Northeast Maranhão Mission (MNeM) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, located in the territory of North Brazil Union Mission (UNB).

Northeast Maranhão Mission’s headquarters is at Commercial block no. 1, Zip Code 65130-000, in the La Belle Park land division, in the Maioba do Genipapeiro neighborhood, in the city of Paço do Lumiar, in the state of Maranhão, Brazil.

The MNeM area of missionary activity comprises the northeastern region of the state of Maranhão and part of the metropolitan region of the capital, São Luís, covering a total of 42 cities. In this area, the total population is 1,421,154 inhabitants. The Northeast Maranhão Mission leads 48,118 baptized members, in 544 congregations spread across the missionary field. The average is one Adventist per 29 inhabitants in the territory.

In the MNeM field, two units of the Adventist Educational Network are in operation, which are: Cidade Operária Adventist Academy, located in São Luís, with 696 students; and Cohab Adventist Academy, also in São Luís, with 974 students. The total amount of students served in these two school units is 1,670. In this missionary field there is also the Adventist Training and Recreation Center 2 (CATRE 2), located on 257 Rua da Bomba, in Vila Esperança neighborhood, in São Luís.

In order to meet administrative demands, the mission has 214 servers of whom 37 are credentialed workers and 16
The Origin of the Adventist Work in the Mission Territory

The first reference to the state of Maranhão, in the SDA documents, is mentioned in 1920, in the August edition of Revista Mensal [Monthly Review]. In an article from that edition, it was reported that Mr. Juvenal Olympio de Farias and his wife were sent to work through canvassing in Maranhão. In December of the same year, another canvasser, Henrique José Corrêa, was called to work in the capital of that state. As he got there, this canvasser discovered that there were already 18 people studying the Adventist message, and at least two keeping the Sabbath.

Two years later, a man named Firmo Marinho, an Adventist who worked as a barber, moved to the city of São Luís. He set up his barber shop on the side of a railway, located in Baixinha neighborhood. That barber decided to spend most of his time, while attending to his customers, preaching the Gospel message, thus intentionally talking to people. As a result of divine blessings, a group of members of the Baptist Church began to study the Bible with Firmo. Shortly after, that group of interested people began to meet at the barber’s home, which was also located in Baixinha neighborhood.

In April of that same year (1922), missionary Clarence Rentro visited the capital of Maranhão. He focused his activities on visiting the canvassers’ field of work and studying the Bible with people who were interested in knowing more about the Adventist message. During that trip, Clarence Rentro baptized 8 people in the capital of Maranhão and, as far as we know, this was the first Adventist baptismal ceremony held in the state of Maranhão.

Later, in 1926 and 1927, another missionary arrived in São Luís. This was the German Hans Mayr who traveled from the city of Fortaleza to the capital of Maranhão. During the journey by ship to São Luís, Hans met a fisherman, on the banks of the Anil River, who told him about the evangelistic work carried out at Firmo Marinho’s barber shop. So, as he arrived in the capital of Maranhão on a Saturday morning, that missionary walked through Baixinha neighborhood until he found the group of Adventists he had heard about. During his stay in that city, Hans sold books and studied the Bible with the new converts.

As the time went by, that small group which started with Firmo Marinho’s customers grew a lot. However, in 1929, due to the barber’s move to the city of Santarém, in the state of Pará, that congregation started to meet at the house of another member, in João Paulo neighborhood, also in São Luís. This was only the first time that the congregation changed its address. Due to the constant growth in the amount of Adventists, this group headquarters moved several times, remaining without a fixed location until 1942. This lack of a fixed place for church meetings was a reflection of the unfavorable socioeconomic conditions that affected a large part of the state of Maranhão at that time. But even amidst the challenges, Adventist work moved forward in the region.

In 1942, when pastor Walter Streithorst arrived in Maranhão to serve the Adventist work, there were groups established in the cities of Caxias, Bacabal, Jeju, Rosário, Coroatá, Pedreira, Inháuima, among others. That same year, he and pastor Gustavo Storch held a series of meetings at a place called Cassino Maranhense, in the city of São Luís. Soon the amount of Adventist members increased even more, in view of the relative improvement in the economic situation. Thus, it became possible to rent a big house on Paz street, where that group of São Luís was organized as a church. About 6 years later, the São Luís Adventist community acquired a piece of land on Celso Magalhães street, in the center of the capital, for the construction of the Central Church temple which was inaugurated in 1951.

At some distance from there, in the city of Barreirinhas, the Adventist message arrived in 1947, through the couple Sebastião and Josina Passos. This couple had attended Gustavo Storch’s meetings in the Adventists room on Paz street, in São Luís, and at the end of that series, Josina was baptized. However, Sebastião decided not to be baptized because he wanted to solve all doubts he still had about the Bible. In November 1947, the Passos family moved to Barreirinhas and, there, Sebastião, despite not being baptized, organized a Sabbath School class at his home. After some meetings, some of his family members were converted. Later, in 1948, Sebastião himself was baptized by pastor Frederico Pritchard in the city of Rio Novo, nowadays known as Paulino Neves.

As he arrived in the city of Barreirinhas, Sebastião made the Light Bearer III missionary launch well-known. The commander was Pastor Pritchard. Some time later, the pastor took the launch work to that city and provided health care to the population. He provided medical assistance during the day and held a series of meetings during the night. A few weeks later, Pastor Pritchard went to Barreirinhas again, together with the pastor and nurse Américo Quispe. They conducted another series of meetings which lasted 20 days. At the end of that evangelistic initiative, a church was established there, which operated in the home of Sebastião Passos for about 27 years.

Another point of Adventism pioneerism in the region was the city of Paulino Neves (former city of Rio Novo), where the message arrived in the late 1940s through a woman called Maria Emília Rodrigues Moreira, popularly known as “Sinoca.” She had also attended Gustavo Storch’s meetings in São Luís and, on returning to Rio Novo, she spoke about the Gospel to her brother, Américo Rodrigues Moreira, and to her sister-in-law, Rosa. In 1948, Pastor Frederico Pritchard, who was in the city of Parnaíba, in the state of Piauí, traveled to Rio Novo at the request of Sinoca, and spent a week studying the Bible with the Moreira family. About three months later, Pastor Pritchard baptized nearly 30 people in that city, and organized the first church in that location.

 licensed workers, and from this group 41 are pastors. Among these pastors, 32 are ordained and 9 are licensed, 9 of whom work directly in the administrative unit's office, and the others are spread across schools, CATRE and districts of the missionary field.
In relation to the city of São José de Ribamar, according to the information concerning that time, there was a group of Adventists who met there since 1950. This group was led by Rufino Gomes and his family. At the time Pastor João Gnutzmann was working in the region, he visited the city São José de Ribamar several times, and helped to build a room for worship meetings there. Still in the early 1950s, the Gomes family moved to Vila do Paço, which is currently known as the city of Paço do Lumiar, where Northeast Maranhão Mission is headquartered. 18

Meanwhile, in the city of São Luís, Adventist work continued to expand. In January 1951, the capital of Maranhão already had an Adventist church and an elementary school. Until then, both the church and the school operated in a rented room. 19 However, as previously stated, that congregation had already acquired land (on Celso Magalhães street) for the construction of the definitive temple of the SDA São Luís Central Church. The inauguration of this new place happened in October of that same year. 20 The following year (1952), in the state of Maranhão, six Adventist primary schools were already operating, with a total of 250 students. 21

On September 7, 1963, an Adventist church was inaugurated in the city of Rosário, then belonging to the district of São Luís. The ceremony was attended by leaders from the North Brazil Union Mission and the North Coast Mission. On the same day of the inauguration, Pastors Manoel Walter and Benedito Lisboa started a series of meetings at the new temple. 22 That same year, some Adventists arrived in the city of São José de Ribamar, in the metropolitan region of São Luís. Although a group had already been established in that city in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, most members had moved to the city of Paço do Lumiar. Thus, the congregation started operating in 1964. 23

In 1967, Adventist social assistance took new steps with a mobile clinic, which traveled the states of Maranhão and Piauí. During the first quarter of that year, 34 lectures on health and 48 lectures on religious themes were held in 56 villages and cities. The work done through that mobile clinic brought results, and by March 1968, almost 130 people had already been baptized in both states. 24 Similarly, during the 1970s, medical and social assistance work was intensified in the region. Through an agreement with Funrural, 25 the North Coast Mission acquired a VW van to perform the necessary work. Based in Caxias, Maranhão, that car, driven by the nurse Ivo Jacinto Meneses, provided assistance to 18 cities in the region, treating more than a thousand people per month. 26

The work continued to advance on many fronts. In 1984, the São José de Ribamar Adventist temple was inaugurated in the metropolitan region of São Luís. Then, in 1987, the group that existed in the city was organized as a church. 27 In the village of São Bento, then part of the city of Tutoia, a Catholic lady named Maria Esther Silva became an Adventist after reading a Bible that she received as a gift from the community priest. Maria decided to keep the Sabbath, and the other parishioners followed her example. After meeting Adventist brothers, in a short time, almost all Catholics in the city became Seventh-day Adventists, and the Catholic temple was transformed into an Adventist temple. 28

During March 1986, the city of São Luís hosted the Triennial Assembly of the North Coast Mission. At that time, the delegates present decided to reorganize the field (which covered Maranhão, Piauí and Ceará), and to create the Maranhão Mission (present Maranhão Conference). 29 The official request for reconfiguration of the missionary territory was sent to UNB, which approved this measure in 1988, resulting in the creation of the Maranhão Mission. That year, there were 51 organized churches, 133 groups and 69 more Adventist families (in more isolated places) in Maranhão. The new administrative unit was inaugurated July 27-30, 1988. 30

In November 1996, the city of São Benedito hosted a campmeeting organized by the Maranhão Mission. About 1,500 people from Barreirinhas and Baixo Parnaíba districts attended the meeting, and 32 baptisms were performed on that occasion. 31 The Maranhão missionary field continued to expand over the years. This is shown, for example, by data from the city of Barreirinhas. 32 In 2004, this city completed 57 years since the Adventist message first reached it, with the arrival of Sebastião and Josina Passos. In that year (2004), Barreirinhas already had about 3,000 SDA members, distributed in 60 congregations and two pastoral districts. 33

The Mission Organizational History

In early 2018, Maranhão Conference served about 79,800 Adventists, distributed in 902 congregations. 34 Being one of the largest fields in the North Brazil Union Conference, at the time, it was noticed that it needed to be reorganized. Thus, in an administrative meeting of the board of directors of the Maranhão Conference (AMa), which took place on May 25, 2018, the votes of the South American Division (SAD) and UNB were recorded, which approved the proposal for territorial reorganization of AMa and the creation of the Northeast Maranhão Mission. When the MNeM was established, it assumed as a mission to be a field where they work to achieve “excellence in Discipleship, Fidelity and Evangelism, aiming to fulfilling the mission of the Master.” 35

In August 2018, the board of directors of the North Brazil Union Conference voted to nominate Pastor Samuel Bastos as president of the new mission, and Pastor José Araújo Neto, as treasurer. 36 Subsequently, in October of that year, UNB voted Pastor Fausto Farias, secretary of the Maranhão Conference at the time, to exercise the same function in the new missionary field. The MNeM was responsible for leading the advancement of Adventist work in the northeast region of the state of Maranhão and in part of the São Luís metropolitan region. 37 The new mission started its activities with the task of leading more than 48,000 Adventists, who were spread over 543 congregations in the territory, and started to administer the Cohab and Cidade Operária Adventist Academies. 38

From its creation until the end of 2019, the MNeM office operated in a provisional headquarters. Notwithstanding, in October 2018, the cornerstone for the construction of the mission’s final headquarters was laid. 39 The inauguration of
this new office took place later, on October 24, 2019, at Commercial block no. 01, in La Belle Park land division, in the Maioba do Genipapeiro neighborhood, in the city of Paço do Lumiar. The opening ceremony was attended by leaders from the South American Division and the North Brazil Union Conference.

Even with the short time of existence of the Northeast Maranhão Mission, the Adventist Church in the region has already developed several projects of social and spiritual importance. More and more people are getting involved in projects like “Dez Dias de Oração” [Ten Days of Prayer], whose mobilization has been accompanied by solidarity actions. Adventists in the region have also turned their attention to refugees of the humanitarian crisis, which has plagued Venezuela since 2017. In August 2019, members of the churches in the Janaina and Vila Embratel neighborhoods, in partnership with a residents’ association, offered breakfast to Venezuelan refugees at the São Luís Bus Terminal. On the occasion, the volunteers also delivered clothes and basic food baskets to the families who lived at the bus station.

In the MNeM missionary field, there has also been active participation in other missionary projects fostered by SAD, such as “Impacto Esperança” [Hope Impact] and “Quebrando o Silêncio” [Breaking the Silence]. In the 2019 edition of the “Impacto Esperança” project, members of more than 500 Adventist congregations in the northeast of Maranhão distributed around 245,000 copies of the book “Esperança Para a Família” [Hope for the Family]. During the “Quebrando o Silêncio” project of the same year, awareness actions were held, such as marches and distribution of magazines.

The MNeM leadership and members are also very concerned with the spiritual preparation of children and adolescents. Therefore, there are more than 440 Pathfinder and Adventurer clubs in this region, with almost 10,500 active participants in total. Another means used for the preaching of the Gospel in that field is radio waves. In the region near the administrative unit headquarters, Rádio Cultura [Culture Radio] (106.3 FM) broadcasts the radio program “Jesus em Sua Vida” [Jesus in your life]. Its evangelistic content reaches the cities of Paço do Lumiar, São Luís and Raposa, and has a potential reach of 60,000 people. This is one of the many tools that are used by SDA in that region, in order to reach some of the locations that do not yet have an Adventist presence.

And these various missionary fronts have produced results. Since the recent inauguration of the MNeM, a new Adventist church has been planted in the covered region. This was the Chácara Brasil Seventh-day Adventist Church, located in Turu neighborhood, in the capital of Maranhão. Even though it has existed since the 1980s, this neighborhood still did not have any Adventist presence. Currently, about 65 people attend that congregation which is also part of a project to reach neighborhoods and localities without an Adventist presence.

Regarding the educational area, the mission’s plans include building one more Adventist academy, and train teachers and employees. As for churches, the plans involve: intensifying efforts to diminish the amount of members leaving the Church; making investments and providing more support to district pastors; training canvassers for evangelistic work in the field; improving service to members by increasing the number of pastoral districts; consolidating the Small Groups project, in order to increase the strength of faith and the relationship between members; getting children and adolescents more involved in an intense spiritual life, through projects such as Pathfinder and Adventurer clubs; and optimize the physical space of CATRE 2.

Realizing these plans and continuing to grow solidly has its challenges. One of them is the precariousness of the urban infrastructure in several cities served by the Mission, a reality that results in difficulties in the displacement of the missionaries during the task of preaching the Gospel. However, the history of the work in the MNeM territory shows that the missionary disposition of Adventists who worked in this region is an inspiring example for the advancement of the Church even amidst many adversities. One of the lessons learned is that missionary success is the result of letting the Holy Spirit work through dedicated people, who wholeheartedly preach the Gospel.

Chronology of Administrative Leaders

 Treasurers: José Araújo Damasceno Neto (2018-Present).

SOURCES


Adventistas Nordeste Maranhão [Northeast Maranhão Adventists]. Facebook post, August 26, 2019.

Adventist South-American News Agency, “Nordeste do Maranhão ganha nova sede administrativa da Igreja...”

Barreto, Orlando. “Mais Uma Escola” [One more School]. Revista Adventista [Adventist Review], no. 6, year 47 (June 1952).

“Campal inspira igrejas no Maranhão” [Camp meeting inspires churches in Maranhão]. Revista Adventista [Adventist Review], November 1996.

Carianha, Josiane (UNB secretary assistant). Email message to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associate editor), September 10, 2019.


Educação Adventista [Adventist Education]. https://www.educacaoadventista.org.br/.

Ferreira, Mallú. “Cohatrac cresceu com gerações e se tornou autossuficiente” [Cohatrac grew over time and became self-sufficient]. O Imparcial [The Impartial] (Online), July 31, 2018.


Luzeiro [Light Bearer]. https://www.luzeiro.org/.


“Recentemente, a Missão Costa-Norte...” [Recently, the North Coast Mission...]. Revista Adventista [Adventist Review], vol. 65, no. 2, February 1970.


Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) website. https://www.adventistas.org/pt/.


NOTES


2. Josiane Caranha (UNB secretary assistant), e-mail message to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associate editor), September 10, 2019.

3. Ibid.


6. Evangelist canvasser of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the 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 on February 4, 2020, http://bit.ly/2J6tY1I.


15. “The first Light Bearer Missionary Launch was inaugurated in July 1931 by the couple Leo and Jessie Halliwell, aiming to bring health education and free medical and dental assistance to the riverside population in the Amazon. […] During these 80 years, thousands of people were directly benefited by the support provided by the launches. In many cases, this was the only way of these people to get some medical and dental assistance.” Luzeiro [Light Bearer], “História” [History], accessed on January 22, 2020, https://www.luzeiro.org.


17. Ibid., 101, 102.

18. Ibid., 72.


demonstrate "skill with discipline through drill commands and have their creativity awakened by manual arts. They also fight the use of tobacco, like camping, hiking, climbing, exploring the woods and caves. They know how to cook outdoors, making a fire without matches." Besides, they once a week to learn to develop talents, skills, perceptions and a taste for nature." These boys and girls "are thrilled with outdoor activities. They

The Pathfinders Club is made up of "boys and girls aged 10 to 15 years old, from different social classes, color, religion. They meet, in general, https://bit.ly/2wsFGRG.

Adventistas Nordeste Maranhão [Northeast Maranhão Adventists], Facebook post, August 26, 2019, accessed on March 3, 2019,

Adventistas Nordeste Maranhão [Northeast Maranhão Adventists], Facebook post, May 26, 2019, accessed on March 3, 2020,

"Breaking the Silence is an annual project, developed since 2002, by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in eight countries of South America accessed on February 4, 2020,

the Seventh-day Adventist in the South American territory."

Igreja Católica torna-se adventista” [Catholic Church Becomes Adventist], Revista Adventista [Adventist Review], July 1989, 28.


Luis Antônio de Menezes Dias, "Um breve histórico sobre o surgimento da Missão Maranhense“ [A brief history of the emerging of the Maranhão Mission], Monograph, Brazil College, 1996, 7-11.

Campal inspira igrejas no Maranhão” [Camp meeting inspires churches in Maranhão], Revista Adventista [Adventist Review], November 1996, 28.


"Igreja Adventista comemora 57 anos em Barreirinhas” [Adventist Church celebrates 57 years in Barreirinhas], Revista Adventista [Adventist Review], February 2003, 33.

Josiane Caranha (UNB secretary assistent), e-mail message to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associate editor), September 10, 2019.


The project “Hope Impact is a program that encourages the practice of reading and provides a mass annual distribution of books on the part of the Seventh-day Adventist in the South American territory.” Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) website, “Impacto Esperança” [Hope Impact], accessed on February 4, 2020, https://bit.ly/34dZROO.

"Breaking the Silence is an annual project, developed since 2002, by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in eight countries of South America (Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay) that aims to educate and prevent against the domestic abuse and violence." Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) website, “Quebrando o Silêncio” [Breaking the Silence], accessed on February 4, 2020, https://bit.ly/2WdJlW.


The Pathfinders Club is made up of "boys and girls aged 10 to 15 years old, from different social classes, color, religion. They meet, in general, once a week to learn to develop talents, skills, perceptions and a taste for nature." These boys and girls “are thrilled with outdoor activities. They like camping, hiking, climbing, exploring the woods and caves. They know how to cook outdoors, making a fire without matches.” Besides, they demonstrate “skill with discipline through drill commands and have their creativity awakened by manual arts. They also fight the use of tobacco,
The Adventurers Club is a specific program for children from 6 to 9 years old, created by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in 1972. At the meetings, children carry out activities with a focus on physical, mental and spiritual development. Seventh Day Adventist Church (Brazil) website, “Aventureiros” [Adventurers], accessed on February 4, 2020, https://www.adventistas.org/pt/aventureiros/sobre-nos/.


Josiane Caranha (UNB secretary assistant), e-mail message to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associate editor), September 10, 2019.

Ibid.


For more information about Northeast Maranhão Mission, access the website: http://mnem.adventistas.org/, or the social media - Facebook and Instagram: @adventistasnordesteMA.