

West Bolivia Mission

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West Bolivia Mission (Misión Boliviana Occidental or MBO) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) located in the Bolivia Union Mission (Unión Boliviana or UB) territory. Its offices are located on Brasil 1329 Ave. between Cuba and San Salvador streets at Miraflores in the city of La Paz in the Pedro Domingo Murillo province of La Paz in the Plurinational State of Bolivia.¹

The MBO missionary field covers the departments of La Paz, Pando, and General José Ballivián Seguro province, which is part of the department of Beni. Throughout the MBO territory, there are 593 organized congregations (216 churches and 377 groups) and a membership of 62,783 Adventists in a population of 3,158,838 inhabitants. This means that in this Mission, there is 1 Adventist per 50 inhabitants.²

In the educational arena, “the Adventist Education Organization of West Bolivia (Asociación Educativa Adventista del Occidente Boliviano or ASEA-MBO), under the motto of ‘Educating and Redeeming,’ offers Adventist Education through its 14 educational units spread in La Paz, El Alto, Caranavi, Chulumanu, Palos Blancos, and Cobija.”³ These are the schools in MBO territory: Viacha Adventist Academy, located on Ismael Montes Mendoza Ave. no. 58, La Paz; Chulumani Adventist Academy, located on Tolopat, Center, Chulumani, La Paz; Caranavi Adventist Educational Unit, located on Tocopilla n/a, Center, Caranavi, La Paz; Shalom Adventist Educational Unit, based on Covendo no. 3304, Senkata, El Alto, La Paz; Palos Blancos Calle 1 Adventist Educational Unit, Palos Blancos, La Paz; and Miraflores Adventist Educational Unit, established on Busch and Díaz Romero Ave. no, 1888, Miraflores, La Paz.⁴

In addition to these institutions, the MBO also administers the following educational units: Real del Sur Educational Unit, located on Julio César Valdez no. 2160, Villa Esther, El Alto, La Paz; Salomón Adventist Educational Unit, located on Calle 27 no. 120, Villa Tejada Rectangular, El Alto, La Paz; San José Adventist Educational Unit, located on Pichincha no. 2059, Río Seco San José de Yunguyo, El Alto, La Paz; Bello Horizonte Adventist Educational Unit, based on Jorge de la Reza no. 1555, Alta San Pedro, La Paz; Harry Pittman Adventist Educational Unit, located on José Chacón no. 25, Villa Ballivián, El Alto, La Paz; Franz Tamayo Adventist Educational Unit, located on Calle 135 no. 519, Villa Bolívar D, El Alto, La Paz; Baker Adventist Educational Unit, located on February 9 Ave. no. 170, Center, Cobija Pando; and Los Andes Adventist Educational Unit, established on Vilamil de Rada no. 818, Alto San Pedro, La Paz.⁵

Committed to disseminate the Gospel, the MBO has a total of 660 servants, including 64 pastors (37 ordained ministers and 27 licensed), six workers (one ordained and five licensed), and another 590 employees who collaborate in education and administration roles in the MBO institutions.⁶

The Origin of the Adventist Work in the Mission Territory

The publications work initiated by James White⁷ later came to Bolivia through the Brazilian Adventist canvasser Juan Sebastián Pereira. He arrived in Bolivia in 1897,⁸ and he was driven by the desire to preach the Gospel⁹ even knowing that at that time he could be sentenced to death due to the lack of religious freedom.¹⁰ That approach succeeded in 1902 through the efforts of José Escobar and Eduardo Werner Thomann, who sold books and reviews in La Paz, Oruro, and Cochabamba, although most of it was sold in Quillacollo.¹¹ In 1905, President Ismael Montes promulgated tolerance to all religions,¹² but it was only approved on August 6, 1906, by the entire Congress.¹³ This allowed the canvassing work to continue under better work conditions.

Following the Bolivian government adoption of the Religious Freedom law, in 1906, the West Coast Mission – Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru – went through a reorganization, and Chile and Bolivia formed the Chile-Bolivia Mission, and it was headquartered in Valparaíso, Chile. However, ten years after the arrival of Juan S. Pereira and one year to the establishment of the South American Union Conference (presently Argentina Union Conference), during a general meeting in the city of Santiago, Chile,¹⁴ on April 4, 1907, the Bolivia Mission (Misión Bolivia or MB) was organized.¹⁵ In that same week, it was voted that Chile would separate its administration from Bolivia, and it would have the status of a Conference. In that same meeting, the delegates voted for the transference of Eduardo W. Thomann to Cochabamba, where he would work as the first permanent pastor in the country and president of the MB.¹⁶ Once the Mission was established, J. W. Westphal predicted that Bolivia would be one of the most difficult fields because it has no coastline, and so it would be isolated from the world's immediate contact.¹⁷

Nevertheless, Eduardo W. Thomann and his wife Flora Westphal, confident and motivated by the call, complied with the mission and left Valparaíso on May 25, 1907, on their way to the city of Oruro.¹⁸ They started their work without making racial distinctions, preaching to both white and indigenous peoples in the country.¹⁹ They gathered a small group of interested people who had already bought books from Juan S. Pereira. Shortly, from Oruro, the Thomanns went to Cochabamba, where they settled and not only worked in favor of the Spanish, but also for the Quechua and Aymara Indians.²⁰ With assistance from Pereira and other brothers, on June 14 of that same year, the first Bolivia Mission headquarters was established in Cochabamba.²¹

By the end of July 1909, after having worked for two and a half years, the Thomanns returned to Chile;²² and in his place, Ferdinand Anthony Stahl and his wife Ana Christina Carlson de Stahl and both their children, Frena and Wallace – 15 and 4 years old respectively – arrived. The Stahls arrived about one week before the Thomanns had left.²³ The Stahls arrived in their first missionary destination--in the city of La Paz, Bolivia, without mastering

the country's language, inexperienced in missionary work and using their own resources.²⁴ Subsequently, in their visits, they sold Bibles and religious books, thus managing to afford their expenses.²⁵ Soon, Stahl started his medical work, and he first did it among the higher class Bolivians before the end of that year.²⁶ But later, he and his wife started a medical work among the Indians in Bolivia²⁷ because

they sought to improve the lives of the Indians through the medical missionary work. Because of his work with the Indians, Stahl became known as "the apostle of the Indians."²⁸ Moreover, in that same year, the Mission transferred his workshops from Cochabamba to La Paz.²⁹

After his great work in Bolivia, in July 1911, Stahl was temporarily assigned to the city of Platería, 40 km from the city of Puno in Peru, to start with the indigenous mission and develop a medical work among the Aymara of the area. However, before his departure, nurses Otto H. Schlz and Ignacio Kalbermatter³⁰ arrived in Bolivia, and the latter remained in La Paz as the interim superintendent of the Mission.³¹

Until then, during the entire year of 1911, Stahl held many outdoor meetings with the assistance of Juan Huanacca, an Adventist Indian from Peru who served as his translator.³² These meetings led many of the Indians to sympathize with Sabbath keeping; nevertheless, the interested still weren't baptized. However, the first baptism in the country was soon carried out when, a year and a half later on August 7, 1912, a widow named Rosa N. Doering decided to give her life to Christ through baptism, becoming the first Seventh-day Adventist Bolivian female.³³ Finally, from that year, Adventism in Bolivia continued to take its first steps towards a stronger growth.

After the arduous work of the foreigner missionaries, in 1913, the first Sabbath School was organized on Potosí St. in La Paz. This Sabbath School was mainly composed by Indians, so the missionaries had to teach in the Aymara language.³⁴ In 1915, the Adventist Church in Bolivia had 12 congregations in La Paz and Cochabamba.³⁵ But by the end of 1919, the Adventist Church in the city of La Paz had 15 members. The church's growth during that time was slow but entirely understandable because, at the time, the environment was quite hostile and full of hatred and persecution towards those who were considered dissidents of the dominant religion in Bolivia.³⁶

Amid these adversities, God was working in the hearts of the people in such a way that, in 1920, there already was an organized church with 25 members and, in 1921, it had 40 congregations. While the church grew in the city of La Paz, the indigenous in the Plateau were eager to study and leave poverty behind. At the time, a man named Francisco Tancara was entrusted by the People General Assembly to require for the national government of Ismael Montes the authorization of a school and a teacher for its respective operation. Years later, Tancara met Reid Shepard, a North American missionary who had arrived in Bolivia along with his wife in August 1920. By that time, Tancara's community wanted to receive an academic education, and Shepard wanted to share his Bible knowledge.³⁷

Thus, the Adventist educational work began with its task of educating and evangelizing in the city of Mauri. The school began with a gathering of 40 kids taking classes in Manuel Chuquimia's courtyard. Then, a school for the

youth with 21 students in Domingo Chuquimia's courtyard sprung up. In these schools, the kids and youth learned how to write and read as well as receiving religious teaching. The number of students in the Mauri Adventist School was growing and had an average of 100 students per year.³⁸

Years later, just as the Adventist education grew, the number of members also grew on February 23, 1929. On that day, the mission in Collana and the Bolivian directors led a four-day meeting. Some of the brothers, about 600 who were in the meeting, had walked for four days to arrive in that place on time. Among the delegations that attended the meeting, there was a band (Bronces de Rosario) that carried their instruments for three days in order to perform at the gathering. During that meeting, the leaders made an exhibition of the books that they sold for US\$ 167.00 in gold. This fact proved that the indigenous communities were always reading.³⁹

In the 1940s, the growth of Adventism in Bolivia seemed irregular because since the Mission establishment until 1946, it was only possible to establish churches within the La Paz department.⁴⁰ Therefore, precisely during that year in search for more ecclesiastical growth, a transition took place. The MB had to leave the purely rural, Plateau, Aymara, regional, and provincial environments to be developed in an urban environment.⁴¹ For this reason, the MBO had to approve the canvassers' trip to different territories in Bolivia. This enabled the growth of the MB in major cities of the country, such as the cities in La Paz region where a great ecclesiastical rise happened.⁴² Nevertheless, there was still only a little Adventist presence in Pando region.⁴³ Among the canvassers sent to work there was Julio Chávez, who was designated to work in the city of Cobija, the capital of Pando, selling the books *Amanecer* [Daybreak] and *Consejero* [Counselor].⁴⁴

As the years passed, the ecclesiastical field of the MB proved very difficult when it came to meeting the responsibility and dedication of all members who had great needs. Because of that, the MB faced new challenges, including its territorial division into two missionary fields with the inauguration of a new administrative unit. The first attempt that the Mission made to split the field took place in 1961 when the MB Executive Board formed a special commission and presented the project to the Inca Union Mission (Unión Inca or UI, presently South Peru Union Mission). This project requested the splitting of the MB as of January 1st, 1963. However, the request was postponed.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, the Adventist work continued persevering and growing. The Church was not only worried about the spiritual nourishment of people, but also felt the responsibility of helping the needy in the community. Therefore, in 1966, the Philanthropic Work of Adventist Social Assistance (Obra Filantrópica de Ayuda Social Adventista or OFASA, now the Adventist Development and Relief Agency – ADRA) worked in the areas of health, food, and clothes donations to the people through limited resources.⁴⁶ This church social work caused more people to trust in the religious activities carried out, including evangelizing.

In 1967, the MB came to have 13,000 members and 43 organized churches. Thus, the Mission leadership made a second attempt of reorganizing its field in a way that they once again gathered the commission, but their plan again didn't succeed.⁴⁷ In the third occasion, the MB suggested that the UI could create two future missions but,

like the previous attempts, they didn't succeed.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the missionary work did not stop. In 1973 and 1974, the city of Cobija in the Pando region would be, for the first time, impacted by the personal evangelistic work developed by Luis Mita – first Bolivian missionary sent by the MB to work in that great and important city-capital. In this city, Luis was devoted to give Bible studies from house to house, and at the end of his work, 18 people decided to be part of the SDA Church through baptism, and then, a church was planted.⁴⁹

Mission Organizational History

Due to the large territorial extension, the development of the church work in the country and the rapid economic and demographic growth in eastern Bolivia, it was decided that it was time to reorganize the MB missionary field.⁵⁰ In 1975, the Adventist Church in Bolivia had a large population, and it was difficult for a single Mission to manage it all. There were 52 churches, 460 organized groups, 34 Adventist schools, and about 40 pastors⁵¹ at church services all over the Bolivian territory. For that reason, it was necessary to require the split of Bolivia Mission once again. Thus, Pastor José Amasias Justiniano was the final president of the MB because, this time, the request was approved. In January 1977, the reorganization of the MB territory was accomplished.⁵² Then, the MB was split into two missions: West Bolivia Mission and East Bolivia Mission.⁵³ This event marked a milestone in the Bolivian Church history because 70 years had passed since the Bolivia Mission was established. Since then, the MB became known as the MBO, and its headquarters were located at 1329 Brasil Ave. in La Paz. The ecclesiastical territory, at the time covering the departments of La Paz, Oruro, and Potosí, had 2,497,041 inhabitants, and of these, 21,970 were Adventists. In addition, the first president chosen to lead the work with 42 organized churches was Pastor Mariano Pairo, and to operate as secretary-treasurer, Felipe Alcón.⁵⁴ In other words, these men, along with other pastors and church leaders, had a great challenge ahead of them because, at the time, the average of Adventists in the region was 1 per 114 inhabitants.

Once established, all the MBO strategic plans had the goal of reaching more people, both adults and young people, through all missionary fronts of the church. For that, many encouraging evangelistic activities were carried out with members in the first years of its organization. One of these, for example, took place in 1984 when the "Youth ministry" gathered 4,000 young Adventists in La Paz to take part in the "Bolivian Youth Congress." Some of these young people rode on horses for three days to get to the event. In the Congress, the youth displayed a better lifestyle during a parade on the streets of La Paz. This parade caused an impact with the communication media, such as journals. For example, this event was reported as the best parade held in the city and that those young people had arrived there to express themselves to God.⁵⁵ Thus, by the end of that year, the MBO reached 39,199 members in its seven years of organization (1977)--that is, the MBO had statistically grown nearly 78.42 percent.⁵⁶

In the following years, the increase of church members was constant, and other blessings were received. In 1997, the Bolivian government authorized the Adventist Church to establish the “Adventist Radio.” This permission contributed to the Gospel proclamation through the program “La Voz de Esperanza” [“The Voice of Hope”]. The program broadcast helped the Gospel to reach from La Paz to the 11 biggest cities in the country. Among those was the department of La Paz.⁵⁷

As a result of the constant growth in all missionary fronts, in 2003, the UB decided to restructure the Union territories and establish a new administrative unit: the Central Bolivia Mission. Therefore, the MBO missionary field comprised the departments of La Paz and Pando. At the time, the Mission was responsible for 127 churches and 58,101 members with a population of 2,495,988 inhabitants. In short, in this new stage, there was an average of 1 per 43 inhabitants. Pastors Alberto Pena and Mateo Salvador – president and secretary-treasurer – oversaw the field’s direction.⁵⁸

With the new reorganization, the MBO coordinated with the Bolivia Union Mission and faced new challenges. Nevertheless, it carried on with its strong evangelistic emphasis through projects and missionary actions in many fronts. One of those is the project “Impacto Esperanza” [“Hope Impact”] led by the South American Division, and it has been one of the most valued projects in this field because it had the participation of all church departments, ministries, and services. It focused on handing out missionary materials on the streets and distributing books that convey hope house to house. In 2012, for example, the MBO, along with other UB Missions, had the opportunity of distributing 3,000,000 issues to a population of 11,000,000 inhabitants.⁵⁹

Another missionary action that the MBO develops since 2010 is the project “Misión Caleb” [“Caleb Mission”]. This project sought to involve thousands of young people from different MBO churches to dedicate their vacations to evangelism in places that had no Adventist presence. One example of this took place in 2013 in La Paz, where over 2,000 youth gathered to carry out community, leisure, and missionary activities for a week under the motto “Evangelism in the great cities.” During their community activities, the youth planted pine and willow trees; cleaned up parks; removed all kinds of advertising posters from poles; and cleaned up debris. Regarding evangelizing, the youth visited interested people with Bible studies every afternoon. After working during the day, each “Caleb” group carried out an evangelistic campaign at night.⁶⁰

Besides carrying out projects that involved Gospel preaching, the MBO provided camps for the spiritual strengthening of its congregants – like the one carried out from February 5 to 9, 2016, in La Paz. During that period, 40 “Campamentos de Esperanza” [“Hope Camps”] were assembled all over the field with the assistance of 3,000 young and adult participants. As a result, in addition to benefiting church members, the camps were also a blessing for more than 70 Bible students because this opportunity helped them to decide to give their lives to the Lord Jesus.⁶¹

With the same intent, church members from each “Small Group” had the opportunity of seeking and preparing more people to Christ through a great evangelistic campaign that was carried out by Pastor Alejandro Bullón.

This campaign was developed in the city of La Paz in the closed coliseum “Julio Borelli Vitterito” on September 28 and 29 of that same year. During those days, 9,000 people gathered each night to listen to the hopeful messages. As a result of the campaign, 186 baptisms were carried out. Subsequently, Pastor Bullón held meetings in the city of Patacaya where more than 5,000 people listened to the salvation message in the local City Coliseum. As a result, 197 people were baptized. Thus, through the work of the “Small Groups” and the Holy Spirit, a total of 383 people became members of the Adventist Church.⁶²

The MBO, apart from carrying out evangelistic campaigns and involving church members in the projects, also wants to disciple new generations. To this goal, since 1970, the Bolivia Adventist Church⁶³ joined the South American Division mission so that its boys and girls and teenagers can be part of Adventurers Clubs⁶⁴ and Pathfinders Clubs.⁶⁵ Recently, in January 2019, the MBO Pathfinders, along with Central and East Bolivia Missions clubs, took part in the South American Camporee carried out in the city of Barretos, Brazil. Almost 730 teenagers from these Bolivia Union Mission Missions attended the event.⁶⁶ Currently, the MBO assists 191 Pathfinders Clubs with 4,433 Pathfinders and 153 Adventurers Clubs with 3,490 Adventurers.⁶⁷ The main goal of these ministries is for the Gospel of Salvation to reach people in their younger years through love and serving others.

In short, the Adventists from the MBO, since its founding, have not stopped being faithful to their mission of proclaiming the eternal Gospel and testifying about God’s love. Throughout the years, the history of Adventism in Bolivia has shown that, even facing serious difficulties, missionaries have earnestly preached the Three Angels Messages from Revelation 14:6-12. These messages have revealed the life, death, resurrection, and high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ; and because of them, many have come to believe and to join His remnant church. This past effort and its results remind them of the new generations and their respective role to keep on preaching the eternal Gospel in order to prepare a people for the Lord Jesus Christ’s return.

Chronology of Administrative Leaders⁶⁸

Presidents: Eduardo W. Thomann (1907-1908); Fernando Stahl (1909-1913); Walterio. H. Von Pohle (1914-1921); T. L. Oswald (1922-1926); L. D. Minner (1926-1929); Francisco Brouchy (1930-1932); J.D. Replogle (1933-1935); G. Eduardo Stacey (1936-1938); Juan Plenc (1939-1943); R.E. Kepkey (1944-1949); E.D. Clifford (1950-1954); Nathan M. Merkel (1955-1959); Carlos L. Christensen (1961-1962); Bert Elkins (1963-1965); Mariano Pairo (1966); Orval Scully (1967-1968); Eduardo Stacey (1969-1962); José Amasias Justiniano (1973-1976); Mariano Pairo (1977); Gonzalo Monroy (1978-1982); Miguel Salomón Méndez (1983-1987); Eleodoro Rodríguez Curi (1988-1990); Remberto Parada (1991-1992); Hugo Jorgensen (1993); Edmundo Ferrufino (1994-1998); José Luis Santa Cruz (1999-2000); Wilfredo Gonzales (2001-2002); Alberto Peña (2003); Daniel de Brun (2004-2005); Hugo Valda Sardina (2006); Tito Benavidez (2007-2008); Edmundo Ferrufino Montaña (2009-2013); Giovani Izquierdo (2014-2015); Samuel Jara Zegarra (2016-Present).

Secretaries: Ignacio Kalbermatter (1912-1913); Claire M. Wightman (1914-1915); W.R. Pohle (1918-1920); J.S. Hindbaugh (1921-1923); Wesley Amundsen (1925-1926); Santiago Schmidt (1927-1928); S.R. Loomis (1930-1935); J.I. Hartman (1936-1940); R.G. Mote (1941-1943); J.N. Pérez (1944-1950); A.G. Johnson (1951-1953); José Busso (1954-1957); G. A. Rose (1958-1961); K.H. Bahr (1962-1965); M.D. Duerksen (1966-1967); M.C. Alana (1968-1970); A.E. Gnass (1971-1972); Mariano Pairo (1973-1976); Felipe Alcón (1977-1978); Genaro Tuesta (1979-1981); Moisés Aguilar (1982-1985); David Soto (1986-1990); Rolando Patzi (1991); Roberto Catacora (1993-1994); Juan Concepción (1995); Roberto Tellez (1996-1998); Fernando Asturizaga (1999-2000); Raúl Tancara (2001-2002); Mateo Salvador (2003-2005); César Mena (2006-2007); Henry Mendizabal (2008); Eleodoro Martínez (2009-2013); Samuel Jara (2014-2015); Marco Antonio Yupanqui (2016-2019); Javier Massi Fernández (2020-Present).

Treasurers: Claire M. Wightman (1914-1915); W.R. Pohle (1918-1920); J.S. Hindbaugh (1921-1923); Wesley Amundsen (1925-1926); Santiago Schmidt (1927-1928); S. R. Loomis (1930-1935); J.I. Hartman (1936-1940); R.G. Mote (1941-1943); J.N. Pérez (1944-1950); A.G. Johnson (1951-1953); José Busso (1954-1957); G.A. Rose (1958-1961); K.H. Bahr (1962-1965); M.D. Duerksen (1966-1967); M.C. Alana (1968-1970); A.E. Gnass (1971-1975); Felipe Alcón (1976-1978); Genaro Tuesta (1979-1981); Moisés Aguilar (1982-1985); José Alomía (1986-1987); Manuel Egas (1988-1989); Federico Chuquimia (1990); José Ríos (1991-1992); Roberto Catacora (1993-1994); Juan Concepción (1995); Roberto Tellez (1996-1998); Fernando Asturizaga (1999-2000); Raúl Tancara (2001-2002); Mateo Salvador (2003-2005); Cesar Mena (2006-2007); Henry Mendizabal (2008); Gonzalo Patzi (2009-2015); Wilson Rodríguez (2016-2017); Juan Apaza (2018-Present).⁶⁹

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