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Rio Grande do Sul Conference

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Rio Grande do Sul Conference (ASR) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) located in the territory of South Brazil Union Conference (USB). Its headquarters is currently located at Av. Cai, no. 82, Cristal district, zip code 90810-120, in the city of Porto Alegre, capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil!

ASR's territory covers the southern part of Rio Grande do Sul, with a population of 3,436,654 people. Under the care of this administrative unit, there are 18,891 members, spread out across 242 organized congregations over the region. Thus, the overall average is of one Adventist per 181 inhabitants.² Also under the administration of ASR, there are 10 educational institutions and about 5,000 students.

The academies are: Porto Alegre Adventist Academy, in Porto Alegre, with 1,535 students; Viamão Adventist Academy, in Viamão, with 531 students; Partenon Adventist Academy, in Porto Alegre, with 721 students; Osório Adventist Academy, in Osório, with 212 students; Pr. Ivo Souza Adventist Academy, in Rolante, with 136 students; Rio Grande Adventist Academy, in Rio Grande, with 453 students; Santa Cecília Adventist Academy, in Viamão, with 432 students; Santa Isabel Adventist Academy, in Viamão, with 284 students; Santo Antônio da Patrulha Adventist Academy, in Santo Antônio da Patrulha, with 137 students; and Pelotas Adventist Academy, in Pelotas, with 475 students.³

The ASR territory also includes care assistance stations, such as the Adventist Home for the Elderly and Centro de Vida Saudável [Health Life Center]. Both institutions are in Porto Alegre. Regarding ASR personnel, there are 614 servers, of whom 42 are ordained ministers and 11 are licensed ministers.⁴

Origin of SDA work in the Conference Territory

Pastor Huldreich Ferdinand Graf (1855-1946) was the first Adventist pastor to officially visit Rio Grande do Sul. He once reported: “When I arrived in the state, in October 1897, I found many open doors, because our canvassers had done a good job. In Porto Alegre, the capital, I had the privilege of baptizing six people - the first ones to join the church in Rio Grande do Sul.”⁵

In 1897, Pastor Graf organized the two first churches of Rio Grande do Sul. One in Ijuí, in October, and another in Santa Cruz do Sul, in November. Thus, October 1897 is considered the opening date of Adventist work in the state. Also, in 1897, in Porto Alegre, in the living room of the couple John and Berta Lipke, a home school began operating⁶ the first Adventist school⁷ located in Rio Grande do Sul.

In the following year, 1898, Graf returned to Rio Grande do Sul, where, in the region of Passo Fundo, he baptized about 40 people.⁸ In addition, during this endeavor, he organized the third church of the state in the city of Não-Me-Toque [Do-Not-Touch-Me], currently Lagoa dos Três Cantos [Lake of three songs]⁹ Among those who decided to be baptized in the region of Passo Fundo were the children of Guilherme and Helena Kümpel. On the same occasion, “in São Pedro do Sul, they were excited to find brother Lindermann and his family. Three days after his arrival, Pastor Graf baptized Mr. Linderman’s three older children.”¹⁰ Both families, Kümpel and Lindermann, had immigrated from Germany, in 1892, as Seventh-day Adventists.¹¹

At the turn of the twentieth century, Porto Alegre had a small church where a newly organized church gathered. The report at the time mentions: “On February 18, at 8 p.m., coinciding with the starting of the Rio Grande do Sul evangelistic series, the church’s chapel was opened. The modest building still offers a beautiful aspect, gathering about 160 people. The chapel is in a meadow called *Campo da Redenção*; and without hiding from anyone’s eyes, exalted like a light on the lamp, it serves very well the inhabitants of Porto Alegre.”¹²

One of the regular members of this church was brother Paul Kramer, a former Baptist pastor, originally from Hamburg, converted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Pastor Graf’s friend. Paul Kramer and his wife taught in Curityba School (currently Bom Retiro Adventist Academy), until 1904, when they were transferred to the capital of the state.¹³ As a layman, Kramer stood out in the small Adventist community located in Porto Alegre. He participated in all important meetings, wrote for North American reviews, giving news about the missionary work in the country, besides hosting the pastors who would come to the city.¹⁴

Meanwhile, in the countryside of the state, just as in Porto Alegre, the missionary work progressed. Also, at the turn of the twentieth century, “many congregations were formed, especially in Ijuí, Santa Maria, Campo dos Quevedos, Rolante, Fazenda Passos, and Taquari.” Adventism progress in Rio Grande do Sul occurred in two main fronts, the German colonies and in the territories formed by Brazilian families.¹⁵ The pioneer evangelist canvassers,¹⁶ who almost always preceded the arrival of the few existing pastors, cooperated with the work’s progress in the region. Thus, the Adventist publications had two roles in Rio Grande do Sul, to sow the truth and to amplify its effects.¹⁷

Working with a prompt delivery of books and travelling in the back of mules, the canvassers Alberto and Frederico Berger - brothers and immigrants from Germany - not to mention Henrique Tonjes, Guilherme Conrado, Emílio Fröeming, Hans Mayr, Saturnino Mendes de Oliveira, Antônio L. Penha, José Negrão, André Gedrath, Domingos César da Silva, Emiliano de Oliveira, and Guilherme Landskron,¹⁸ continued canvassing all over Brazil.¹⁹ As a reward for this work, on October 8, 1905, they held the first meeting in the newly-finished church of Campo dos Quevedos, the first brickwork Adventist Church in the state and one of the first of its kind in Brazil.²⁰

Conference Organizational History

On April 15, 1906, during the ordinary session of the Brazilian Conference, held in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande Conference was organized, headquartered in Taquari – where it remained until 1913, when it was transferred to Porto Alegre. To lead the work’s progress in the state, they named Pastor Graf as president of this new administrative unit.²¹ The occasion was attended by Pastors Willian Spicer from the General Conference; J. A. Westphal, President of the South American Union Conference in Argentina; F. W. Spies, from the city of Rio de Janeiro; and Emilio Hoezle, from Paraná.

When it was created in 1906, Rio Grande Conference began to assist 439 Adventists, who were divided into six churches spread across the state. Later, in 1911, the church of Central Porto Alegre Seventh-day Adventist Church was opened.²² However, soon after, they sold the property and acquired a piece of land closer to the city center in order to build a new church – which was opened and dedicated on February 7 and 8, 1936.²³

On April 10, 1920, the 14th Yearly Meeting of Rio Grande Conference was held in Porto Alegre. “The brethren had come from everywhere. Many of them brought their own tents and stayed many days in a pleasant place, listening to the reports of the many departments’ work and also the beautiful sermons preached by the first pastors to work in these regions [...] For the first time in the history of the SDA Church in Brazil, a Brazilian was ordained to the holy ministry to act as pastor in the country.”²⁴ This was Pastor José Amador dos Reis (1891-1935).²⁵

In addition, during the 1920s, more specifically on November 14, 1928, Pastor Abraham Classen Harder and his wife, Mary, both American missionaries, acquired a property of 50 hectares in the town of Taquara to set up an academy.²⁶ On March 11, 1929, they began offering classes in the new institution, with only 27 students present.²⁷ The first teacher of the academy was the German Ernesto Roth, who was also a carpenter and built the classroom building himself, which also served as a dormitory.²⁸

A few years later, in 1936, Pastor Harder donated the school to Rio Grande Conference, which quickly expanded its premises. In 1938, the government finally officially recognized the school, which came to be known as Taquara Adventist Gymnasium. This name would only change in the 1960s, when the name of the institution was changed to Cruzeiro do Sul Academy, and later to Cruzeiro do Sul Adventist Academy (IACS).²⁹ When the school celebrated its 70th anniversary, the chosen motto was: “IACS: 70 anos fazendo brilhar estrelas” [IACS: 70 years making stars shine].³⁰

The work continued progressing in the region and, on February 14, 1946, Rio Grande Conference assumed the name of Rio Grande do Sul Conference (ASR), which remains to this day.³¹ In 1950, an evangelistic series in tents was held in Porto Alegre, the city of ASR headquarters. The preacher of the event was Pastor Walter Schubert, leader of the Department of Evangelism in the South American Division of SDAs. Schubert innovated the evangelistic series in South America, which began with prophetic studies. His first themes were about well-being, family, and health. Later, the pastor would talk about theological themes.³²

Although it was the first experience of evangelism with such patterns in Brazil, the evangelistic series led by Pastor Schubert were successful. Due to the event, 70 people decided to be baptized in the first two baptismal ceremonies. As assistants, the project organizing team worked with Pastors Araceli de Melo, Roberto Azevedo, Silas Gianini, and Renato Oberg and three more Bible workers, Irma Conrado, Rosália Engel, and Maria Pacífica de Oliveira. From then on, this evangelistic experience shaped the way Adventists evangelized the country.³³

Thus, the church grew throughout the region assisted by ASR to the point that five years later, in 1955, there were more than 5,200 Adventists and 30 organized churches in the region.³⁴ Due to the good progress of the work in the south of the state, the number of members linked to ASR doubled, reaching 11,492 people in 1965. In the same year, there were at least 45 organized churches throughout Rio Grande do Sul.³⁵ Finally, in 1971, ASR acquired its first headquarters, where it is currently located.³⁶

Subsequently, on August 25, 1973, due to the rapid growth of young Adventists in the ASR territory, an Adventist camp site was inaugurated in the municipality of Campestre. The place was organized and prepared to receive camp meetings, congresses, courses, and training. Over the years, other investments and openings took place in the south of the state. In September 1981, the Home for Girls was opened in Taquara; in 1988, Clínica Adventista Zona Norte [North Zone Adventist Clinic], in Porto Alegre opened; and in 1992, Centro Adventista de Desenvolvimento Comunitário [Adventist Center for Community Development] (CADEC) began operation, qualifying and optimizing assistance work in the city of Caxias do Sul.³⁷

In addition, in August 1992, New Time Radio started operating in the town of Sapiranga, with 1 kw of power. In 1994, its signal increased to 10 kw and its head office was transferred to the town of Nova Hamburgo. This station was the first Adventist radio in the south region of the country and the first to have an all-digital system in the region.³⁸

In 1996, due to the expansion of Adventism in the ASR territory during previous decades, the South American Division leaders approved the division of the Rio Grande do Sul missionary field into two administrative regions, thus creating the Western Rio Grande do Sul Mission (MOSR), with headquarters in Ijuí.³⁹ After this reorganization, ASR was responsible for meeting the demands of around 28,870 members, distributed in 108 churches,⁴⁰ different from the previous year, when it assisted 35,806, spread over 120 organized churches.⁴¹

Two years later, in 1998, due to the investments on behalf of Adventist education, Porto Alegre Adventist Academy (CAPA) opened its new building about 35 years after its foundation.⁴² Later, in 2006, a new division in the ASR assisted territory took place. On this occasion, Central Rio Grande do Sul Conference (ACRS) was created, headquartered in Porto Alegre.⁴³ Following this new reorganization, ASR was responsible for leading 24,766 members, in 102 churches, while the new conference was responsible for mobilizing 19,797 members.⁴⁴

Throughout the existence of ASR, several missionary activities were carried out. The institution has led countless initiatives to fulfill the evangelistic purposes of the Church in its region of operation. We highlight its contribution to the creation of the IACS, in 1928, as well as two more SDA administrative units, the Western Rio Grande do Sul Mission, in 1996, and the Central Rio Grande do Sul Conference, in 2006. In this context, all activities carried out by the ASR leadership team have been carried out in order to corroborate with the plans proposed by Seventh-day Adventist Church leadership at the South American and worldwide level.

Due to ASR's asset expansion, from January 2015 to February 2016, 16 new churches were opened, as well as a new school in the city of Gravataí. In addition, 12 plots for new construction were acquired. Another expressive result was obtained through the *Impacto Esperança* [Hope Impact Project] from 2014 to 2016. During the realization of this

project, participants distributed around 595,098 evangelistic books throughout ASR's territory. At the end of this period, the conference had 150 full-time canvassers, which achieved great success in sales.⁴⁵

In 2017, through votes no. 2017-124 and 2017-170, of USB, and vote no. 2017-217, of the South American Division, the first territorial reorganization of the three fields in operation in the state was carried out.⁴⁶ The goal of this reorganization was to enhance the administrative and evangelistic effectiveness all over Rio Grande do Sul territory. Thus, with the changes, ACRS was responsible for the central region of the state;⁴⁷ North Rio Grande do Sul Mission (former Western Mission) was responsible for the north and north-eastern regions and for the Vale dos Sinos [Bells Valley] region;⁴⁸ and ASR was responsible for the south portion of Rio Grande do Sul territory.⁴⁹

The ASR leadership team understands that, although it is one of the first conferences of the Church in Brazil, the mission of this institution has not yet been fully accomplished. For leaders, the number of people prepared for Christ's return must be continuously increasing in their missionary region. Furthermore, the character of Christ needs to be reproduced in His people with ever more testimony of the truth. For this, the leadership is aware that the preaching of the eternal gospel has yet to reach the last inhabitant in their mission field.

In relation to the lessons learned throughout the organizational history of ASR, it is highlighted that God dreams of bolder actions, bolder plans, an evangelism that He himself provides; a total commitment from believers; a church that cries out for new gifts; a firm unity in purpose; managing to preach the gospel all over the world in these days by people who reflect the character of Christ and witness His love in their lives. In this regard, one of ASR's greatest emphases has been on the involvement of members in the Communion, Relationship, and Mission (CRM) project. This initiative aims to encourage daily communion with God, the relationship between the Church and the community, and an understanding of the urgency in carrying out the mission.

Church planting is also one of the goals of the field, which hopes to establish new congregations in Porto Alegre. Other plans for the future of ASR involve expanding the educational area, with the implementation of at least one new school unit and a continuous increase of 10% per year in the number of students. To achieve these goals, the Christian Stewardship Department has been increasingly active, inviting members to be true worshipers through tithes and offerings. In addition, ASR works to rescue former Adventists. Similarly, for new baptisms to take place, the conference uses evangelism as its main support tool.⁵⁰

One of the greatest dreams of ASR's current leadership is that the field will not complete another century here on this earth, but that the gospel will soon be preached, and Christ will return in power and glory. Therefore, ASR uses all possible means in order to fulfil its mission, that is, to offer to many people the opportunity to know the love of God. In that way, soon, everyone will be able to celebrate the achievements of this and other missionary institutions of the Church together - recognizing the legacy of faith of the pioneers and leaders who have passed through Rio Grande do Sul. Each of them left their contribution in order for the field to be where it is today.

In the context of this expectation the ASR's vision is "that in harmony with the great prophecies of the Scriptures, God's plan climax is the restoration of all His creation in full harmony with His perfect will and justice." In this scenario, its declared mission is "to announce the good tidings to the world in the context of the three angelic messages, leading people to accept Jesus as their personal Saviour and join the SDA Church to prepare for His soon return."⁵¹

Chronology of Administrative Executives⁵²

Presidents: Huldreich Graf (1906); John Lipke (1907-1908); Waldemar Ehlers (1909-1913); Henry Meyer (1914-1918); John Lipke (1919-1920); Ricardo Sussmann (1921); Frederick Weber Spies (1922); Abraham Calvin Harder (1923-1931); John H. Boehm (1932-1939); A. L. Westphal (1940-1941); Germano Streithorst (1942-1943); Jeronimo Granero Garcia (1944-1947); Domingos Peixoto da Silva (1947-1949); Renato Emir Oberg (1950-1951); Frederico C. Webster (1952-1953); José Rodrigues dos Passos (1954-1957); Donald Robert Christmann (1958-1961); Emanuel Zorub (1962-1963); Oscar Luiz dos Reis (1964-1967); Benito Raymundo (1968-1972); Floriano Xavier dos Santos (1973-1978); Arno H. Köhler (1979-1982); Wandyr Mendes de Oliveira (1983-1984); Alberto Ribeiro de Sousa (1985-1986); Ivanaudo Barbosa de Oliveira (1987-1988); David Moróz (1989-1998); Samuel G. F. Zukowski (1999-2000); Marlinton Lopes (2001-2005); José Elias Zanotelli (2006-2012); Marcos Luiz Lima de Oliveira Junior (2012-2015); Milton Luiz Pereira de Andrade (2015-2018); Milton Andrade (2019); Charles Britis (2020-current).

Secretaries: A. Pages (1906-1908); August Preuss (1908-1910); Mary Ehlers (1911-1912); August Preuss (1913-1915); E. Langenstrassen (1916); L. Lotz (1917-1922); U. Wissner (1923-1924); Henrique L. Zipp (1925); G. Doerner (1926-1928); Santiago Schmidt (1929-1934); B. Schuenemann (1935-1940); Gustavo Bergold (1942-1943); Henrique S. Bergold (1944-1950); G. F. Ebinger (1952-1955); E. W. Olm (1956-1958); J. F. Walting (1959-1960); Henrique Marquart (1961-1963); Geraldo Boekenkamp (1964-1966); Holbert Schmidt (1967-1968); Ivo Souza (1969-1970); Francisco Nascimento (1973-1974); Arno. H. Köhler (1975); J. O. Correia (1976-1978); I. S. Paiva (1979); L. L. Fuckner (1979-1980); Vilson F. Oliveira (1981); Wandyr Mendes de Oliveira (1982); Alberto Ribeiro de Souza (1983-1984); Arthur M. L. Fortes (1985); Ivanaudo Barbosa de Oliveira (1986); Athaliba Huf (1987-1988); Antônio A. G. Moreira (1989-1993); Marlinton Souza Lopes (1994-2000); Milton Ceza de Souza (2001); Ertion Carlos Köhler (2002); Moisés de Mattos (2003-2004); Otávio Almeida Fonseca (2005-2010); Marcos Luiz Lima de Oliveira Junior (2011); Milton Luiz Pereira de Andrade (2012-2015); Leonardo Preuss Garcia (2016-current).

Treasurers: A. Pages (1906-1908); August Preuss (1908-1910); Mary Ehlers (1911-1912); August Preuss (1913-1915); E. Langenstrassen (1916); L. Lotz (1917-1922); U. Wissner (1923-1924); Henrique L. Zipp (1925); G. Doerner (1926-1928); Santiago Schmidt (1929-1934); B. Schuenemann (1935-1940); Gustavo Bergold (1942-1943); Henrique

S. Bergold (1944-1950); G. F. Ebinger (1952-1955); E. W. Olm (1956-1958); J. F. Walting (1959-1960); Henrique Marquart (1961-1963); Geraldo Boekenkamp (1964-1966); Holbert Schmidt (1967-1968); Ivo Souza (1969-1970); Francisco Nascimento (1973-1974); Vilson. F. Oliveira (1975-1982); Arthur M. L. Fortes (1983-1985); Vilson P. Keller (1986-1988); Marino F. de Oliveira (1989); Paulo Cândido dos Reis (1990-2003); Davi Contri (2004-2007); Marcelo Cristiano Bif (2008); Telson Bombassaro Vargas (2009-2011); Harlei Mazzo de Queiroga (2012-2017); Márcio Luz da Silva (2018-current).⁵³

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52. Ibid., 23; Emanuele Fonseca, "Associação Sul rio-grandense elege novo presidente" [Rio Grande do Sul Conference elects new president], *Notícias Adventistas* [Adventist News], November 25, 2019, accessed on December 10, 2019, <http://bit.ly/36i3Ji9>; "Rio Grande Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1907), 95; "Rio Grande do Sul Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2018), 254. For a more detailed visualization about all presidents, secretaries, and treasurers of Rio Grande do Sul Conference, see Seventh-day Adventist yearbooks from 1907 to 2018.?
53. For more information about the Rio Grande do Sul Conference access the website: asp.org.br, or social media – Facebook: @centralparanaense, Twitter: @iasdacp, and Youtube: Associação Sul-rio-grandense da IASD.?

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