



Soconusco Conference headquarters.

Photo courtesy of Chiapas Mexican Union.

Soconusco Conference

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Soconusco Conference is a part of Chiapas Mexican Union Conference in the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists. Its main offices are located at 4ª Avenida Sur 121, Colonia San Sebastián, Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico.

Territory and Statistics

Territory: Southern part of the state of Chiapas, including the municipalities of Cacahoatan, Cd. Hidalgo, Frontera Hidalgo, Huehuetan, Independencia, Mazatan, Metapa de Dominguez, Tapachula, Tuxtla Chico, Tuzantan, and Union Juarez.

Statistics (June 30, 2020): Churches, 145; membership, 26,683; population, 632,416.¹

The Soconusco region covers 5,475 square kilometers or 7.2 percent of the territory of the state of Chiapas. Soconusco is the most extreme southeastern region of Chiapas sharing borders with the Sierra Madre de Chiapas to the north, the Pacific Ocean to the south, and Guatemala to the east. Coffee, yellow mango, and rambutan are local crops of the region. Due to its geographic position, Soconusco is a region of great importance to communication and commerce between Mexico and Central America. Currently, Soconusco is one of Chiapas's 15 economic zones. The region's most important city is Tapachula de Córdova y Ordóñez, which is also known as Tapachula.²

Institutions

Centro Educativo Amado Nervo is located at 10ª Sur Prolongación No. 141, Colonia Hortalizas Japonesas, Tapachula, Chiapas. This educational center began operations in a building in the Colonia 5 de Febrero, which is now the Iglesia 5 de Febrero 3 in the North Central District. It offers pre-school, elementary, middle school, and high school education, and has an enrollment of 913 students with 42 teachers, two directors, 15 support staff, and four administrators.

Centro Educativo Harmon White is located at 3ª Poniente no. 32 entre 10ª y 12ª Norte, Colonia Barrio Nuevo, Ciudad Hidalgo, Suchiate, Chiapas. It offers elementary and middle school education. Its staff includes ten teachers, five support staff, and four administrators. It has an enrollment of 246 students of which 25 percent are Seventh-day Adventists. This allows for the sharing of the Adventist message through missionary work with the majority of students.

Centro Educativo Emilio Rabasa Estebanell is located in Ejido Rosario Ixtal, Tecate Road, Cacahoatan, Chiapas. It offers pre-school, elementary, middle school, and high school education. Its staff includes 28 teachers, five support staff, and four administrators, and it has an enrollment of 369 students.

Centro Escolar Adventista Dr. Braulio Pérez Marcio is located at Calle 5 de Mayo no. 13, Barrio Esquipulas, Huehuetan, Chiapas. It offers elementary education with 174 students and middle school education with 83 students. Its staff includes 12 teachers, four administrators, and three support staff.

Campamento Sinaí is located in Tapachula – Arriaga 377, Álvaro Obregón, Chiapas. The campground comprises 15 hectares located in Ejido Cantón Coapantes Buena Vista, Huehuetan, Chiapas. It began operations in 1992 when the campground was granted to Iglesia Adventista Central de Tapachula for the activities of the church's clubs.³ The camp has facilities and fields as well as an auditorium with a capacity of 1,500 people, a dining room,

a pool, bathrooms, showers, a soccer field, a basketball court, and a deep well which can supply drinking water for 5,000 people on a daily basis.

Origins of Adventist Church in Territory

In 1913, the Adventist faith was introduced in Tapachula, which was the second largest city in the state of Chiapas at the time. The Jiménez brothers, Aurelio, Catarino, and Juan, and their cousin Emilio were the first to preach the Adventist message along the Chiapas coast. They had preached in all the towns where trains stopped until they arrived in Tapachula at the extreme southern tip of the country.⁴ At the time, several entry routes into Chiapas existed. However, to get specifically to Soconusco, missionaries and colporteurs had to travel from Oaxaca.⁵ The Jiménez brothers were from the state of Oaxaca.

Aurelio was the first to bring the Adventist message to the state of Chiapas. In trips that lasted three to four months over 25 years, he traveled through the southern states of Mexico to preach the gospel. This is how the Adventist Church was established in Chiapas.⁶

In 1924, Tehuantepec Mission was established with Oaxaca, Tabasco, Chiapas, and the southern half of Veracruz as its territory and Pastor H. J. Winter as its president. He was German, and he realized that many Germans lived in Mexico, especially in Mexico City and among the owners of coffee plantations in the state of Chiapas. For this reason, he asked the General Conference to send two German colporteurs to Mexico. Max Fuss and Alfred Lutz, two German missionary colporteurs, arrived at the port of Veracruz in 1927. Rafael Aguilar, the colporteur director, met them there and brought them to Tapachula, Chiapas. They stayed in a boarding house while preparing to travel to the coffee plantations in the mountains. Each missionary bought and equipped his own horse.⁷

In October 1931, Tehuantepec Mission sent Pastor Vicente Rodríguez Velázquez to Tapachula. Pastor Rodríguez established the first congregation in his own house on Hidalgo No. 2 in 1932. A short time later, he transferred to 2ª Calle de Ignacio Rayón No. 25. Some of the members of the small congregation were María de González; Teodosio and his son-in-law, Ricardo; Panchita; the Castrejón family of which José, who later became a minister of the Adventist Church, was a member; and Buenaventura Gudiel and his wife, who later became highly successful colporteurs in Veracruz. Buenaventura also later became a minister of the Adventist Church in Tuxtla Gutiérrez and Copainalá, Chiapas.⁸

Pastor Rodríguez's congregation had approximately 28 Sabbath school members. Later, they acquired a plot of land that had been donated by a Mr. Alvarado whose wife and son, Roberto, had been baptized together. This is where the central church of Tapachula is currently located. Among the prominent families of the church in Tapachula were Sister Margarita de Castrejón and her children, José and Cupertina. José Castrejón became a colporteur, pastor, and administrator of the Adventist Church. His work as a colporteur began in 1934. Later,

José de la Paz Matus joined him.⁹

Events That Led to Organization of Soconusco Conference

The Mexican Mission was first organized in 1903 with Pastor George M. Brown as its president, Pastor A. Cooper as secretary, and Pastor G. W. Caviness as treasurer. Its main offices were located at 1599 Avenue 22, Tacubaya, D. F., Mexico.¹⁰ As the message spread and the church grew stronger in Mexico, the organization of the Central American countries became a necessity. Therefore, in 1923, Aztec Union Mission was organized. Its territory included the Republics of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras with British Honduras. It had 21 churches and 1,014 members. Pastor D. A. Parsons was its president with M. R. Battee as secretary-treasurer.¹¹

In 1926, to better manage the administration of the Adventist church in Mexico, it was decided to reorganize Aztec Union Mission. The new union mission that emerged from it was named Mexican Union Mission as its territory encompassed the entire country of Mexico. It was organized with Central Mexican Mission, Gulf Mission, Lake Mission, Sonora Mission, Tehuantepec Mission, and Yucatán Mission. The state of Chiapas and, consequently, the churches in Soconusco were a part of the territory of Tehuantepec Mission.¹²

By 1944, the Adventist Church made the decision to form Chiapas Mission with 25 churches and 1,422 members. Its territory was the state of Chiapas, which had been a part of Tehuantepec Mission prior to the creation of Chiapas Mission.¹³

On January 22, 1948, Mexican Union Mission's board of directors decided to reorganize the territory of Chiapas Mission. It would now include the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca in its territory and be renamed South Mexican Mission. It had 33 churches and 2,215 members. Xavier Ponce was elected president with Miguel Lara Flores as secretary-treasurer. Its main offices were located at 1ª Avenida Norte No. 58-A, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas.¹⁴

In 1975, after 27 years of operation, South Mexican Mission had a change of status and became South Mexican Conference. It had 60 churches and 28,295 members. Its president was Jacob Savinon.¹⁵

With the purpose of growing the church and giving better care to church members, South Mexican Conference's leaders requested the Inter-American Division to conduct a study for the reorganization of its territory. In 1981, the reorganization of the territories of Central Mexican Conference, the Inter-Oceanic Conference, South Mexican Conference, and Southeast Mexican Conference was authorized. In 1983, the new Isthmus Mexican Conference and Soconusco Mission were organized. Soconusco Mission began with the territory of South Chiapas and two counties of Oaxaca, 36 churches, 18,762 members, Carlos Uc as president, and Irán Molina as secretary-treasurer.¹⁶

In 1997, Soconusco Mission requested a change in status.¹⁷ After 16 years of operation and having strengthened the Adventist Church in its territory, in 1999, Soconusco Mission was reorganized, and it had a change in status from a mission to a conference. Soconusco Conference at this time had 105 churches and 54,862 members.

Tomás Isaías Espinoza Hernández was elected president with Dimas López López as secretary and Orlando Jiménez Hernández as treasurer.¹⁸

On April 13, 2004, in a meeting in Huatulco, Oaxaca, the South Mexican Union Conference board of directors voted to conduct a field study in order to create a new mission that would be named “Upper Chiapas Mission.”¹⁹

On January 30, 2005, in an extraordinary meeting in Tapachula, Chiapas, Soconusco Conference’s constituency voted to cede 12 churches and 3,967 members to Upper Chiapas Mission.²⁰

On May 3, 2007, because Soconusco Conference had such an extensive territory, its board of directors voted to cede 15 churches and 1,633 members to a second newly-created mission that would be named “West Chiapas Mission.”²¹

As time passed, another territorial reorganization of Soconusco Conference was deemed necessary. From this reorganization, on June 27, 2011, a new mission was established and named “South Chiapas Mission,” with Hipólito Gómez Cruz as president and Víctor R. Cabrera Morales as secretary-treasurer. When it was established, this mission had 123 churches and 28,948 members.²²

After the territorial reorganizations, Soconusco Conference had 102 churches and 19,237 members in 2011. By 2020, these numbers have grown to 145 churches and 26,683 members.

Soconusco Conference Fulfills the Mission by:

Motivating pastors and church members to experience a personal revival and reformation to obtain the necessary power to finish the preaching of the gospel.

Continuing to motivate, inspire, train, and equip pastors and church members to involve themselves in the preaching of the gospel.

Continuing with [health programs](#) across Chiapas.

Conducting monthly missionary impacts distributing *Enfoque* magazines.

Conducting annual distributions of the chosen “missionary book of the year.”

What Remains to be Done

Since Tapachula, where the conference offices are located, is on the border between Mexico and Guatemala, the conference territory has many immigrants, a fact that presents a challenge and an opportunity to preach the gospel.

Within Soconusco Conference's territory are many communities, especially in the municipality of Cacahoatán, Chiapas, that have no Adventist presence. Therefore, the conference faces the challenge to spread the word among these communities.

List of Presidents

Carlos Uc Gorocica (1983-1987); Samuel Amaro Covarrubias (1988-1989); Elias Herrejón Rivera (1990-1991); Raúl Alberto Escalante Casanova (1992-1994); Julián Gómez Morales (1995-1996); David Manuel Pacheco Cocom (1997-1999); Tomás Isaías Espinoza Hernández (2000-2002); Dimas López López (2003); Villaney Vázquez Alegría (2004); Hipolito Gómez Cruz (2005-2011); Rigoberto Ricárdez Burelo (2012-2014); Daniel Torreblaca Arguello (2015-2018); Jaime Medrano Nieto (2019); Samuel Castellanos (2020-).

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NOTES

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