it is close to the tram line, connecting downtown to the Santo Amaro region.

In 1970 São Paulo Conference was considered the largest Adventist Conference in the world in number of members, serving about 37,000 members across its field. By the end of 1977 membership had risen to 54,221. With this significant increase, the purpose of “dividing administratively to grow together spiritually” arose. In September 1977 the Extraordinary Assembly approved the reorganization of the São Paulo Conference into two fields: East São Paulo Conference, headquartered in the capital, and West São Paulo Conference (present-day Central São Paulo Conference), headquartered in the countryside. In early 1978, work began on this configuration. São Paulo Conference became East São Paulo Conference, continuing with its headquarters in the neighborhood of Brooklin Paulista, serving about 41,900 members.

On August 5, 1978, a new achievement for the then East São Paulo Conference was the inauguration of the Israelite Heritage Institute, under the leadership of Pastor Benoni B. de Oliveira. The institute was created with the special objective of evangelizing Jews and sympathizers of Jewish culture. Both the inaugural meeting and the subsequent meetings took place on the premises of the Superbom [Brazil Manufacturing Branch] restaurant, in the capital of São Paulo. Due to its continuous growth, on September 6, 1982, East São Paulo Conference was redivided into two fields. Its name was changed to South São Paulo Conference, and remained based in the neighborhood of Brooklin Paulista. In turn, the new field was named East São Paulo Conference, and was headquartered in the neighborhood of Vila Matilde, also in the capital of São Paulo.

In an assembly held December 15 and 18, 1982, the first leaders of the East São Paulo Conference were voted: Rodolpho Gorski as president, Jorge Lucien Burlandy as secretary, and Lauro Manfred Grellmann as treasurer. Despite economic hardship in 1982 and 1983, new groups and churches were founded, “as well as new churches [were] firmly established,” and Adventist schools grew in attendance.

Finally, in November 1991, the East São Paulo Conference was reconfigured, receiving the current name of São Paulo Conference. At this time its team of collaborators was a great producer of evangelistic materials that even served other fields. The administration’s initial goal was to increase Bible study, prayer, and testimony. With this objective in mind, missionary work with the Arabs, Jews, and Japanese who lived in the region of the conference had already been proposed in the previous year.

In 2006 the church celebrated the centenary of Adventism in the state of São Paulo. The Sabbath: World Joy Day program took place July 22, 2006, in the Anhembi Sambadrome, where more than 50,000 people distributed approximately 1.5 million fliers with a message about Sabbath. They also surpassed the previous record of food collection, gathering around 150 tons for those in need. The celebration was attended by the mayor of the city of São Paulo and the governor of the state of São Paulo.

That same year the Central São Paulo Conference carried out an evangelistic campaign in the city of Rio Claro, where the history of São Paulo Conference began. Led by evangelist Luís Gonçalves, the campaign saw more than 300 people baptized. The state of São Paulo now had five conferences and one mission, organized under the
leadership of Central Brazil Union Conference. At that time, the church surpassed 180,000 members across the state, meeting in more than 1,500 congregations.36

In 2014 the headquarters was moved to 2449 Santo Amaro Avenue, still in the neighborhood of Brooklin. In the same year, another reconfiguration was carried out to provide a better structure to meet evangelistic challenges. “São Paulo Conference was divided into São Paulo Conference, headquartered in Brooklin, São Paulo, […]” and “Southeast São Paulo Conference [APS], headquartered in São Bernardo do Campo […].”49

In 2015 the conference placed a strong emphasis on the Hope Impact project.46 “The official proposal of the AP was for each member to distribute one book a day during the month of May. And on Saturday, the 30th, that member should invite a non-Adventist friend to lunch at his home and offer a vegetarian lunch.” It was also proposed to continue the project through health fairs. One of the fairs was held by Vila Rodrigues Church, in a public school in the city of Osasco. “Whoever arrived at the health fair, was registered and walked through a series of stands, which were based on the eight natural remedies. At the end, the participants received the diagnosis about the tests performed, and were presented with the book ‘Viva com Esperança’ [Live with Hope].” That year, around 500,000 units of the book were distributed.41

In 2018, continuing its plan for permanent missionary mobilization, the São Paulo Conference launched a project titled “BEING and MAKING Disciples.” The project seeks to expand the meaning of discipleship in the life of the Christian, showing that being a disciple means more than being an ordinary member of the church, and that the true disciple learns not only by listening, but by practicing as well. That is why it’s important to act, “to multiply the eternal gospel by saving people, keeping the saved in the faith and waiting for Jesus’ return.”42

The São Paulo Conference continues to face great challenges, such as post-modernism that influences São Paulo, the largest metropolitan region in South America, and the ever-increasing cost of urban living, which challenges investments in improving the existing structure and acquisition of new properties.43

With confidence and dependence on the power of God, the São Paulo Conference plans to baptize 12,000 people during the next quadrennium; open 80 new congregations; start the construction of Moema and Santana de Parnaíba Adventist Academies; finish the construction of the Center of Influence/Alphaville Academy; grow at least 40% in relation to tithes, and at least 60% in relation to offerings; build churches in the neighborhoods of Santo Amaro, Americanópolis, Pinheiros, Lapa and Alphaville; revitalize churches in the central region of São Paulo; increase the number of small groups; expand ministries in local churches; use new technologies to reach audiences online; and innovate in evangelistic strategies aimed at new generations.44

Looking to the future, São Paulo Conference leadership aims to continue to concentrate efforts, to preaching the gospel is achieved through its missionary field, by the grace of God.

Chronology of Administrative Leaders


SOURCES


“Bairro de Santo Amaro” [Santo Amaro neighborhood]. City of São Paulo Culture (Online), February 29, 2008.

Brito, A.G. “Na Paulista Leste Começa Evangelismo Especial em Prol dos Judeus” [Special Evangelism Begins for
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3. A canvasser of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, or literature evangelist, is a missionary who “develops his ministry by acquiring and selling to the public the publications edited and approved by the Church, to transmit to his fellow-men the eternal Gospel that brings salvation and physical and spiritual well-being.” *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil)* website, “Colportagem” [Canvassing]. Accessed February 4, 2020, http://bit.ly/2J6T1l.

4. Fabiano R. Mendes, “Histórico da Igreja Central de Rio Claro” [History of Rio Claro Central Church], Monograph, Brazil Adventist University, campus Engenheiro Coelho, 1999, 3.


7. Fabiano R. Mendes, “Histórico da Igreja Central de Rio Claro” [History of Rio Claro Central Church], Monograph, Brazil Adventist University, campus Engenheiro Coelho, 1999, 6.

8. Ibid., 7.


27. “Missionary launches are used to provide services to those who live on the banks of rivers and places that are difficult to access. They are equipped for medical and dental care, also counting on the presence of an Adventist pastor to give spiritual assistance to families.” Centro Nacional da Memória Adventista [National Center of Adventist History], “Lanchas Missionárias no Brasil” [Missionary Launches in Brazil]. Accessed February 27, 2020, https://bit.ly/396w2mo.


34. Ibid.

35. “Paulista Sul foi dividida” [South São Paulo Conference was divided], Revista Adventista [Adventist Review], March 1992, 20.


44. Ibid.


46. For more information about São Paulo Conference access the website https://ap.adventistas.org/, or social media – Facebook, Instagram and Twitter: @apiasd, and Youtube: apiasd.