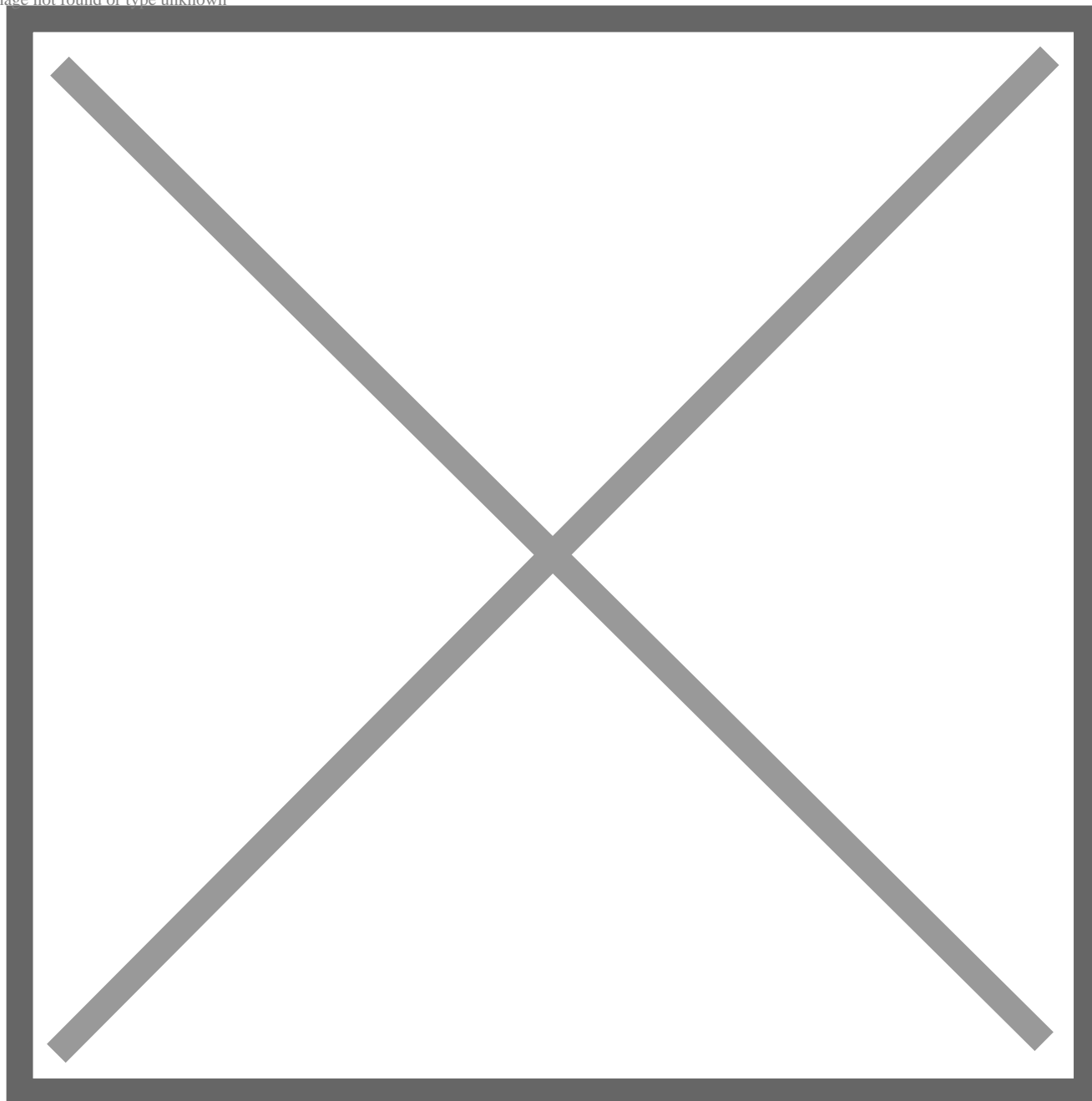


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Oaxaca Conference

PEDRO LÓPEZ RUIZ

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Oaxaca Conference covers the state of Oaxaca except for the southeastern portion. The conference was organized in 1988 and reorganized in 2008. Its headquarters is in the state capital, the city of Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca, Mexico.

Oaxaca Conference is part of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference of the Inter-American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. It has 17 districts, 110 organized churches, 151 congregations, and 21,450 members led by 22 ministers. Its offices are located at 523 H. Colegio Militar, Reforma Development, Postal Code 68050, between Sabinos and Palmeras streets, Oaxaca de Juarez, Oaxaca.

Statistics (June 30, 2018): Churches, 115; membership, 20,983; population, 2,294,123¹

Oaxaca is a city considered by UNESCO as a World Heritage site and is located among the Central Valleys, at a distance of 550 km (341 miles) from Mexico City. It was founded by a detachment of Mexica warriors in 1486. In 1532, it earned from King Carlos I of Spain the title "Very noble and loyal city." It was first named Antequera but this name was changed in 1821 to Oaxaca and on October 10, 1872, the city received the name Oaxaca de Juarez²

The Oaxaca Conference encompasses approximately 450 municipalities within the state. Most of them are governed by the system of "usos y costumbres" (customs and traditions), with recognized local forms of self-government³ It is located in the southwestern area of the country. On the north, it borders with the states of Puebla and Veracruz; on the east, with the Isthmus Region; on the south with the Pacific Ocean and on the west with the State of Guerrero. With a geographic area of 93,757 km² (36,200 square miles) statistics from 2015 indicate the state population to be 3,967,889.⁴

Oaxaca is the city with the greatest cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity in all of Mexico. Of the 65 ethnic groups found in Mexico, 18 live in Oaxaca. The population, distributed in 2,563 communities, exceeds one million, which is more than 32 percent of the country's total.⁵

Conference Institutions

"Cinco de Febrero" school is located at 208 Alfonso Reyes Street, San Francisco Tutla, Santa Lucia del Camino, Oaxaca. It consists of four levels, preschool, elementary, middle and high school with 465 students and a staff of 39, 33 of whom are teachers.

Origins of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the territory of the Oaxaca Conference.

The original presence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the state, was in Ixtaltepec, in the Tehuantepec Isthmus in 1905, where some young men -Aurelio, Juan, Catarino and Emiliano Jimenez lived. Aurelio and Juan Jimenez went to visit an uncle in Juchitan, Oaxaca, a town near Ixtaltepec. The uncle gave them bread to take home, wrapped in newspaper. The next day, when Aurelio unwrapped the bread, he noticed that the paper was some slightly torn and wrinkled pages from the magazine *El Mensajero de la Verdad* (*The Messenger of Truth*). Excited, he told Juan: "Look, brother, come so you can hear this important message." He began reading the incomplete articles, one based on Revelation 1:7 and the other on 2 Peter 1:19. Aurelio and Juan searched for the meaning of those words, but, who and where would they ask, since the pages did not have an address? Three years went by during which they continued searching for the light. Catarino continued searching persistently for a complete magazine in some nearby city, but to no avail.⁶

At that time, their father, Domingo Jiménez, became gravely ill because of his abuse of alcohol. The medication recommended by the doctor was not available in their town, so they had to order it from Mexico City. Several weeks went by and, finally, the medication arrived in a box that left them in shock, since it was wrapped in two complete magazines of *El Mensajero de la Verdad*. These were the March and April 1907 editions. There, they read about the importance and the joy of keeping the Sabbath. An article was also included that talked about the work of the Holy Spirit. Juan looked heavenward and gave thanks because he now knew that the editor of the magazine was a teacher named George Washington Cavines. They wrote to him asking for a Bible and several subscriptions of the magazine. A short time later, they asked to have someone visit them for the purpose of teaching them more of these precious truths.⁷

They began to receive new magazines on a regular basis and the most important book, the Bible. It is likely that they were the first owners of a Bible in all of Ixtaltepec. At the end of 1908, some missionaries arrived, sent by pastor George Washington Cavines. They found these fervent young men, who would make up the first group of faithful Adventists in the South of Mexico. Meeting at the house of Domingo Jiménez, the group of believers was strengthened even further. Thus, the work of the Adventist church was started. These youth visited the nearby towns and awakened an interest in the gospel among many people. Dr. Swayze invited Aurelio Jimenez to accompany him to Mexico City to attend the annual meetings of the Adventist Church in Mexico. All the inspiration and knowledge that he acquired in those meetings expanded his mind and heart. In 1909, the missionaries returned to Ixtaltepec and continued to strengthen the faith and doctrine of the group.⁸

Pastor George Washington Cavines visited Ixtaltepec in 1910, accompanied by Pastor Juan Robles, to teach the doctrines and truths of the Bible. During that time of celebration, many baptisms were held, among them Juan and Aurelio Jimenez and the first Sabbath School in Southern Mexico was organized in 1911 in Ixtaltepec.⁹

Aurelio Jiménez donated a parcel of land for the construction of the church. During one of his trips, Pastor Cavines baptized more than 80 people in Ixtaltepec. Due to his devotion, diligence and the fact that he was self-taught, Aurelio

Jimenez was named and ordained as a pastor. For 25 years, he travelled through mountains, coasts and remote towns in order to preach the gospel in the states of Oaxaca and Chiapas. Juan became an excellent minister and Catarino was a devout and eloquent layman.¹⁰

Pastor Max Fuss, during his trips to Matías Romero, met Francisco Jiménez, who was Aurelio's nephew. This young man who was approximately 13 years old lived with his uncle Alejandro (not an Adventist, but rather a devout Catholic) who forbade him from going to church. One day, he decided to run away from home. He bundled his things together, took the train headed to Oaxaca and rented a room there with the little money that he had. One day, he met Pastor Max Fuss, who was the director of the Publishing Ministry at the Tehuantepec Mission and he recommended that the young man sell the *El Centinela y Heraldo de la Salud* (*The Sentinel and Health Herald*) magazine in the central and other parks of the city, to the train passengers. Thus began the very productive ministry of Pastor Francisco Jimenez.¹¹

Some brethren arrived to the Sierra Juarez zone and from there, they began to preach in the capital of Oaxaca. Two of the first Adventists were a businessman by the name of Francisco Díaz Hernández and his wife Rosa Hernández de Dios. They began to meet and keep the Sabbath around 1947. Sometime later, the family of brother Eliodoro Roman and Raquel Ortiz joined them, as did pilot Guillermo Guillermo Sors and his wife Elenita Soriano. They met in various places; Independence Street, Arista Street, 33-20th November Avenue, and 90 Reforma Street. Several years later, a piece of land was purchased at 304 Alianza Street, in the Jalatlaco Development, and the first church was built in the Capital City around 1960. From there, the gospel began to spread, transforming developments and neighborhoods.¹² The first pastors were Antonio Zazueta and Alfonso Castillo. Today, by the grace of God, there are approximately 50 churches in and on the outskirts of the City of Oaxaca.

Organization of the Oaxaca Conference

Aztec Unión Mission was the name assigned by the Inter-American Division to the union organized on October 25, 1923. Its territory encompassed the countries of Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras and British Honduras. It was comprised of twenty-one organized churches with 1,014 members. The offices were located at 74 4th Street, Queretaro, Roma Development, Mexico City. The president of the union was Pastor D. A. Parsons.¹³

On May 21, 1924, the Aztec Union Mission conducted its first meeting in the city of San Pedro Sula, Honduras, where a vote was taken to organize five missions. One of them was the Tehuantepec Mission.¹⁴ On October 23, 1923, the Inter-American Division voted to change the name of the Aztec Union Mission to the Mexican Union Mission, whose territory now only encompassed the country of Mexico.¹⁵ In the territorial readjustment of the Tehuantepec Mission, the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Tabasco and Southern Veracruz were included and the offices were at 74 4th Street, Queretaro, Mexico City. Its first leader was H. J. Winter.¹⁶ In 1926, the offices were relocated to 93 Montiel Street, in the city of Orizaba, Veracruz, México.¹⁷

In 1933, the states of Puebla, Yucatan, Campeche and Quintana Roo were added to the Tehuantepec Mission.¹⁸ In December 1942, due to notable growth in the Tehuantepec Mission, the board of the Mexican Union Mission made a territorial readjustment and created the Yucatan Mission, headquartered in Merida, Yucatan. Its territory included the states of Yucatan, Campeche, Tabasco and Quintana Roo.¹⁹ Thus, the Yucatan Mission was organized in 1943.²⁰

In 1944, the Chiapas Mission was organized. With this new territorial readjustment, the Tehuantepec Mission was left with 21 churches and 1,200 members. The offices were located at 1702 9th Street, West, Puebla, Puebla, Mexico.²¹

In 1947, the board of the Mexican Union Mission constituted a commission to study the details of a territorial readjustment of the missions. This was in an effort to balance the size of the territories and to allow better communication with the union. On January 22, 1948, the board voted changes to the boundaries and names of the missions. Tehuantepec Mission was renamed Inter-Oceanic Mission and consisted of the states of Guerrero, Morelos, Puebla, Tlaxcala and Veracruz, from the Tamiahua Lake to the north, and the regions of San Andrés Tuxtla and Juan Díaz Covarrubias on the railroad tracks of the Suchiate railroad. The Chiapas Mission was renamed Southern Mission and consisted of the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca. Its headquarters continued in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas.²² In January 1975, the status was changed from Southern Mission to Southern Conference. The first administrators were President, Pastor Jacob Zabiñon and Secretary-Treasurer, Sergio Mejía.²³

In 1982 the Mexican Union requested of the Inter-American Division the creation of a new field, due to the growth of the Southern Conference, which at the time had 102 churches and 55,444 members.²⁴ In January 1982 this territorial readjustment created the Isthmus Mission,²⁵ headquartered in the Capital Oaxaca de Juarez. Its territory covered the entire state of Oaxaca and part of Veracruz. The offices were established in a rented house at 203 Amapolas Street, in the Reforma Development, under the guidance of Pastor Samuel Guizar Robles as president.²⁶ Under the leadership of this administration, a piece of land was purchased in this same development, at 523 H. Colegio Militar Street, Oaxaca, Oaxaca, where the conference offices were built.

In 1987 the Mexican Union and the Isthmus Conference made another request to the Inter-American Division for readjustment of their territory in order to create a new mission. In January 1988, the territorial readjustment was made and the Isthmus Conference was dissolved giving rise to two fields- the Oaxaca Mission and the Southern Veracruz Conference.²⁷

The last board meeting of the Isthmus Conference was held on January 13, 1988 under the leadership of Pastor G.W. Brown, president of the Inter-American Division and Pastor Agustin Galicia Montesinos, president of the

Southern Mexican Union.²⁸ The new Oaxaca Mission, headquartered in the state capital, had 13,361 members, 23 organized churches and 17 districts.²⁹

After almost 19 years of work and consolidation, in its committee meeting of November 6-8, 2006, the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference voted to petition the Inter-American Division for a commission to study the change in status of the Oaxaca Mission.³⁰ On December 6, 2007, the Oaxaca Mission requested a territorial readjustment in order to create a new field which would be called the Isthmus Mission.³¹

The ceremony to celebrate the change in status and territorial division of the Oaxaca Mission was held on September 21, 2008, in the City of Oaxaca, Oaxaca. Those present included Pastor Israel Leito, president of the Inter-American Division, Pastor Cesar Gomez, the treasurer Jairo Zavala, and administrators of the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference. The territory of the Oaxaca Conference encompassed six regions: Cañada, Mixteca, Cuenca, Sierra Juárez, Sierra Sur and the Central Valleys of the State of Oaxaca.³² Its borders are Guerrero on the west, the state of Puebla to the northeast (the municipality of Tehuacan), the municipality of Izúcar de Matamoros to the north, the state of Veracruz to the Southeast, and the state of Morelos to the south. It is divided by the Rio Grande at the Boqueron de Yautepec bridge, of the municipal agency of San Jose de Gracia, Oaxaca.³³ The Oaxaca Conference comprised 13 districts, 48 churches and a membership totalling 19,328. Pastor Ovidio Morales Correa was elected president.³⁴

Fulfilling Its Mission

In spite of the great difficulties that this conference has faced during its development, God's hand has guided the church and its advancement. The challenges are still very great; there are many towns, communities and cities where there is no Adventist church presence. The territory is vast, the resources are few and the diversity of languages, because of the different dialects which are spoken in the territory, hamper the church's growth. The customs and traditions in some places where no other religion is permitted, other than the existing one, also present a great obstacle to growth.

Events that benefit the community, such as medical brigades, "I want to live healthy," fitness runs, vegetarian cuisine workshops, family seminars and book donations with missionary purposes have been held. A permanent plan exists for the organization of new churches. The challenge is to strengthen the faith of the church members by visitation and giving care and attention to them; training and motivating them in faithfulness and missionary work, by means of small groups, in order to conquer new territories. Another challenge is motivating the pastors and training them to carry out the work with greater effectiveness.

List of Presidents

Samuel Guízar Robles(1982-1990); Efraín Piedra González (1990-1992); Jesús Hernández Clemente (interim 1992); Rubén Rodríguez R. (1992); Misael Escalante Mazariegos (1992-1997); David Chablé T (interim 1997); Erwin González Esteban (1997-2001); Villaney Vázquez Alegría (2001); Herbert Cortés Rasgado (2001-2003); Araín Juárez López (2003-2006); Julián Gómez Morales (2006-2008); Ovidio Morales Correa (2008-2012); Noé Valderrama (2012–2016); Josué David López Ramírez (2016-2018); Pedro López Ruíz (2018-).

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