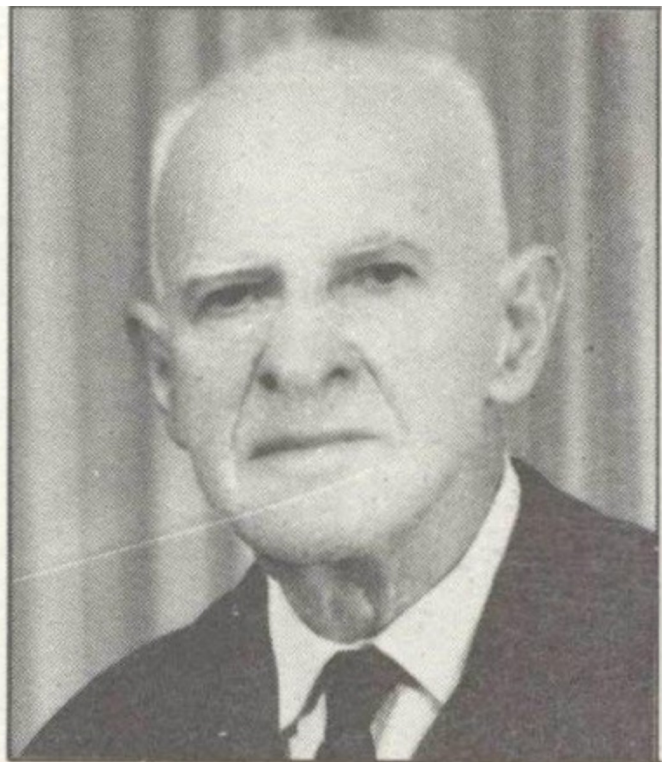


# Oliveira, Saturnino Mendes de (1890–1977)



Saturnino Mendes de Oliveira

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## THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP

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Saturnino Mendes de Oliveira was born on May 10, 1890, in the city of Santo Antônio da Patrulha in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.<sup>1</sup> He was the son of Saturnino Mendes Rabelo de Oliveira and Maria Thompson de Oliveira, Portuguese and English descendants respectively. He learned his first Christian principles from his mother, who was a Catholic. At this time, almost all immigrants in Rio Grande do Sul professed the Catholic religion, except the German, who were mainly Lutheran.<sup>2</sup>

Saturnino was raised in a rural environment. It was the family custom to get up before sunrise, when he and his siblings, all eight of them, helped their father in the farm duties. As a child, Saturnino already showed the attributes that would later make him a great evangelist - he was very zealous and committed to the tillage work.<sup>3</sup> The Adventist message reached the Oliveira family between 1903 and 1904 through a missionary visit by Pastor

Ernesto Schwantes. In their first contact, the pastor discussed the second chapter of the Book of Daniel, which refers to Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the statue and the world history. The family's interest was piqued, and they agreed to continue having Bible studies. Saturnino and his family were baptized by Pastor Schwantes in March 1904 at the Campestre Adventist Church. He was 14 years old at the time.<sup>4</sup>

Encouraged by Pastor Schwantes, Saturnino felt the desire to study at the Adventist school in Taquari. Not having the necessary financial resources, his father instead gave him good planting land and accorded that whatever he produced there would be exclusively for his use and benefit.<sup>5</sup> This allowed Saturnino to study at Taquari for a time, but he was not able to complete his coursework since in 1910 the school was sold.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, there was no other missionary school in the region at that time.<sup>7</sup>

He soon decided to become a missionary, so he entered the canvassing work in 1910 at the age of 17 in the city of Porto Alegre. After that, he travelled through the eastern cities of Rio Grande do Sul, passing by Santo Antônio da Patrulha, Conceição do Arroio (today Osório), Barra do Ouro, Três Forquilhas, and Torres until he reached the city of Araranguá in the state of Santa Catarina.<sup>8</sup>

In 1912, Saturnino was invited to work in the state of São Paulo, where he attended one of the first canvassing courses in Brazil held at the Brazil Publishing House and directed by pastors Lipke, Spies, and Conrado.<sup>9</sup> Due to his dynamic and trustworthy conduct, he was invited to choose between three areas as a church worker: teacher, evangelist, or canvasser. He chose the latter since he preferred to be on the frontline of missionary work. He was then appointed as a sales agent and canvassing supervisor for the São Paulo Mission. As a pioneer canvasser, he met the first Sabbath keepers in the cities of Socorro, Espírito Santo do Pinhal, Bertioga, Rio Preto, Barretos, Cosmópolis, and many others.<sup>10</sup>

In 1914, he helped Pastor John Lipke in the first series of meetings held in Santo Amaro, which today is a district in the city of São Paulo.<sup>11</sup> His role was to give Bible studies to any interested people. One of them was Pantaleão Teisen, who owned a large portion of land at that place. Later in 1915, a part of it was sold to the Adventist Church, where what today known as the UNASP campus São Paulo was built.<sup>12</sup>

After the Seminary's construction, Saturnino's plan was to study there in order to become a better-prepared missionary. However, the number of church workers in São Paulo was few, so he continued canvassing. In 1916, he trained the first class of student canvassers at the Adventist seminary.<sup>13</sup>

By this time, Saturnino and his auxiliary canvasser José Mello were revisiting the city of Barretos in the state of São Paulo in order to continue the interest begun about the Sabbath issue during their canvassing work. On this occasion, he met Jerônima Cervo (1898-1988),<sup>14</sup> whom he married on May 10, 1916.<sup>15</sup> From their union, five children were born: Gideon, Enoch, Ruth, Rubem, and their eldest daughter, who sadly passed away at a young age due to a lack of resources for medical treatment.<sup>16</sup>

In 1919, Saturnino was appointed as director of the publishing department of the Parana-Santa Catarina Mission.<sup>17</sup> In order to work in this field, he had to learn the German language since a large number of that population couldn't speak Portuguese. After almost ten years of dedicated service, he accepted a call to serve as canvassing director of Minas Mission in 1928. After the organization of the Rio-Minas Gerais Mission in 1931 with headquarters in the city of Rio de Janeiro, he led the field's Publishing department until 1935. Afterwards, he was appointed canvassing director of the Northeast Brazil Mission, later known as the Bahia Mission, where he served from 1935 to 1942.<sup>18</sup>

In 1943, he began the canvassing work at the newly organized Rio São Francisco Mission alongside two canvassers. Afterwards, he led the canvassing work at the Goiano-Mineira Mission from 1944 to 1948,<sup>19</sup> and at the Mato Grosso Mission from 1948 until his retirement in 1950.<sup>20</sup>

However, Saturnino's desire was to continue canvassing as long as possible. So, after retiring, he asked the São Paulo Conference for a field to work in. Having his request accepted, he canvassed in the city of Sorocaba for about four years. Following that, he worked in the district of Cidade Dutra, São Paulo, where a church was established through his evangelistic efforts. After fracturing his leg, he diminished his activities as a canvasser but still continued to make missionary visits. Even though he was retired, Saturnino continued canvassing for 10 more years.<sup>21</sup>

In April 1977, Saturnino had a stroke that restricted his bodily movements. On August 18, 1977, he suffered a second stroke, causing his death at the age of 87. The funeral service was held at Capão Redondo Church in São Paulo city.<sup>22</sup> He left behind a 51-year contribution to the canvassing work in Brazil, 17 as a canvasser and 34 as canvassing director. According to his statement for *Revista Adventista* (the Portuguese language *Adventist Review*), he worked in "11 Brazilian states, visiting 830 cities and villages, not counting the small settlements and farms." As means of transportation, he traveled by "horse, train, automobile and ship." On one occasion, he happened to travel "66 km on foot per day." Saturnino is remembered for his passion and enthusiasm as well as for his simple faith.

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## SOURCES

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## NOTES

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3. *Ibid.*, 5, 6.
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5. Bomfim, "Saturnino Mendes de Oliveira," 7.
6. Apêndice: Saturnino Mendes de Oliveira (1890 -1977), 1.
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11. John Lipke, "Sao Paulo (Brazil) Mission," *ARH*, September 3, 1914, 12.
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14. "Jerônima C. de Oliveira (1898-1988)," *Revista Adventista* 85, no. 7 (July 1989): 32.
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