



Present Maranhao Conference headquarters.

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Maranhao Conference

DANIEL OSCAR PLENC, AND LUCAS VÍTOR ALVES RODRIGUES SENA

Daniel Oscar Plenc, Th.D. (River Plate Adventist University, Entre Ríos, Argentina), currently works as a theology professor and director of the White Research Center at the River Plate Adventist University. He worked as a district pastor for twelve years. He is married to Lissie Ziegler and has three children.

Lucas Vítor Alves Rodrigues Sena

Maranhao Conference (Associação Maranhense or AMa) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church located in the territory of the North Brazil Union Mission (União Norte Brasileira or UNB).

Maranhao Conference's headquarters is on Daniel de La Touche Avenue, no. 53, in Zip Code 65061-021 in the Maranhão Novo neighborhood in the city of São Luís in the state of Maranhão, Brazil.

The mission field of AMa comprises 44 cities in the north of the state of Maranhão, including 237 congregations and 43,097 Adventists in June 30, 2019.¹ The total population in its territory is 2,856,118 people, and the average is one Adventist per 74 inhabitants. AMa manages six units of the Adventist Educational Network in its territory, serving a total of 2.797 students. The units are: Colégio Adventista de São Luís [Sao Luiz Adventist Academy] in the city of São Luís with 990 students; Escola Adventista de Monte Castelo [Monte Castelo Adventist School], also in the city of São Luís with 409 students; Escola Adventista de Caxias [Caxias Adventist School] in the city of Caxias with 132 students; Escola Adventista de Coroatá [Coroatá Adventist School] in the city of Coroatá with 279 students; Colégio Adventista de Codó [Codó Adventist School] in the city of Codó with 402 students; and Colégio Adventista de São Luís KIDS [São Luís KIDS Adventist School] in the city of São Luís with 585 students.²

The field is also covered by the Adventist Media Center - Brazil, that has its signal openly transmitted to the cities of São Luís (channel 44), Caxias (channel 3) and Vitória do Mearim (channel 4). In these cities, the Adventist Media Center potential viewers are 1.3 million people. To meet the needs of the SDA Church in this mission field, AMa has 470 staff members. Among these, there are 414 who are allocated in different areas and institutional functions (including Adventist Education), 40 who act as credentialed pastors, and nine as licensed pastors in addition to one credentialed missionary and six licensed missionaries.³

The Origin of the Adventist Work in the Conference Territory

As far as it is known, the first Adventist arrived in São Luís during 1922. Firmo Marinho, a hairdresser and an Adventist who was previously baptized in the city of Recife in Pernambuco, arrived in the capital of Maranhão during that period and began to preach to his clients. Several people accepted the message he presented, and soon a group of Sabbath keepers was formed in the city. Sérgio Vieira de Araújo was among those converts (1888-1980), and he later led a group of Adventists in São Luís.⁴

In 1923, Henrique Berg Correia arrived in the state of Maranhão. He was the first evangelist canvasser⁵ to work on those lands, and he promoted the advancement of the Adventist work there through the printed page. Noticing the evangelization opportunities in that region, four years later, the SDA Church sent other missionaries to the North of Brazil. They were Pastor John Lewis Brown and canvassers André Gedrath and Hans Mayr. This trio, with their wives and children, arrived in Belém, the capital of Pará, in May 1927 when the South American Division (Divisão Sul-Americana) organized the Lower Amazonas Mission (presently the North Para Conference). At first, this Mission comprised the states of Amazonas, Pará, Ceará, Piauí, and Maranhão.⁶

Sometime later, in December 1936, a commission from the South American Division approved the reorganization of the mission field of the East Brazil Union Mission (now the Southeast Brazil Union Conference), giving rise to the North Brazil Union Mission. At that same time, the field was also organized into Missions to better manage the work, and the North Coast Mission (presently the Ceara Conference) was established. At first, this Mission was responsible to promote the Adventist work in the states of Ceará, Piauí, and Maranhão with its

headquarters in Fortaleza (the capital of Ceará).⁷ The North Coast Mission began to operate in January 1937.⁸

In 1942, Gustavo S. Storch, an evangelist of the North Brazil Union Mission, led evangelistic conferences in a place called “Cassino Maranhense” [Maranhao Casino] in the city of São Luís. Storch received help from Walter and Olga Streithorst (his son-in-law and daughter, respectively) and baptized around 60 people in that location.⁹ At that time, there were only two districts in the entire North Coast Mission. In that same year (1942), Walter Streithorst became responsible to manage one of these districts that comprised the vast territory of the states of Maranhão and Piauí. The other one, which covered the state of Ceará, was managed by Aldo Carvalho.¹⁰ After that Storch’s series of conferences, the rising congregation rented a big house on Rua da Paz [Peace Street] in downtown São Luís. This group was later organized into a church under the leadership of Walter Streithorst. In addition, at that time, a Parish School was also organized in that big house with young Elziária de Castro as the first teacher.¹¹

In 1945, the São Luís SDA Church members started an evangelism work in the city’s public prison. Bible studies with the prisoners were held on Sundays and, on Fridays, there were illustrated conferences using a projector. A Sabbath School branch also operated in that prison with more than 20 members enrolled. In addition to their studies, the São Luís Church members also helped prisoners with medicines, clothing, shoes, hammocks, magazines, blankets, brochures, and books.¹² Some time later, because of its constant growth, the São Luís Adventist congregation was no longer able to hold their meetings in the house at Rua da Paz [Peace St.] Thus, in 1949, the church members purchased a land on Celso Magalhães St. where they started the building of the Central SDA Church of São Luís. Two years later, in October 1951, that temple was inaugurated!¹³

Still in 1949, a group of Adventists who had lived in Teresina, the capital of the state of Piauí, moved to Caxias and established an Adventist center in that area. Thus, the Adventist message reached another city in the state of Maranhão. Some years later, in 1955, Pastor Gustavo Storch started a series of conferences in Caxias, holding evangelistic meetings on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. This time, he had as assistants Américo Quispe and Emery Cohen as well as Orlando Barreto and Orlando Queiroz. As a result of divine blessings on that work, more than 50 people were baptized in what was the first Adventist baptism in that city. In July of the following year (1956), the Central Caxias Adventist Church was organized.¹⁴

During the first half of the following decade, other cities in the countryside of the state of Maranhão also received the message of hope preached by the Adventist Church and, as a result, other congregations were established. In 1963, for example, some Adventists arrived in the city of São José de Ribamar on the island of São Luís. Although an Adventist group had already previously been established in that city during the late 1940s and early 1950s, its members had moved to the city of Paço do Lumiar. Therefore, the Adventist group in that place started to officially operate only in 1964 when the first meeting was held.¹⁵

During the 1960s, the Adventist social assistance work intensified in the Maranhão state. A Dorcas Society¹⁶ was established in the city of Caixas and, by the end of 1963, this missionary front had already served around 800

people. During Christmas time of that same year, milk, wheat, and clothes were distributed to some families in need in the city.¹⁷ The Adventists of São Luís were also actively involved in social assistance. In 1966, the local church's Dorcas Society carried out courses on Culinary Art and Cutting and Sewing. In addition, a doctor's office was set up, and a nurse and a doctor provided care weekly. By October of that year, around 140 appointments had already been conducted in the church's office. In that same year, the São Luís Dorcas Society was established in a registry office, gaining the right to receive financial resources that would assist in the philanthropic work.¹⁸

In the following year (1967), a new type of work was added to the Adventist missionary fronts in the region. Health care started to be offered when the North Coast Mission received a donation from the SC Johnson & Son Incorporation. A mobile clinic was used in assistencial work. Until April 1967, 56 towns and cities were visited, and more than 21,000 visits were conducted. The clinic was based in Caxias in the Maranhão countryside and was managed by Luis Fuckner, a nurse and pastor. Due to the influence of the work of this clinic, by March of the following year, 127 people had already been baptized in the states of Maranhão and Piauí!¹⁹

Several evangelistic advances continued in the state of Maranhão during the first half of the following decade. In the late 1970s, that mission field had reached 440 baptized people at a time when the entire state of Maranhão was still part of a single pastoral district.²⁰ In the following year, about 200 students were already enrolled in an Adventist school that had been previously established in the city of Coroatá. Thus, the Adventist message was also preached through the educational field.²¹ In 1972, Pastor Raimundo Lima held a series of conferences in Codó and, at the end of this session, about 200 people were baptized, giving rise to an Adventist Church in that region.²²

The evangelistic advances continued in the following year (1973). At that time, Caxias was among the few cities in the North Brazil Union Mission that received the radio signal of the program *A Voz da Profecia* [*The Voice of Prophecy*],²³ was broadcast five times a week.²⁴ The broadcast of this denominational program helped to spread the Adventist message throughout that region. In 1974, Codó also started to receive these broadcasts. As a result, the branch of the program, led by the city's Adventist Church, enrolled around 700 students in the Radio School.²⁵ In addition to these enrollments, through the radio work, more than 200 people expressed interest in the Adventist message.²⁶ Also in 1974, a new evangelistic series was held in the city of Codó, and around 1,200 people attended the meetings every night. Most of the participants were students from the *A Voz da Profecia* [*The Voice of Prophecy*] program.²⁷

In the first half of the 1980s, some Adventist church buildings inaugurations happened. At the beginning of this decade, another Adventist temple was inaugurated in the city of São Luís in Monte Castelo neighborhood. A few years later, in 1984, the São José de Ribamar Adventist temple in the island of São Luís was also installed. And three years later, the group in that city was organized into a church.²⁸ With the constantly increasing growth of preaching the Adventist message in that region, in 1987, the North Coast Mission already had 61 organized

churches and 27,257 Adventist members, indicating that the mission field needed to be reorganized.²⁹

Conference Organizational History

At the end of the 1980s, there was a need to organize an administrative unit that could more closely lead the growing of the Adventist work in the state of Maranhão. After some meetings between the leadership of the UNB and the North Coast Mission, it was decided to create the Maranhao Mission during a meeting that happened between July 27 and 30, 1988. This new administrative unit was established after the reorganization of the North Coast Mission field and started to operate on July 31 of that same year.³⁰ On its inauguration date, this Mission was called by its first president “The Field of Miracles” due to the countless blessings already received in that territory.³¹

When Maranhao Mission was established, there were a total of 19,609 Adventist members in its missionary territory, and they were spread over 54 churches and 202 groups organized in 15 pastoral districts. Since its beginning, this administrative unit has operated at 53 Daniel de La Touche Avenue in the Maranhão Novo neighborhood in São Luís. To lead the newly created Mission that operated throughout the state of Maranhão, Pastor Izéas Cardoso was chosen as president, and Pastor Anastácio Ximenes was chosen to serve as secretary and treasurer.³² Since then, the mission of this administrative headquarters has been to concentrate efforts so that “the good news of salvation are carried to each municipality, each home and each inhabitant of the state of Maranhão.”³³

About three years after the inauguration of the Mission, the Instituto Adventista Maranhense [Maranhao Adventist Institute] that had been operating in São Luís for over a decade had its headquarters transferred to Daniel de La Touche Avenue next to the administrative unit facility of the Church in Maranhão. Two years later, the second grade course (nowadays high school) was implemented in this school that became known as Sao Luiz Adventist Academy (as it is still called today).³⁴ In 1993, this academy served about 800 students.³⁵ As a result, two years later, the school had attracted 1,200 enrolled students. Thus, the preaching of the Adventist message through education was advancing more and more in the capital of the state of Maranhão.³⁶

In parallel to the educational area advances, the Maranhao Mission also advanced in terms of number of baptisms and new established congregations in that region. Between 1996 and 2001, 56,019 people were baptized throughout the missionary field of Maranhão.³⁷ At the end of that period, the Mission had 70,899 Adventists and 241 organized churches.³⁸ By the end of 2005, those numbers had increased even more, resulting in 124,854 Adventist members spread across 387 congregations across the state.³⁹ Noticing this growth in number of members and churches, between December 13 and 15, 2005, an Ordinary General Assembly of Maranhao Mission deliberated on the issue and voted in favor of the reorganization of that mission field.⁴⁰

The reconfiguration was carried out, and a new administrative headquarters was established. The new institution was called the South Maranhao Mission and was responsible for managing the advances of the Adventist work throughout the south of Maranhão. From then on, the Maranhao Mission was responsible for promoting the Adventist work in the north part of the state with 62,893 Adventist members belonging to 262 congregations.⁴¹ Even after this reorganization, the Maranhao Mission continued to grow steadily in the preaching of the Gospel. Noticing this, some time later, the North Brazil Union Mission leadership approved a vote authorizing the change of status of this administrative unit that came to be called the Maranhao Conference. This nomenclature change was made official in 2011.⁴²

The following years showed similar developments directly related to the many missionary advances. In 2014, AMa started to officially promote the “Caleb Mission Project”⁴³ in its mission field. In that year, the project’s campaign involved about 7,780 youth and resulted in 2,367 baptisms in the north of Maranhão. In the following year (2015), the Conference purchased the license of an open TV channel for the transmission of the Adventist Media Center signal. In the educational field in 2015, the Colégio Adventista de São Luís Kids [São Luís KIDS Adventist School] was built. In addition, two lots were purchased, one in São Luís and another in the city of Caxias, and they also served educational purposes. Within 2014 and 2016, AMa recorded about 14,000 baptisms and 96 new churches were inaugurated.⁴⁴

With this significant growth of the Adventist work in the north region of Maranhão in 2018, the North Brazil Union Mission approved the creation of a new administrative Church headquarters in that state. The Missão Nordeste Maranhense (Northeast Maranhao Mission or MNeM) was then established with its headquarters in Paço do Lumiar in the São Luís metropolitan region.⁴⁵ Thus, the Maranhao Conference started to manage the Adventist work advances in a more specific way in part of the north region of the state of Maranhão that includes the capital of São Luís and part of the metropolitan region. Since this reorganization in the mission field, the institution responsible to promote the Adventist work in the northeast region of the state of Maranhão is the MNeM.⁴⁶

On November 19, 2018, in recognition of the good social work developed through volunteering during the Mission Caleb Project execution, the then-governor of the state of Maranhão sanctioned law no. 10,948, and it instituted “Caleb Mission Project State Day.”⁴⁷ In addition to this law, a few months later during a project opening event in 2019, the then-governor also highlighted the important role of the Adventist youth and the Caleb Mission Project in the state of Maranhão.⁴⁸ In this ecclesiastical context, within the years 2014 and 2019, more than 25,000 people were baptized through this missionary project.⁴⁹

Still in relation to the main evangelistic projects developed in the missionary field of Maranhao Conference, on May 21, 2019, the launching ceremony of the “Impacto Esperança” [“Hope Impact”] Project⁵⁰ edition of that year took place. The event happened in the Conference’s office and was attended by the institution’s leaders and employees.⁵¹ Later, on May 25 of that same year, the project was carried out. On that day, almost 300,000

Adventist volunteers from the states of Maranhão, Pará, and Amapá went to the streets of the North Brazil Union Mission territory in order to distribute to the population 2,000,000 missionary books. The book distributed on that occasion was written by Willie and Elaine Olive and was specially prepared for this purpose.⁵²

The Maranhão Conference has gone through several changes and major advances since its establishment. However, there are still challenges to be faced. One of AMA's goals is to reach the São Luís neighborhoods where there is still no Adventist presence. However, this has been a great challenge in view of the lack of financial resources and due to the high price of land in these locations. In addition to reaching these neighborhoods of the Global Mission, the Maranhão Conference's goals for the future include: Make available the Adventist Media Center open signal in the entire São Luís island; Create 150 new churches; Promote 30% growth in the number of members; Organize eight new pastoral districts; Achieve a 20% growth in the number of Small Groups⁵³ each year; and build two new school units in the mission field.⁵⁴

Regarding the lessons that can be learned from the trajectory of this administrative unit of the Church, it should be mentioned that AMA history shows that a large part of the institution's organizational growth from 1988 to the present is due to at least four pillars: (1) teamwork; (2) focus on fulfilling the mission; (3) leadership training for churches with a focus on inspiration rather than motivation; and (4) work focused on people. However, it is important to remember that all of this is useful only if it is combined with confidence in God's sovereignty.⁵⁵

Chronology of Administrative Managers ⁵⁶

Presidents: Izéas dos Santos Cardoso (1988-1992); Eric Philippe Monnier (1993-1995); Gilberto Batista de Oliveira (1996); Jairo Emerick Torres (1997-2001); Moisés Batista de Souza (2002-2004); Otimar dos Santos Gonçalves (2004-2005); Ezequias Melo de Freitas Guimarães (2005-2011); Ramildo Bezerra dos Santos (2012-2013); Fernando Pereira de Lima (2014-present).

Secretaries: Anastácio Cardoso Ximenes (1988-1991); Ely José Dias (1992-1994); José Ribamar Bezerra Martins (1994-2005); Samuel Muniz Bastos (2005); Aquino Gonçalves Bastos Filho (2005-2006); Ramildo Bezerra dos Santos (2006-2011); Ozéias de Souza Costa (2011-2013); Francisco Wellington de Oliveira Almeida (2013-2016); Fausto Rocha Farias (2016-2018); Raimundo Nonato Ribeiro Silva (2019-present).

Treasurers: Anastácio Cardoso Ximenes (1988-1991); Ely José Dias (1992-1994); Solano da Conceição Correia (1994-1997); Rui Linhares de Freitas (1997-2003); Josias Francisco da Costa (2003-2007); Adimilson Vieira Duarte (2007-2011); Edson Erthal (2011-2014); Adimilson Vieira Duarte (2014-2019); Edinaldo Pinto Martins (2019-present).⁵⁷

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NOTES

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13. de Jesus Saraiva, *A História do Adventismo no Maranhão: 80 Anos de História e Milagres* [*The Adventism History in Maranhão: 80 Years of History and Miracles*], 54-56.
14. *Ibid.*, 113-114.
15. *Ibid.*, 72-73.
16. "The Dorcas Society was an assistance entity established by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1874, with the goal of 'provide for the poor and needy' in local churches. The name derives from the biblical character Tabita, or Dorcas, a Christian believer who helped the poor (Acts 9:36). Nowadays, it's called Seventh-day Adventist Welfare Service (ASA)." "South American Division," *Manual da Ação Solidária Adventista* [*Seventh-day Adventist Welfare Service Manual*], Brasília, DF: South American Division, 2016, 13.
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23. "A Voz da Profecia [*The Voice of Prophecy*] is the oldest evangelical program in the Brazilian radio, starting in 1943. Since its beginning it has counted with the musical participation of the quartet Arautos do Rei [The King's Heralds]. Nowadays, the program has its version, also, on TV, and it is presented by pastor Gilson Brito, who has been in the pastoral ministry for over 30 years. These are biblical sermons that present a message of hope and salvation." *Adventist Media Center - Brazil*, "A Voz da Profecia" ["The Voice of Prophecy"], accessed January 28, 2020,

<https://bit.ly/2RzGrRh>.

24. "Ecos da Voz da Profecia na Uninorte" ["The Voice of Prophecy Echoes in the North Brazil Union Mission"], *Revista Adventista* 68, no. 6 (June 1973): 26.
25. "The Radio School served to enable the sending of lessons from Bible courses students and to answer the listeners letters." Alexandre Brasil Fonseca, "Muito Além do Sábado: O Pioneirismo Adventista na Mídia Eletrônica Religiosa" ["Far Beyond Sabbath: Adventist Pioneerism in Religious Electronic Media"], *Revista de Estudos da Religião [Religion Studies Review]*, 8 (September 2008): 96.
26. "Mini-filial da Voz da Profecia de Codó" ["Codó Mini affiliate of The Voice of Prophecy"], *Revista Adventista* 69, no. 7 (July 1974): 28.
27. "Evangelismo" ["Evangelism"], *Revista Adventista* 69, no. 8 (August 1974): 28.
28. de Jesus Saraiva, *A História do Adventismo no Maranhão: 80 Anos de História e Milagres [The Adventism History in Maranhão: 80 Years of History and Miracles]*, 81-82.
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30. Minutes of the Maranhao Mission, August 1988, vote no. 88-001.
31. Robson Marinho, "Nasce a Missão Maranhense: Um sonho de 37 anos" ["The Maranhense Mission is born: A 37-year-old dream"], *Revista Adventista* 84, no. 10 (October 1988): 38-39.
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33. Minutes of the Maranhao Mission, August 1988, vote no. 88-001.
34. "Comissão avalia o setor educacional" ["Commission evaluates the educational sector"], *Revista Adventista* 89, no. 3 (March 1993): 24.
35. de Jesus Saraiva, *A História do Adventismo no Maranhão: 80 Anos de História e Milagres [The Adventism History in Maranhão: 80 Years of History and Miracles]*, 157, 158.
36. "Campo maranhense continua crescendo" ["Maranhao field continues to grow"], *Revista Adventista* 91, no. 4 (April 1995): 24.
37. de Jesus Saraiva, *A História do Adventismo no Maranhão: 80 Anos de História e Milagres [The Adventism History in Maranhão: 80 Years of History and Miracles]*, 152.
38. "Maranhao Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002), 281.

39. "Maranhao Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2006), 264.
40. "Edital de Convocação da 5ª Assembleia Geral Ordinária da Missão Maranhense da Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia" ["The 5th Ordinary General Assembly Call Notice of Maranhao Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church"], *Revista Adventista* 100, no. 10 (October 2005): 30.
41. "South Maranhao Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2007), 269.
42. "Maranhao Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2011), 289.
43. "The Caleb Mission Project is a voluntary, social service and testimony program that challenges young Adventists to dedicate their vacations to evangelism in places where there is no Adventist presence, to strengthen small congregations and win new people into the kingdom of God." *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) Website*, "Missão Calebe 2020" ["Caleb Mission 2020"], accessed February 4, 2020, <http://bit.ly/2HRpvRi>.
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46. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Maranhao Conference," accessed November 26, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2XQcmOP>.
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48. Abimael Costa, "Milhares de jovens iniciam a Missão Calebe no Maranhão" ["Thousands of young people start the Caleb Mission Project in Maranhão"], Abimael Costa, July 7, 2019, accessed October 24, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2JiNuji>.
49. Tamyres Mendes (Assistant of AMa Executive Secretary), message sent by e-mail to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associated editor), October 2, 2019.
50. "The Hope Impact Project encourages reading and provides a huge annual distribution of books by Seventh-day Adventists in the territory of South America." *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) Website*, "Impacto Esperança" ["Hope Impact Project"], accessed February 4, 2020, <https://bit.ly/34dZROO>.
51. Adventistas Maranhão [Maranhao Adventists], Facebook post, May 21, 2019 (12:30 a.m.), accessed July 9, 2020, <https://bit.ly/38FOq60>.
52. Anne Seixas, "Pará, Amapá e Maranhão recebem dois milhões de livros neste fim de semana" ["Pará, Amapá and Maranhão receive two million books this weekend"], Adventist News, May 25, 2019, accessed July 9, 2020, <https://bit.ly/38L9fNI>.

53. "A Small Group is a group of people who meet weekly under the coordination of a leader aiming for spiritual, relational and evangelistic growth, with the goal of multiplication." *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) Website*, "Pequenos Grupos" ["Small Groups"], accessed February 4, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2NtcXj7>.
54. Tamyres Mendes (Assistant of AMa Executive Secretary), message sent by e-mail to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associated editor), October 2, 2019.
55. Ibid.
56. "Maranhao Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1989), 267; "Maranhao Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2018), 241. A more detailed list of all the Maranhao Conference administrative leaders can be consulted in the *SDA Yearbooks* from 1989 to 2018.
57. More information about the Maranhao Conference can be found on their website at <http://ama.adventistas.org/> or on their Social Networks at Facebook: @adventistasMA, Instagram: @adventistasmaranhao, and YouTube: Adventistas Maranhão [Maranhão Adventists].
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