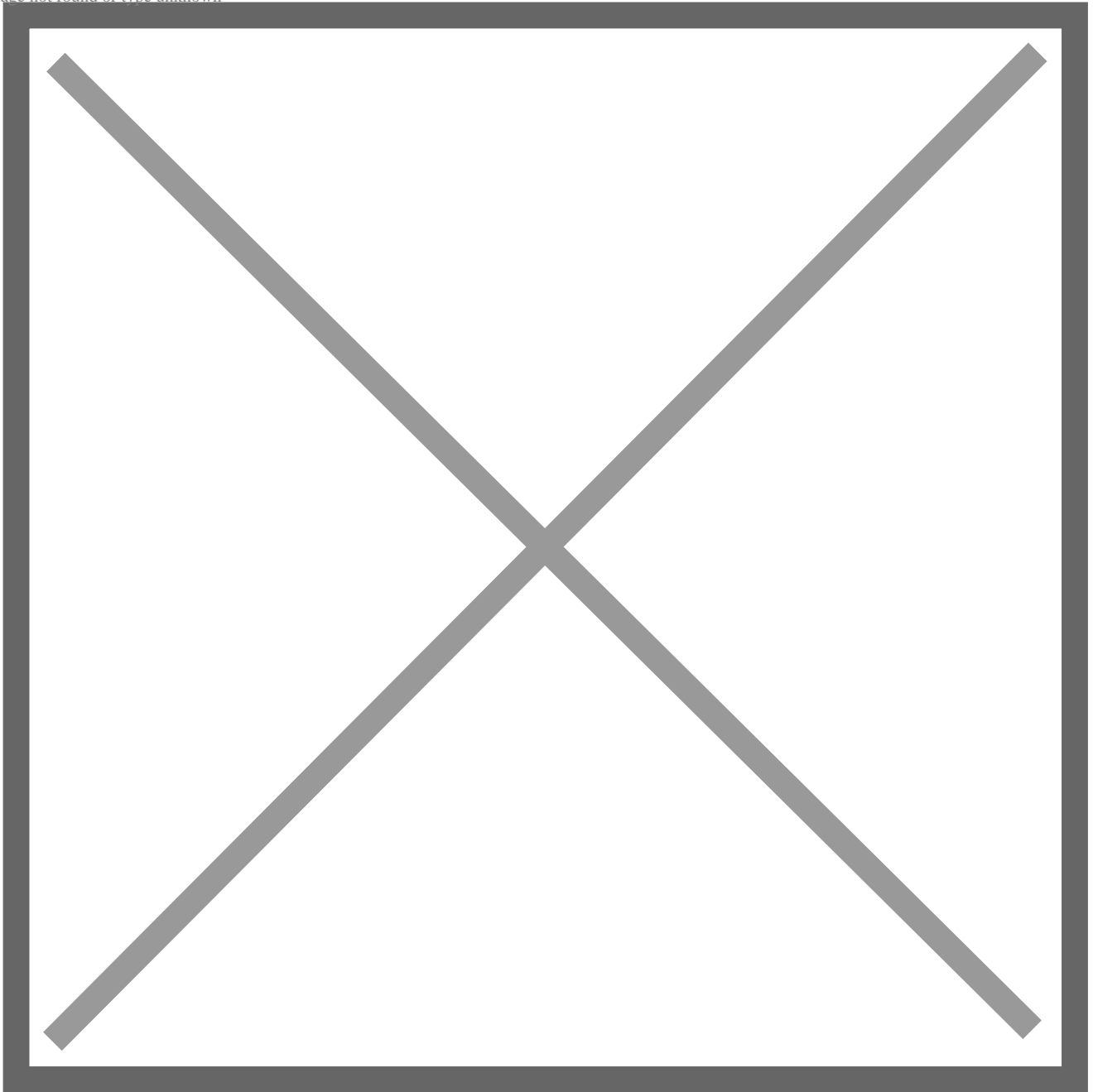


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Southeast Veracruz Mexican Conference

JOSÉ SETH LUIS CRUZ

José Seth Luis Cruz, M.A. (Universidad Linda Vista, Chiapas, México), is a pastor in Coatzacoalcos V district in the south of Veracruz, where he has also served as pastor in 13 other districts: Coatzacoalcos, Coatzacoalcos I, Coatzacoalcos II, Coatzacoalcos III, Insurgentes, Central Coatzacoalcos, Minatitlán, Rodríguez Clara, La Esperanza, Oluta, Acaycan, Ixhuatlán I, and Nanchital II. He is married to María Concepción Martínez González and has two children.

Southeast Veracruz Mexican Conference is a part of the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference in the Inter-American Division. It was organized in 2010 and reorganized and renamed in 2014.

The territory of Southeast Veracruz Mexican Conference is comprised of the counties of Choapas, Agua Dulce, Motoacán, Nanchital, Southeast Ixhuatlán, and Coatzacoalcos and parts of the counties of Minatitlán, Chinameca, Cosoleacaque, and Pajapan. These counties are in the southeastern part of the state on the leeward plains and are watered by the Coatzacoalcos, Clazadas, Uxpanapa, and Tonalá Rivers. Because of swamps and storm runoffs, it has suffered severe floods.¹ In total, this territory covers ten counties, which had a population of 573,887 inhabitants in 2018.²

The conference's offices are located in the city of Coatzacoalcos, Mexico. Even though the city is not separated from the continent, its principal connection to solid land is the Coatzacoalcos 1 Bridge, inaugurated on March 18, 1962, by President Adolfo López Mateos. Its soil is formed mostly by crushed shells, sand, and silt.³ The conference's offices are in Petrolera Colony in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, Mexico. The conference forms part of the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference of the Inter-American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

In 2019, Southeast Veracruz Mexican Conference had 24 districts, 18 ordained and 13 licensed pastors, 193 organized churches, 112 organized Sabbath Schools, and 21,579 members.⁴ The ministry of the printed page is carried out by 40 distributors of Adventist religious literature, or colporteurs, 30 of which are full-time and 10 of which are part-time.⁵

Institutions of Southeast Veracruz Mexican Conference

Gral. Ignacio Zaragoza Educational Center is located in Centro Colony, Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz. In 1979, it began offering elementary level grades in the Sabbath School rooms of the church. In 1982, construction of classrooms began on a property donated by Brother José Carreón. The incorporation of secondary level grades was supervised by Professor Rafael Hernández Méndez. Everything, especially student enrollment, quickly prospered, and plans were soon made to offer preparatory level grades. Today, the institution has enough classrooms to educate students in the elementary, secondary, and preparatory levels and, among its personnel, has 21 teachers and one chaplain⁶

Niños Héroes Educational Center is located in Centro Colony, Ixhuatlán del Sureste, Veracruz. It is a K-12 institution with kindergarten, elementary, secondary, and preparatory levels and, among its personnel, has 25 teachers and one chaplain.

Lázaro Cárdenas del Río Educational Center is located in Nanchital del Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Veracruz. It is a K-12 institution with kindergarten, elementary, secondary, and preparatory levels and, among its personnel, has 20 teachers and a chaplain.

Mi Patria es Primero School is located on 109 Nicolás Bravo Street, Choapas, Veracruz. It offers kindergarten, elementary, secondary, and preparatory levels and has 20 teachers among its personnel.

Francisco I Madero School is located in 4 Caminos Colony, Agua Dulce, Veracruz. It offers elementary and secondary levels and has 16 teachers among its personnel.

Niños Héroes School is located in the community of Cerro de Nanchital, De las Choapas County, Veracruz. It offers kindergarten and elementary levels and has four teachers among its personnel.⁷

El Jobo Camp is located on the Coatzacoalcos-Minatitlán Highway at kilometer 25, Canticas Way. It is called "El Jobo Camp" because of the *jobo* tree at the intersection of the highway and Barrancas-Cerritos.⁸ The camp has an area of nine hectares and an auditorium/dome with a seating capacity of 3,000. It also has a kitchen/dining room, modern bathrooms, and a deep well with sufficient water for all the events held there by churches, Adventurers and Pathfinders Clubs, and Master Guides. Lately, the terrain has been improved with heavy machinery, creating a place for sports courts and camping areas.⁹

Origins of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Territory

The Adventist message arrived in Mexico in 1891, when Italian-American Salvador Marchisio traveled to Mexico City to sell the English edition of "The Great Controversy."¹⁰ Also, in 1891, to support this work, Dan T. Jones, Dr. Lillis Wood, Ida Crawford, Ora Osborne, Alfred Cooper, and his wife arrived in Guadalajara and started a clinic and a school.¹¹ San Luis Potosí was the third place in which the gospel was preached in a wide, organized form, starting in 1902, when Salvador Marchisio joined the ministry of the printed page. Bodwell was already preaching the Word of God there. La Bisnaga is the historical site where the first chapel and a school were established in Mexico.¹²

Pastor George W. Caviness was another pioneer of the Adventist mission in Mexico. He was named president of the Adventist Mexican Mission in 1899. His wide service included being editor of the magazine, *El Mensajero de la Verdad* ("The Messenger of Truth"). Through this, groups of believers in the Adventist message formed in Torreón, Coahuila, and in Ixtaltepec, Oaxaca. Pastor Caviness arrived in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, specifically Ixtaltepec. He knew that, through reading the Adventist magazine, Aurelio and Juan Jiménez Toledo and others had accepted Christ and the message of the Adventist Church. In 1911, Pastor Caviness baptized the first believers and organized the first Sabbath School in the south of Mexico. In 1912, he returned to Ixtaltepec and organized the first Adventist church in the south of Mexico. In front of this first church is the Adventist school, Benito Juárez. It was demolished by an earthquake that affected the area on September 7, 2017, especially the Tehuantepec Isthmus. Thankfully, the school was rebuilt with better facilities.

The work of Christ has continued over 100 years in the Tehuantepec Isthmus. In 1923, the Mexican Mission stopped being dependent on the General Conference and was organized as the Aztec Union Mission. In 1926, it changed its name to Mexican Union Mission, and its territory included only the country of Mexico with about six local fields.¹³

The development of the church in Mexico continued without pause. On June 18, 1970, the 12th president of the Mexican Union Mission was elected; Pastor Velino Salazar Escarpulli was the first Mexican president of the union instead of a missionary.¹⁴

Soon, there were new churches and new mission fields, missions, and conferences. Thousands of members lived the joy of the preaching of the gospel. In 1982, Isthmus Conference was organized with its territory formed by the state of Oaxaca and the south of Veracruz.¹⁵ It was a vast territory that, for this reason, was difficult to administer. In 1987, with the goal to best care for the membership, the boards of Isthmus Conference and South Mexican Union Conference requested the Inter-American Division to readjust their territory and form a new local field. The Inter-American Division approved the plan, and, in 1988, Isthmus Conference was reorganized. Two fields were created from the reorganization, including South Veracruz Conference with headquarters in Catemaco, Veracruz. Its territory was established in the south of Veracruz from the Papaloapan River to the border of the states of Tabasco and Oaxaca.

Formative Events and Formal Organization of Conference

The leaders of South Veracruz Conference planned the organization of Southeast Veracruz Mexican Mission in Coatzacoalcos due to the growth the conference experienced. On December 8, 2008, the board voted to request "the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference to begin the study necessary to establish a new mission with headquarters in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz. This would imply a readjustment of territory of our field and Olmecca Conference."¹⁶ The plan considered by South Veracruz Conference would cede six districts: Central Coatzacoalcos with two organized churches, one congregation, and 717 members; Coatzacoalcos I with five organized churches, six congregations, two branches, and 620 members; Coatzacoalcos II with seven organized churches, one branch, and 798 members; Coatzacoalcos III with seven organized churches, six congregations, three branches, and 662 members; Coatzacoalcos IV with seven organized churches, six congregations, five branches, and 1,004 members; and Allende with four organized churches, three congregations, and 612 members. Olmecca Conference would cede the south part of Veracruz, which was composed of churches in the counties of Las Choapas, Agua Dulce, Moloacán del Sureste, and Nanchital.¹⁷

At the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference mid-year plenary session in June 2-3, the conference approved the plan and nominated the leaders of the new mission. It was voted "to approve the nominations that the nominating committee proposes form part of the administration of Southeast Veracruz Mexican Mission," and Pastor Samuel Mancilla Juárez was voted president with accountant Osiel Caamal Turrubiates as secretary-treasurer.¹⁸

On August 3, 2010, the constituency meeting took place in the city of Coatzacoalcos with 197 delegates. Also present were Pastor Israel Leito, president of the Inter-American Division; the three Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference administrators, President César Gómez Jiménez, Secretary Abraham Sandoval Jiménez, and Accountant Jairo Zavala Arias, treasurer; and the administrators of the fields who ceded territory to form the new mission: from Olmecca Conference, President Aarón Omaña Pliego, Secretary Pedro López Ruiz, and Accountant Arturo Dominguez Sánchez, treasurer; and from South Veracruz Conference, President Noé Valderrama Martínez, Secretary Gabriel A. Aguilar Ramírez, and Accountant Elio Córdoba Cruz, treasurer. The nominating committee confirmed the names submitted for administrators and named departmental directors, and Pastor Samuel Mancilla Juárez was appointed president with Accountant Osiel Caamal Turrubiates as secretary-treasurer.¹⁹ On the same date, the offices of the new mission at 912 Nuevo León Avenue, Petrolera Colony, Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, Mexico, were inaugurated.

Southeast Veracruz Mexican Mission started large, and it was decided that Accountant Turrubiates should not carry the responsibilities of both secretary and treasurer. So, at the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference year-end plenary session of November 15-16, 2010, the conference voted to approve the nomination of Pastor Gregorio Aviles Mendoza as secretary of Southeast Veracruz Mexican Mission.²⁰ With this, the team that continued the work of finishing the mission was complete.

Very soon, due to the growth of Southeast Veracruz Mexican Mission, the time came to change the status of the organization from Southeast Veracruz Mexican Mission, a consumer of material and human resources, to Southeast Veracruz Mexican Conference, a generator of such resources. With this intent, it was decided to take a vote to

request the Inter-American Division through the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference to change the mission's status to Southeast Veracruz Mexican Conference. After the union approved, a constituency meeting was held on June 3, 2014, in the city of Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz. The meeting was composed of 222 delegates, among which was Pastor Israel Leito, president of the Inter-American Division; the administrators of the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference; and the administrators of Southeast Veracruz Mexican Mission. The nominating committee proposed (and it was voted) that Pastor Daniel Estrada Cedillo would be president with Pastor Oscar González Corona as secretary and Accountant Arturo Dominguez Sánchez as treasurer. Southeast Veracruz Mexican Conference started with a membership of 23,683. Also, in the following four years, 40 churches were organized²¹

Prospects for Development of Conference

In the area of education, the conference has six schools: three K-12 institutions in Coatzacoalcos, Nanchital, and Ixhuatlán; an elementary and secondary institution in Agua Dulce; a kindergarten and elementary institution in Cerro de Nanchital; and a kindergarten to preparatory institution in Las Choapas. The challenge in each educational institution is to increase enrollment.

From July 2013 to July 2017, there have been 7,392 new members added to the church of Southeast Veracruz Mexican Conference. Nevertheless, the conference faces challenges to progress: lack of safety in the region, migration problems, and apostasy. Statistically, a pastor ministers to an average of 1,030 members. For this reason, in places with large churches of over 500 members, one pastor should have only that one church. Currently, there are 24 districts, but the district of Nanchital II has a large central church; therefore, that church with one or two more could be a new district, as are Ixhuatlán I and Central Coatzacoalcos. In the same way, the district of Cerritos with 24 churches would qualify to divide into two districts.

Fortunately, the territory is not very large and lends itself to frequent visits from leaders of the conference to its churches. In this way, leaders form close relationships with local churches and ensure that pastors and leaders are united and committed to their mission.

We praise God for all our achievements, but there are still challenges like the building of churches worthy of worshipping God and the completion of El Jobo Camp, the location of large events. The camp only has an auditorium, a dining room, and bathrooms. It needs dormitories, sports courts, a swimming pool, and other facilities to provide the church with what is necessary for its activities, for youth activities, and for evangelism. There is a need to inspire a revival in evangelism, stewardship, youth, and children and a need to improve the quality and quantity of each for the glory of God.

Researching this conference's history reveals that it is a great blessing to work for God in this territory. God helps so that, united, members and leaders can be committed to finishing our mission so that Christ can come soon.

List of Presidents

South East Veracruz Mission

Samuel Mancilla Juárez (August-September 2011).

South East Veracruz Conference

Daniel Estrada Cedillo (2011-2018); Oscar González Corona (2018-).

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