



Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference

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Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union is one of 24 unions that comprise the Inter-American Division and one of five unions established in Mexico.

Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union is located between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans and bordered on the north by Michoacán, Mexico City, Mexico State, San Luis Potosí, and Tamaulipas; on the south by the states of Chiapas and Tabasco; on the east by the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean; and on the west by the Pacific Ocean.

The general population of the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union's geographical territory is approximately 30,000,000 inhabitants, and its territorial extension is 300,787 square kilometers.¹ Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union covers a territory that holds great cultural wealth.² The official language of the region is Spanish, but various ethnic groups, especially in the state of Oaxaca, speak 33 indigenous languages as well.

At the beginning of 2018, Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union consisted of seven conferences and four missions, 204,820 church members in 1,596 organized churches, and 1,323 congregations under the direction of 169 ordained ministers and 111 licensed ministers. Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union oversee 44 elementary and middle schools with 700 teachers; a radio and television station; 11 branches of *Gema Editores*, the Mexican publishing house; 287 active colporteurs; and five fully-established campground sites.

Organizational History of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union's territory began in Ixtaltepec, Oaxaca, in 1905. Two brothers, Aurelio and Juan Jiménez, became interested in the Adventist message mentioned in the magazine, *El Mensajero de la Verdad*, or the "Messenger of Truth," edited by George W. Caviness, a North American missionary and director of Mexican Mission. Their uncle who lived near Ixtaltepec in Juchitán, Oaxaca, gave them bread wrapped in some of the magazine's pages. They were intrigued by the message but did not know how to get more pages. For two years, they asked all the region's evangelical churches but could not find the one that published the magazine. Then the Spirit of God led them to the truth. One day, the young men's alcoholic father became ill, and they ordered medicine for him. In a few days, the medicine arrived wrapped in almost all the pages of the March and April 1907 issues of the magazine *El Mensajero de la Verdad*, one of which explained the Sabbath message. The Jiménez brothers accepted the Sabbath message and started a group of Sabbath keepers in Ixtaltepec, Oaxaca.³

In 1910, Pastor George W. Caviness visited Ixtaltepec, Oaxaca, and organized the first Sabbath School in the territory of what is now Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union. In 1911, Pastor Caviness returned to Ixtaltepec and baptized the first Sabbath keepers, including Aurelio and Juan Jiménez and their families.⁴ In 1913, Antonio Sánchez preached the Adventist message in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, another region that is now part of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union. In spite of the problems caused by the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), evangelistic pastors and colporteurs continued to work. As a result of their commitment, in 1914, Pastor Caviness reported that seven groups from various parts of the country asked for a pastor to baptize them.⁵

In 1923, Aztec Union was organized. It included all of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and British Honduras (now Belize).⁶ On May 21, 1924, Aztec Union held its first meeting in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, and voted to organize five missions, among which was Tehuantepec Mission, whose territory is now part of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union.⁷ In 1926, Tehuantepec Mission was voted as a local field of Mexican Union Mission, which was organized that year. Mexican Union Mission also included Central Mission, Gulf Mission, Lake Mission, Sonora Mission, and

Yucatán Mission.

The church continued to grow. Pastor Antonio Esteban Torres Reyna attended the General Conference Session of Seventh-day Adventists in San Francisco, California, from June 11-15, 1930.⁸ Pastor Torres Reyna was the first Mexican delegate sent by the Mexican church to a world session. This demonstrated the organizational preparedness of the Adventist church in Mexico to connect with the Seventh-day Adventist world church.

On February 23, 1935, the Mexican Union Board appointed Pastor Emiliano Ponce Sedano as president of Central Mission, and he became the first Mexican administrator of a mission. This demonstrated the maturity of Mexican leadership and inspired local leaders to continue preaching the gospel. Pastor Emiliano Ponce Sedano is also the author of the well-known hymn, *Más allá del sol* ("Far Beyond the Sun").⁹

Mexican Union deemed it necessary to adjust the Tehuantepec Mission's territory for its growth. In December 1942, part of Tehuantepec Mission was divided, and the new Yucatán Mission based in Mérida, Yucatán, was organized. Yucatán Mission included the states of Yucatán, Campeche, Tabasco, and Quintana Roo.¹⁰ This was the first of many territorial adjustments preceding the establishment of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union.

On January 22, 1948, the Mexican Union Board voted to change the name of Tehuantepec Mission to Inter-Oceanic Mission. The territory of the new Inter-Oceanic Mission included the states of Guerrero, Morelos, Puebla, Tlaxcala, and part of Veracruz from the *Laguna de Tamiahua* in the north to the regions of San Andres Tuxtla and Juan Diaz Covarrubias in the south.¹¹

From February 27 to March 2, 1977, a session was held in which Inter-Oceanic Mission became Inter-Oceanic Conference based in Puebla, Puebla. The states that formed it were Morelos, Guerrero, Puebla, Tlaxcala, and part of Veracruz. On December 5, 1977, Mexican Union Mission changed its status and was reorganized as Mexican Union Conference.¹² In 1985, Mexican Union was divided into two unions, North Mexican Union and South Mexican Union.¹³

On January 1, 1986, the first issue of *Enfoque de nuestro tiempo* ("Focus of Our Time") magazine, a missionary magazine of North Mexican Union and South Mexican Union, was published. Presently, it is the missionary magazine of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union. On June 2, 1986, Pastor Félix Cortés Antonio published the book, *Un sitio en la cumbre* ("A Place in the Summit"). Pastor Félix Cortés Antonio was born in the state of Oaxaca, which is now part of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union. The book Cortés published quickly became an important resource for literary evangelism in Mexico. It was the first subscription book written by a Mexican author and is a significant part of the heritage of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union. In 1994, the first issue of the magazine, *Mundo Joven* ("Young World"), a magazine with specialized topics for young people in Mexico, was published. Today, it has a wide circulation in Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union.

Events That Led to the Official Organization of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union

On April 3, 2000, South Mexican Union convened an extraordinary session in the city of Villahermosa, Tabasco, to discuss the possibility of readjusting the South Mexican Union's territory to form two unions. Five administrators, nine departmental directors, 13 pastors, seven teachers, and 39 laypeople attended the session. It was voted to request the Inter-American Division Board to readjust the territory of South Mexico Union.¹⁴

The Inter-American Division Board appointed a special committee to study the proposed territorial adjustment. The committee met on January 23, 2001. Pastor Leo Ranzolín was the president of the special committee, and its secretary was Pastor Agustín Galicia. Gary DeBoer, Elie Henry, Israel Leito, Armando Miranda, Juan O. Perla, and Filiberto Verduzco also served on the committee. The invitees were Sergio Balboa, Jaime Castrejón, Pedro Farfán, César Gómez, David Javier Pérez, Pedro León, and Samuel Meza.¹⁵

The committee sent a request to the Inter-American Division Board which stated:

As the central part of Mexico formed by the states of Guerrero, Morelos, Puebla, Oaxaca, Hidalgo, Tlaxcala, and Veracruz has been strengthened and has excellent potential with remarkable development for the church, we recommend to request the board of directors of the Inter-American Division and General Conference to adjust the territory of the Mexican Unions by creating a third union in Mexico. The territory of this new union would be the South Pacific Conference, the Hidalgo Veracruz Conference, the Southern Veracruz Conference, the Central Mission, the Oaxaca Mission, and the Olmeca Mission. The union's name would be the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union, with headquarters in Mexico City.¹⁶

Thus, in the spring of 2001, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists voted to create Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union, whose territory would be the states of Guerrero, Morelos, Puebla, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, Veracruz, Oaxaca, part of the state of Mexico, and a portion of northeastern Tabasco that separates the Samaria River, or Mezcalapa.¹⁷ The first administration of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union was President Pastor César Gómez, Secretary Pastor Moisés Reyna Sánchez, and Treasurer Jairo Zavala Arias, CPA. Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union began with 713 churches and 175,033 members.¹⁸ The original headquarters of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union was located at Uxmal No. 431, Colonia Narvarte, Delegación Benito Juárez, México D.F., until it was moved to Gran Avenida 3647, Colonia Las Cuartillas, Puebla, Puebla.

Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union's ideals are expressed in its mission, vision, and values. Its mission is: "To glorify God and, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, lead each believer to experience a personal and transforming relationship with Christ, enabling him as a disciple to share the everlasting gospel with all inhabitants." Its vision is: "To have every member of the body of Christ prepared for the kingdom of God." Its values are: "To give glory, integrity, respect, lifestyle, excellence, humility, compassion, fairness, commitment, and unity to God."

Development

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the territory of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union grew in both membership and finances, leading to the establishment of new fields. In 2007, upon a territorial assessment of Oaxaca Conference, Istmo Mission was established in Juchitán, Oaxaca.¹⁹

In 2010, from the territorial readjustment of Olmeca Conference and South Veracruz Conference, another field emerged: Southeast Veracruz Mission with headquarters in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz.²⁰ In August 2013, two fields were created in another Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union territorial readjustment: Alpine Mission in the city of Puebla, Puebla, and Central Veracruz Mission in the port of Veracruz.²¹

Hidalgo Veracruz Conference changed its name to North Veracruz Conference with headquarters in Poza Rica, Veracruz.²² In 2015, Tuxtlas Mission with headquarters in Catemaco, Veracruz, was established due to the territorial readjustment of Southern Veracruz Conference.²³ The new Tuxtlas Mission remained in the office building of Southern Veracruz Conference, which moved its headquarters to Minatitlán, Veracruz. In the same year, Chontalpa Mission emerged in Comalcalco, Tabasco, as a result of the territorial readjustment of Olmeca Conference.²⁴

All these adjustments happened due to membership, financial, and organizational growth of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union. The union started with six local fields in 2001 and had 11 local fields by 2015. Each local field of the union has its own administrative office building and an average of 20 district pastors who each serve about 15 churches. The union has a total of 250 pastors.

The geographic location of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union makes it vulnerable to volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and floods, so Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) has played a valuable role in helping the population. For example, on September 7, 2017, an earthquake measuring 8.2 on the Richter scale, the most powerful in the last 100 years, affected the territory of Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union. The city of Juchitán, Oaxaca, home to the headquarters of Istmo Conference, was almost totally destroyed. Thousands of families lost their homes and livelihoods. To face this humanitarian crisis, ADRA served meals for thousands of people and donated clothes and home construction materials for the victims.

Growth Prospects for the Union

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mexico has shared its message by radio and, more recently, television. Preaching the Adventist message on television was once not possible because of state laws regarding religious materials. Circumstances have now changed, and the program, *Escrito Está* ("It is Written"), currently broadcasts on television and covers not only Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union's territory but also the entire country.

In several cities in Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union's territory, through pastors' and church members' initiatives, live radio programs are offered. On August 6, 2008, the Inter-Oceanic Radio and Television multimedia center was

established to provide resources that help the church advance the preaching of the gospel. Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union houses the multimedia center. Radio stations in the cities of Oaxaca in Oaxaca and Minatitlán in Veracruz are currently waiting on the government's authorization to start multimedia operations.

Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union's evangelistic goal is to establish centers of influence in the territory's main cities, which will allow the Seventh-day Adventist Church to reach non-evangelized social classes. In addition to developing centers of influence, which will be run by the church, the plan is to help entrepreneurial church members transform their businesses into centers of influence. Educational work has made great progress. The present challenges are to financially strengthen educational institutions and open new schools.

Chronology of Executive Officers

Presidents: César Gómez Jiménez (2001-2011); Moisés Reyna Sánchez (2011-).

Secretaries: Moisés Reyna Sánchez (2001-2004); Reynold Zebadúa Pérez (2004-2009); Abraham Sandoval Jiménez (2009-).

Treasurers: Jairo Zavala Arias (2001-2012); Benjamín Lázaro Carballo (2012-).

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8. Salazar, 82-83.

9. Cortés and Salazar, 83.
10. Salazar, 110.
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