



Central South Bahia Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Photo courtesy of Central South Bahia Conference.

# Central South Bahia Conference

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Central South Bahia Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church located at 745 Almirante Tamandaré Street, in the city of Itabuna, in the state of Bahia,

Brazil.

Its area covers 45 counties of the lower south and south region of Bahia.<sup>1</sup> Today it serves a population of 1,154,832 inhabitants, having 51 districts with 206 churches, totaling 43,532 members.<sup>2</sup> The average is one Adventist per 26 inhabitants.

Two hundred twenty people work at Central South Bahia Conference, including 45 office employees, two in the Multibom store, two in the Adventist education office, and 171 in the schools and as church janitors. The ministry has 43 pastors, eight in administration, three in education, and 32 in the districts or as assistants<sup>3</sup>

Two educational units are maintained by Central South Bahia Conference: Itabuna Adventist Academy in the city of Itabuna, with 680 students, and Ilhéus Adventist School in Ilhéus, with 369 students. Altogether there are 1,049 students distributed in these units.<sup>4</sup>

In the area of communication, the Conference has TV Novo Tempo relays on open channels in the cities of Camacan (channel 42) and Ipiaú (channel 24). This administrative unit is carrying out its mission based on its hope to see Jesus return to earth and many saved people.

## Origin of Adventist Work in the Conference's Territory

The gospel preached and taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church began in southern Bahia in 1908 with brothers Francisco Queiroz and Pedro Baptista. Through canvassing, they first worked in Itabuna and, as a result of this work and the presence of Pastor John Lipke (president of the East Brazil Mission), they managed to perform the first baptism in the county,<sup>5</sup> and later in the city of Ilhéus.<sup>6</sup> The first record of an Adventist church in southern Bahia points to Ilhéus in May 1912. It was a group of just over 10 Sabbath keepers in Pontal neighborhood, according to Pastor John Lipke's exposition.<sup>7</sup>

From Itabuna, headquarters of this church administrative unit, the message reached the countryside. Mr. João Roberto Ramos, owner of Boqueirão farm, moved from the state of Sergipe to the southern region of Bahia with the encouragement of local authorities seeking cocoa crop manpower for economic development.<sup>8</sup> He heard the message through Mr. Joaquim Melo, who had previously bought abundant literature from the canvassers Francisco Queiroz and Pedro Baptista de Mello.<sup>9</sup>

After accepting the message of hope, Mr. João Roberto Ramos met José de Aniceto and together they began spreading the message they had received to reach most of their neighbors, who were baptized on two occasions. The first ceremony was on April 8, 1918, six years after the first contact with Adventist literature, and the second occurred three months later when for the second time Pastor Ricardo José Wilfart visited them, with six other people.<sup>10</sup>

The historian Clovis Silveira Gois Junior, in a careful work done in 2016, compiled a list of the first families comprising the church of Itabuna: (Family Ramos) - João Roberto Ramos, Senhorinha Ramos, Maria Ramos, José

Roberto Ramos, Ana Oliveira Ramos, and Antônia Oliveira Ramos; (Family Lins) - Horácio Alves Lins; (Family Alves/Melo) - Joaquim Alves de Melo, his wife Rosa de Melo, and Maria Gracinda de Góis Melo; (Family Bastos) - Delfim Bastos and Matildes Bastos; (Family França Batista) - Lúcio França Batista, Pedro França Batista, and Ernestina França Batista; (Family Jacó) - Genoveva Jacó and Josefina Jacó; (Others) - José Francisco Araújo, Vitória Preta, Franscina Evangelista dos Santos, and husband, for a total of 21 people.<sup>11</sup>

Pastor Ricardo José Wilfart served as president of Pernambuco Mission, which was administrated by North Brazil Union. At the time, Bahia was part of this Union and had only one worker, Zacharias Martins Rodrigues, to serve the entire state.<sup>12</sup>

In the early 1930s Pastor Teófilo Berger<sup>13</sup> began pastoring the church in the city of Itabuna because of the progress of the message in the Itabuna and Ilhéus regions, and in the region of Boqueirão farm, the rural area of the county. During the early years of the new century, many canvassers and evangelists successfully shared the Adventist message in Ilhéus and Itabuna regions.

Due to the progress of the Adventist message in the southern region, also known as the cocoa region, in 1937 there were 25 congregations throughout the state of Bahia, 14 near Ilhéus and Itabuna.<sup>14</sup> This progress was the result of the hard work of brave canvassers bearing a message of hope and the new members including Agostinho F. dos Reis, Antonio Fernandes de Carvalho, and Permínio de Jesus - all from Ilhéus, as well as Joaquim Porto and Pedro Lima, who joined the canvassing;<sup>15</sup> José Aniceto and his wife Catarina de Sousa from Itabuna, João Roberto Ramos with his family, and neighbors of Boqueirão farm.<sup>16</sup>

Due to the extension of the southern territory, the leadership began to call for the division of the work in Bahia in the late 1950s, when the headquarters of the work in Salvador (Bahia-Sergipe Mission) organized several events in the city of Itabuna. This included Adventist youth and missionary congresses, evangelistic campaigns, and administrative meetings. Given these events, there was a growing conviction that the field would grow larger if they divided it. Near the end of the twentieth century, the growth of the work was first served by the regional system, which transformed the city of Itabuna into an administrative region without the status of the church administrative unit (mission or conference) from 1990 to 1998.<sup>17</sup>

Given the ongoing progress of the work in the region, it became necessary to create a new unit in the region. Those leaders calling for the opening of a new field included Dr. Moises Vieira, Jair Passos, Emílio Dann, Braulino Santos, Romildo Darós (from Eunápolis), Isaias Amaral, Dr. Onaldo de Oliveira Almeida, Gilberto (canvasser from Itamaraju, last name is unknown), José Nery (from Pau Brasil), Pedro e Nilson Dórea (from São João do Paraíso, counties of Mascote), Durval França, Manoel Vivas (from Canavieiras), Demerval and Maria Freire, Terezinha Machado (from Ilhéus), Eduardo Lula, Ido Thomas, Ivo Melgaço, Oséias Santos, Wilson Freitas, Miguel Belmiro, Wilson Setenta, Rafael Magalhães (from Itabuna), Gilberto Quadros, Jailton Sarmiento, Carminha, Valdo, Lisboa, Gutoo Koeller, Cláudio, Fernando, Gilmar, Sérgio Guimaraes (from Teixeira de Freitas), and Nely Pires (from

Posto da Mata, Nova Viçosa).<sup>18</sup> Pastors Helder Roger Cavalcanti Silva, Ivo de Azevedo Vasconcelos, Miguel Pinheiro Costa, Jair Garcia Góis, Carlos Alberto R. de Oliveira, Jorge Luís de Oliveira Sousa, Salomão Sarmento Sousa, Edson de Oliveira Pinto, Jurandir Reis, and others also understood the necessity of creating a new administrative unit to meet the needs of the church in the southern region.

## Conference Organizational History

Church administrators of the Bahia Conference recognized that creating a new field, the South Bahia Conference, would facilitate the growth of the church in the region, provide a shorter distance from the church headquarters in Salvador, and foster the emerging growth in the church, especially in the southern region.

On April 5, 1998, through vote no. 98/022, the Bahia Conference requested a survey evaluation committee from the Brazil Northeast Union. On May 7, 1998, at Brazil Northeast Union headquarters in Jaboatão, Guararapes-PE, at its plenary directive meeting, and by vote No. 98/024, the request was accepted, the vote was registered, and the request was submitted to the South American Division (SAD).

On June 1 and 2, 1998, survey members and the president of the South American Division, Pastor Ruy Nagel, took appropriate measures in the plenary steering committee held at the administrative headquarters in Brasília-DF when, through vote No. 98/292, the vote of Brazil Northeast Union was registered and the survey committee was appointed. To this commission were added administrators of the Bahia Conference: Carlos Alberto R. de Oliveira, Jorge Luiz de Oliveira Sousa, Salomão Sarmento, Paulo Cesar Chagas Ferreira, Edson de Oliveira Pinto, Jeremias de Almeida Gonçalves, and Florisberto de Jesus. On June 2, the Bahia Conference plenary steering committee met at its headquarters at 28 Professor Hugo Baltazar da Silveira Road, in Jardim Baiano neighborhood, Salvador.

Finally, given the survey results and the recommendation that the territory of the Bahia division forms a new field, through vote No. 98/225, the South American Division approved the creation of the South Bahia Conference. Subsequently, the Brazil Northeast Union took vote No. 98/132, in which it accepted and informed Bahia Conference that its plenary steering committee during the second half of 1998 at the Salvador Hospital, with the presence of church leadership from all Bahia states, had authorized the opening of the new church administrative unit.

The newly created conference would have as its primary mission to overcome the difficulties encountered by churches in northeastern Brazil. At the time, three main challenges that hindered the spread of the gospel were listed: the size of the mission field, the syncretic northeastern religiosity, and the region's difficult socioeconomic status. To meet these difficulties, they would fulfill their mission by exercising "the valorization of the human element as a missionary agent in the service of God."<sup>19</sup>

From 1999 to 2003,<sup>20</sup> Pastor Edson de Oliveira Pinto was appointed president and Professor Marcio Rogério treasurer, who was also secretary until 2002, succeeded by Pastor Gilson Correia Brito in this latter role.<sup>21</sup>

South Bahia Conference was named after the dismembered territory of Bahia Conference based in Salvador, which encompassed 123 counties in the low-south, southern, and far-south region of the state of Bahia, with a population of 3,253,068. In all, there were 109 churches and 239 groups divided into 19 pastoral districts. These congregations served the 24,837 members of southern and southeastern Bahia.<sup>22</sup>

The reorganizations of South Bahia Conference brought changes in the name and configuration of the territory. The first change was in 2009, when the Southwest Bahia Mission based in Vitória da Conquista was created. At the time, the South Bahia Conference had approximately 35,000 worshipers congregating in 378 churches and groups, 4 academies, and 80 canvassers. The other considerable change occurred in 2015 when the South American Division thought to create another administrative unit in southern Bahia, the South Bahia Mission.<sup>23</sup> However, to avoid confusion when identifying them, South Bahia Conference was renamed Central South Bahia Conference.<sup>24</sup> South Bahia Mission would have its headquarters in Eunapolis, while Central South Bahia Conference remained at the same address.

Following these changes, 45 counties still remained in each area. The population of this area is 1,154,832, corresponding to 7.52% of the population of the state of Bahia and a geographical area of 22,121.740 km<sup>2</sup> or 3.91% of the state's territory.<sup>25</sup>

Even after considerable changes, Central South Bahia Conference continued in full its missionary and social activities. In 2014 the project *Vidas em Ação* [Lives in Action] was taken to the city of Itacaré to promote salvation and health to the residents of that city. The invited NGO provided care through its dentists, nurses, massage therapists, psychologists, and other professionals who shared the unique goal of “bringing salvation through medical missionary work to provide preventive health.”<sup>26</sup> Thirty-seven professionals participated in the project, making more than six hundred calls in a period of six days, and at the end of each call, a prayer was offered. As a result of this joint effort between project volunteers and Central South Bahia Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church volunteers, 180 people interested in receiving Bible studies were registered.<sup>27</sup>

Central South Bahia Conference seeks to play a decisive role in mobilizing the churches it assists by encouraging them to preach the gospel through the Hope Impact missionary project book distribution campaigns,<sup>28</sup> and social campaigns such as the Christmas Campaign,<sup>29</sup> health fairs,<sup>30</sup> and the project *Vidas por Vidas* [Lives for Lives].<sup>31</sup>

In 2016 conference leaders and employees gathered and distributed a total of 1,550 missionary books on April 29 and May 3-4. These workers went to the streets of Bahia, spreading the book “Esperança Viva” [Live Hope], anticipating the great mobilization that would take place throughout South America on May 14 and 15,<sup>32</sup> a practice that has been repeated over the years.

The missionary involvement of leaders and members in its 20 years of existence has resulted in considerable Adventist growth in the Central South Bahia Conference. This is shown by the creation of two new administrative units, one of which is already in operation (Southwest Bahia Mission), while the other (South Bahia Mission) awaits an improvement in the country's economic situation to start its activities. These are the fruits of persistent missionary work in the region.

Along the Central South Bahia Conference journey, lessons have been learned which will lead to safer paths ahead. Evangelism through the printed page (canvassing) and personal evangelism have proven their worth in propagating Adventist principles of faith and beliefs. This has been an important experience since the arrival of the Adventist message in the south part of Bahia, with fruits being harvested to this day, a work that must continue into the future. The purpose is for all church members, leaders, administrators, and pastors to remain committed to the mission of saving lives for the kingdom of God.

To this end, the action plan is anchored to the project established by East Brazil Union, "All for the Word." One effective method for this project is to recognize the importance of missionary pairs and Bible instructors. Continuous training has been conducted for these two classes of missionaries, equipping them with the Missionary Bible that includes the study series "Revelation: The disclosure of Hope." The 4,500 volunteers who attended the first big training were motivated to spread the gospel message through their testimonies and teaching of the Word.<sup>33</sup>

Future plans for Central South Bahia Conference include equipping churches and groups to serve well the ministry of preaching and teaching and to open new pastoral districts wherever possible. Allied to these objectives is the willingness to launch the South Bahia Mission, already voted and waiting for favorable conditions to begin operating.<sup>34</sup>

## Chronology of Administrative Officers<sup>35</sup>

Presidents: Edson de Oliveira Pinto (1999-2003);<sup>36</sup> Clovis Bunsen Ferreira Junior (2003-2007); Daniel Weber Thomas (2007-2012);<sup>37</sup> Fernando Lopes de Melo (2012-2016);<sup>38</sup> Éber Liessi (2016-2018);<sup>39</sup> Murilo Andrade (2018-).<sup>40</sup>

Secretaries: Marcio Rogerio Guimaraes (1999-2000); Gilson Correia Brito (2001); Jorge Correia de Brito (2002-2003); Nilton Carlos Rosa de Oliveira (2004-2005); Daniel Weber Thomas (2006-2007); Carlos Ferreira Santos (2007-2010); Fernando Lopes de Melo (2011); Jadson Almeida Rocha (2012-2015); Murilo de Sousa Andrade (2016-2018); Jucimar Noya (2018-).<sup>41</sup>

Treasurers: Marcio Rogerio Guimaraes (1999-2001); Salomão Sarmiento de Souza (2002-2004); Leonardo do Rosário Pombo (2005-2007); José Adilson Cassiano (2007-2014); Clécio da Silva Goncalves (2015-2017); Eleonor Silva Junior (2017-).<sup>42</sup>

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2. Murilo Andrade, interviewed by the author by phone, August 11, 2018.
3. Elisângela Passos, interviewed by the author, Itabuna, Bahia, September 11, 2018.
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11. Idem.
12. Idem.

13. Teófilo Berger was the first district pastor in southern Bahia, from 1933, when the territory of the two states was divided. Oscar Castelani served in the state of Sergipe and the rest of the state of Bahia, except for the south that was in the care of Teófilo.
14. Minutes of Bahia Mission, no. 03, vote no. 23, March 18, 1937.
15. John Lipke, "Bahia," *Monthly Review* 6, no. 9-10 (September 1911): 13-14.
16. Clovis Silveira Góis Junior, *A Gênese do Adventismo Grapiúna, por meio de notícias, depoimentos e impressões [The Genesis of Adventism Grapiúna, through news, testimonials and impressions]* (Itabuna, BA: Artesam, 2017), 38.
17. Regional System was a project in which an attempt was made to administer a church administrative unit with a vast territory without having to create a new mission or conference. Thus, a pastor with a field secretary-like role was relocated to live closer to a group of churches to assist in the administration and implementation of preaching advancement systems and programs, which took place in Bahia between 1990 and 1998.
18. Names of church leaders in major cities at the time of the field division and the new administrative unit in southern Bahia.
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21. Minutes of South Bahia Conference, vote no. 2000/45, November 8, 2000.
22. Heron Santana, "Igreja Militante" [Militant Church], *Revista Adventista [Adventist Review]*, no. 2 (February 1999): 14.
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25. *Wikipedia*, "Bahia," accessed on July 22, 2018, <https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/bahia>.
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27. *Idem*.
28. Annual campaign in which the church distributes thousands of missionary books for free to all people in the community.

29. Annual campaign where a mobilization in the church and local community collects and distributes tons of food to needy people and entities in the community.
30. Local church action where various services are brought to the nearest church community offering medical care, blood pressure measurement, glucose measurement, obesity control, haircutting, massage, and other services.
31. "Voluntary initiative promoted by Young Adventists in 2005, the project was born with the proposal to contribute to blood centers by encouraging blood donation during the Easter period." Accessed on December 17, 2018, <http://www.vidaporvidas.com/pt/o-projeto/>.
32. Evellin Fagundes, "Funcionários e líderes da Associação Bahia Sul distribuem mais de mil livros em 3 dias" [South Bahia Conference employees and leaders distribute over 1,000 books in 3 days], Adventist News Network, May 4, 2016, Accessed on April 1st, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2TO6NNb>.
33. Evellin Fagundes, "Duplas missionárias e instrutores de classes bíblicas participam de capacitação" [Missionary Teams and Bible class instructors participate in training], Adventist News Network, March 11, 2019, accessed on April 1st 2019, <https://bit.ly/2UxaYOx>.
34. More information about South Bahia Conference can be found at: <http://abs.adventistas.org/> or on Facebook: @iasdabc; Twitter @iasdabd; Youtube Adventistas Bahia Sul; Instagram: iasdabs.
35. "South Bahia Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 272; "South Bahia Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2017), 302. For a more detailed check of all leaders, see Yearbooks 2000-2008.
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39. Minutes of South Bahia Conference, note No. 2016/019.
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