Sao Paulo Valley Conference

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The Sao Paulo Valley Conference (APV) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church located in the territory of the Central Brazil Union Conference (UCB). Its headquarters is located at Avenida Barão do Rio Branco, no. 980, zip code 12242-800, in Jardim Esplanada district, in the city of São José dos Campos, in the state of São Paulo, Brazil.

The territory of this conference covers the metropolitan region of the city of São Paulo, the eastern sub-region, the metropolitan region of the Vale do Rio Paraíba [Valley of Paraíba River], the northern coast, and Bragantina Region. It has a population of 6,301,206 inhabitants. The total number of APV members is 30,818, or one Adventist per 204 inhabitants. This administrative unit assists a total of 46 districts with 265 congregations in its territory. It has a total of 889 servers, of whom 781 are employees and 108 workers; 57 of them are ordained pastors and 12 are licensed pastors. The number of members enrolled in Sabbath School is approximately 18,922.

In APV territory there are 10 elementary and/or high schools located in the state of São Paulo, respectively: Colégio Adventista de Bragança Paulista [Bragança Paulista Adventist Academy], in the city of Bragança Paulista, with 665
students; Colégio Adventista de Cruzeiro [Cruzeiro Adventist Academy], in Cruzeiro, assisting 133 students; Colégio Adventista de Gopoúva [Gopoúva Adventist Academy], in Guarulhos, with 805 students; Colégio Adventista de Jacareí [Jacareí Adventist Academy], in Jacareí, assisting 586 students; Colégio Adventista de Lorena [Lorena Adventist Academy], in Lorena, with 537 students; Colégio Adventista de Mogi das Cruzes [Mogi das Cruzes Adventist Academy], in Mogi das Cruzes, with 1,261 students; Colégio Adventista de São José dos Campos [São José dos Campos Adventist Academy], in São José dos Campos, assisting 1,297 students; Colégio Adventista de Taubaté-Tremembé [Taubaté-Tremembé Adventist Academy], in Tremembé, with 1,091 students; Colégio Adventista de Vila Galvão [Vila Galvão Adventist Academy], in Guarulhos, assisting 616 students; and Colégio Adventista de Caraguatatuba [Caraguatatuba Adventist Academy], in Caraguatatuba, with 663 students. These all add up to 7,654 students in the conference administrative field.6

Sao Paulo Valley Conference has been contributing to the advancement of Adventist work in its entire missionary territory through media such as TV, radio, and the Internet. In relation to this important missionary front, it is interesting to note that the headquarters facilities of the Adventist Media Center are based within its territory in the city of Jacareí, although this institution is directly assisted by the South American Division (DSA).

Origin of Adventist Work in the Conference Territory

The Adventist work in the territory now covered by the Sao Paulo Valley Conference began in 1913 when a canvasser named José da Silva Pereira arrived in the city of Mogi das Cruzes and began preaching the Adventist message through the sale of literature. On July 3, 1914, the first baptism of a Mogiano,7 José Antônio, took place. Later, between 1916 and 1924, the Adventist group (which had already been formed in the city of Mogi das Cruzes) congregated in private residences, where the Sabbath School was conducted.8

From 1916 to 1933, the Adventist group continued worshipping in houses and later in a worship hall, assisted by workers and pastors who were periodically sent to visit. Among the pastors who assisted this group were Pastor R. Suesmann, in 1919; Pastors Ennis Valentine Moore and H. B. Westcott, in 1921; Pastor Alberto E. Hagen, in 1924; Pastors Luiz Waldvogel, Rodolfo Belz, Manuel Margarido, and the canvasser C. L. Bainer, in 1925; and the worker Germano Conrado, in 1931.9

In 1925 the first public hall for Adventist services was inaugurated, located at Travessa da Liberdade, no. 4, in the center of the city of Mogi Guaçu.10 However, as early as 1933, the hall was no longer sufficient to accommodate the number of members. This was due to the baptism of 27 interested people who came from Jerome Granero Garcia’s evangelistic conferences, held between July and October 1932, in the Salão Nobre da Associação Comercial [Noble Hall of the Commercial Association], and to the arrival of other new converts.11 Because of this large growth in membership, in 1940 the Adventist congregation of Mogi das Cruzes was elevated to the status of organized church by Sao Paulo Conference (the administrative unit that managed the advancement of Adventist work in that region at the time).12

Around 1946, another canvasser named João Barcelos arrived in São José dos Campos, another city that is currently part of the APV territory. This canvasser became known as “the initiator of Adventist work in this city.” He met Pedro de Araújo Cesar and combined the new friendship with the desire to fulfill the purpose that had brought him there. Thus João Barcelos shared with Pedro some of the Bible truths that he believed were necessary for his conversion. Soon Pedro became a Seventh-day Adventist. Pedro wasted no time, and as soon as he learned those truths, he passed them on to his family and clients in meetings held in his own house.13

Another family converted at that time was the Borrelis. They moved to São José dos Campos and soon were baptized through Pedro’s contact and friendship. At first, they met at Pedro’s house. However, after other families (who were already Adventists) arrived, they began holding meetings at the Borrelli’s house. Sometime later, more Adventist families arrived and organized the Sabbath School and the service. This helped the growth of that group which soon bore fruit—promoting five baptisms, which were performed by Pastor Osvaldo de Azevedo.14

As membership grew, so did the need to build a more appropriate place to gather for worship. Thus, in 1953, a church was built in that city at Onido Cesar Street, no. 58, in Santana district. This new church was built on land donated by Brother Pedro and was known as Pasto Alto [High Pasture]. The church was built with the help of some local brothers and the participation of some neighboring churches—such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Jacareí, which greatly helped in the work.15

At the time of the inauguration, this church was attended by about 50 baptized members. Then, after the inauguration, the work went on and “in August 1960 Pastor Gustavo Storch led a series of conferences in the city center, after which a new group was formed, which began to meet in a hall at St. Serafim Dias Machado 102.”16 In 1961, Pastor Darío Faria arrived in São José dos Campos and immediately began building a new church. In October 1968 this church which already had at least 100 baptized members,16 (although still unfinished) was inaugurated.

At this time, the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Mogi das Cruzes continued to grow and plant several other churches. In 1961, it was transformed into the headquarters of the ecclesiastical district. The other churches and groups belonging to this district were those in the Alto Tietê region, such as Ferraz de Vasconcelos, Poá, Suzano, and Guaianazes.17 Thus, work in Mogi das Cruzes continued to grow until, in 1973, the Adventist Church in Mogi das Cruzes was transferred to Coronel Santos Cardoso St., no. 434, Centre (where it currently remains). Since 1973, this Adventist church has been through three major renovations in 1979, 1998, and 2016.18
By 1984, the gospel in São José dos Campos had expanded to the point that there were at least three Adventist churches in the city: IASD Central Church, with 290 members; IASD Santana Church, with 80 members; and IASD Parque Industrial Church [Seventh-day Adventist Church of the Industrial Park], with 120 members. In addition, the city of São José dos Campos also housed two other groups, Jardim Ismênia, with 50 members, and Boa Vista, with 30 members.19

By the end of the 1990s, there were five conferences responsible for managing the advancement of Adventist work in the territory of São Paulo state. These included Associação Paulistana [Sao Paulo Conference] (AP), Associação Paulista Sul [South Sao Paulo Conference] (APS), Associação Paulista Leste [East Sao Paulo Conference] (APL), Associação Paulista Central [Central Sao Paulo Conference] (APaC), and Associação Paulista Oeste [West Sao Paulo Conference] (APO). As the gospel message continued to advance throughout the state of São Paulo, the need to organize a new administrative headquarters arose to better assist the demands of the metropolitan region of São Paulo, the eastern sub-region, the metropolitan region of the Paraíba Valley, the northern coast, and the Bragantina Region.20

**Conference Organizational History**

Among the many reasons that were taken into account for opening the new administrative unit that today is the Sao Paulo Valley Conference is the challenge faced by Adventist missionaries in the state of São Paulo for preaching the gospel, as well as the growth perspective that the Church is still experiencing in the state today. The last field created in the state of São Paulo, until 2001, had been the South Sao Paulo Conference, in 1992. In those days, there were about 108,956 members in the state of São Paulo in 450 churches, which were distributed in 167 missionary districts.21

At the end of 2000, the following figures were presented in the report of the Central Brazil Union Conference: 685 churches; 226 missionary districts, and 154,607 members. This large number of churches, pastoral districts, and members justified the need for the formation of a new field, in this case, the Sao Paulo Valley Mission (MPV). In addition, the creation of this new field was justified by the large number of missionary districts that the East Sao Paulo Conference assisted in 2000 (a total of 53), making it impossible for the administration of the field to properly serve everyone.22

Another strong reason that led to the possibility of restructuring the São Paulo state fields territory was the concern with the advancement of the gospel and with reaching the unreached cities, as well as the interest to strengthen the advancement into the interior of the state. Thus the suggestion was that the headquarters of the new field should be located outside the city of São Paulo.23 In this context, São José dos Campos became a considerable possibility.

The commission which requested the studies for the formation of this new administrative unit took place on September 16, 2000, at the headquarters of the East Sao Paulo Conference, which sent the report to the South American Division (DSA) requesting the formation of a new field, with the abbreviation MPV (Missão Paulista do Vale) [Sao Paulo Valley Mission].24 After being authorized by the higher organization, in 2002 the Sao Paulo Valley Mission was organized. This new administrative unit was responsible for the large municipal districts of the state of São Paulo: Arujá, Bragança Paulista, Biritiba-Mirim, Ferraz de Vasconcelos, Guararema, Guarulhos, Itaquaquecetuba, Mairiporã, Mauá, Mogi das Cruzes, Poá, Ribeirão Pires, Rio Grande da Serra, Salesópolis, Santa Isabel, Suzano, Alto Paraíba, River Paraíba Valley region, and the north coast.25

The creation of this new field was the result of the restructuring of the territory of the South Sao Paulo Conferences, (receiving territory from the Sao Paulo Conference) and Sao Paulo Conference (giving territories to APS, APL, and the new field). Considering the territory of the new conference and the purpose of evangelizing places not yet reached, the city chosen to host the administrative unit was São José dos Campos, in the Paraíba Valley, which at the time had 539,313 inhabitants. This city is a center of financial and geographical convergence with a good transport system. Thus, the mission was allocated at Avenida Barão do Rio Branco, no. 980, in Jardim Esplanada district, in this city of São José dos Campos, in the interior of the state of São Paulo.26

By the time of its formation, this administrative unit took over 92 churches with 19,762 registered members. Approximately 3,963,005 people lived in its territory, or an average of one Adventist per 200 inhabitants. Soon seven departments were established to coordinate the work of preaching the gospel in the territory of the new mission. The workers chosen to lead this new institution were Pastors Paulo Stabenow, as president,27 Italo Manzolli, as secretary, and Rubens C. Benedicto, as treasurer.28

Since its onset, MPV's leadership team has been developing several activities focused on the young people of the Church. A remarkable event experienced by the youth of the mission occurred in May 2006. On this occasion Pastor Jan Paulsen, President of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at the time, visited the Luzeiros do Vale [Valley Light] Pathfinders Club.29 His entourage included his wife Nancy, Pastor Ruy Nagel (then president of the DSA), along with his wife Evelyn, Dr. Milton Alfonso, and other leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.30

Since its foundation, APV's headquarters have been located at the same address. However, although there was no change of address, there were structural changes. On November 19, 2008, part of the expansion work was inaugurated at its headquarters. The event was attended by the DSA president Erton Köhler, who made the following statement: "The Sao Paulo Valley Mission [MPV] has grown in membership; in the number of churches; in the educational system and will soon become a conference. Here is a great opportunity to celebrate the wonders that
Key insights learned during the APV's journey include empowering the preaching of the gospel message; Adventist congregations. In 2002, when it was inaugurated, it had 19,762 members, 203 congregations, and 46 pastors. In 2005, the membership increased to 22,053; the congregations were already 240 and the number of pastors was still 46. By the end of 2009, membership increased to 26,000, with 241 congregations. At the end of 2013, APV had 27,822 members and 265 congregations. In 2017, the year in which the last assembly occurred, APV assisted 29,347 members and 265 congregations.

The APV leadership team has always encouraged church members to engage in personal and collective evangelism. Thus, the conference’s own servers set an example during the Impacto Esperança [Hope Impact] project in 2018. Pastors and other collaborators delivered about 2,000 units of the book “O Poder da Esperança” [The Power of Hope]. In addition, during the distribution, about 1,500 residences were reached in the Pinheirinho district, and Maria Aparecida Segolin de Resende School, in the city of São José dos Campos, also received the literature.

The mission of the Sao Paulo Valley Conference is to “act intentionally to change the reality of humanity in this world of sin in order to make people agents of transformation in the community, as well as to prepare them for eternal life, restoring in them the image of the Creator.” This administrative unit also carries, in its institutional view, the purpose of “being a church united in its doctrines and procedures, in solidarity with the needs of the community, committed to its spiritual values, and vibrant in preaching the gospel.”

The fruits of the collective efforts of APV members and servers have brought great satisfaction. In 2018, the number of baptisms in the conference region grew by 27 percent compared to the same period in the previous year. This growth was due to the fact that members and servers engaged together in the work of evangelization in different parts of the territory, enabling good evangelistic campaigns led by their ministers. A good example was in 2018, when the evangelism team reported that 215 people were baptized in three districts over a period of just three weeks.

In this context, APV takes seriously the work done with the youth. Therefore, it has as its objective the duty to “save from sin and to guide in the service” of God. Aiming at the formation of leaders and good citizens, in 2019, this conference had in its care about 5,132 Pathfinders distributed in 158 clubs. Approximately 2,669 adventurers were also distributed in 132 other clubs.

Since its inception, the Sao Paulo Valley Conference aimed to reach all the municipalities of the extensive region with an Adventist presence. Of the 62 locations, Lavrinhas, Lagoinha, Areias, São José do Barreiro, Jambeiro, Roseira, Silveiras, Canas, and Pedra Bela had no Adventist presence. To overcome this challenge, several strategies were used such as public evangelism, relocation of families to these areas, and evangelistic work with those interested in the Adventist message who came through TV Novo Tempo [New Time TV].

Finally, by 2019, the entire territory of APV was covered by Adventist action, and the cities mentioned above had an Adventist presence: Lavrinhas, Lagoinha, Areias, São José do Barreiro, Roseira, and Silveiras; and with an organized group: Jambeiro, Canas, and Pedra Bela. All other municipalities were assisted by established churches or organized groups, which adds up to 265 Adventist congregations.

Key insights learned during the APV’s journey include empowering the preaching of the gospel message;
engagement from both leaders and members; coordinating missionary work between the district pastor and the members; organizing districts to better meet the needs of the local church. In addition, it is essential to observe the general financial condition of the field, seeking to equally meet the demands of all its regions. Attention must also be paid to the geographical characteristics and social identification of congregations in the districts to facilitate spiritual integration through administrative meetings, youth meetings, district planning meetings, and fellowship.

Although new ideas will emerge within Christianity to enhance the communion of believers as well as to preach to unbelievers, many of these new theories aim to end gospel preaching through social strategies and aggregating strategies that best fit the profile of NGOs or fraternity communities rather than the profile of a church whose clear objective is to preach the Eternal Gospel. Thus, another lesson learned during the years of APV's existence is that it is necessary to focus on proclaiming the Bible message. All personal efforts, financial resources, and strategies must clearly and simply contemplate the comprehension of this Church's intrinsic and non-transferable goal. If the focus of this vision and mission is lost sight of, the Church will lose its internal, external, and historical relevance.

The main challenges remaining in the APV field are: motivate and involve believers in personal preaching of the Adventist message; encourage greater fidelity in the return of tithes and offerings, as the non-participation of many still slows the expansion of Church missionary activities; evangelizing in the social context of this territory - this is the region of greatest Marist worship in the world (due to the municipality of Aparecida do Norte, where the Santuário Nacional de Nossa Senhora Aparecida [National Shrine of Our Lady Aparecida], where the largest Catholic church in Brazil is located). In addition, the work is hindered in the area due to many families moving from city to city in search of jobs or better employment opportunities.

Regarding the future of this administrative unit, from the III APV’s Ordinary Denominational Assembly (2014-2017) the following goals were established for the next four years: to be a Church which is an agent of complete transformation (community action); to reach the enrollment of 12,000 students in the Adventist schools network; to reach the number of 2500 small groups and 4,500 missionary pairs; to have one local evangelist in 70 percent of the churches and at least one canvasser in 100 percent of them; to create four new districts; to plant 30 new churches, and to perform 9,000 baptisms.

Moreover, the plan of this conference is to fill vacancies in churches to increase the membership to about 35,000 people in the 265 congregations, reaching their full capacity and improving regular attendance at worship services. The strategy used will be Reencontro e Evangelismo [Reencounter and Evangelism] project. In addition, the leadership team plans to provide spiritual assistance to thousands of people who are interested in learning more about the Adventist message, who had their first contact with the Adventist church through the New Time Network and are residents in the APV territory. Members of churches that have organized visits to interested individuals are to be trained by the coordinator of that region to conduct a Bible class in each church to welcome the interested parties.

Other plans for the future include: establishing more congregations in the centers with the greatest human concentration in the region (such as Guarulhos and Mogi das Cruzes macro-regions which have more than two million people) through public evangelism and church planting; and, investing in believers’ spiritual awareness regarding Christian stewardship through ongoing seminars on the topic to be held in the congregations.

Chronology of Administrative Officers


SOURCES


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NOTES

1. Data provided by the Sao Paulo Valley Conference secretariat, May 3, 2018.?


5. Anne da Silva, email message to Vanessa Belgd, June 7, 2016.?

6. Data provided by the Sao Paulo Valley Conference secretariat, May 3, 2018.?


9. Ibid., 51-61.?

10. Ibid., 57-59.?

11. Ibid., 86-88, 91-93, 95-96.?
15. Idem.
16. Marcos Santos Borges, “Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia de São José dos Campos” [Seventh-day Adventist Church of São José dos Campos] (Monograph, Brazil Adventist University, 1984), 2.
18. Ibid., 235-239.
19. Marcos Santos Borges, “Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia de São José dos Campos” [Seventh-day Adventist Church of São José dos Campos] (Monograph, Brazil Adventist University, 1984), 11.
22. Idem.
29. The Pathfinders Club is composed of “boys and girls aged 10 to 15, from different social classes, color, religion. They usually meet once a week to learn how to develop talents, skills, perceptions, and a taste for nature.” These boys and girls “thrive on outdoor activities. They enjoy camping, hiking, rock climbing, bush and cave explorations. They learn how to cook outdoors, to make a fire without matches.” In addition, they demonstrate “skill with discipline through united order and have creativity aroused by handcrafts. They also fight the use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs.” Accessed on October 09, 2019, http://bit.ly/2FDRqTh.
32. Ibid.
33. Data provided by the Sao Paulo Valley Conference secretariat, May 3, 2018.
39.


“Group of boys and girls, ages 6 to 9, from different social classes, color and religion, who usually meet at least twice a month to develop their gifts and talents with their families. Activities developed for each child age are performed to help the children learn with their parents.” Adventists Brazil, “O que são os Aventureiros [Who are the Adventurers] - Udołcy Zukowski Director to South America” (Youtube video with explanation, Adventists Brazil, May 29, 2015), accessed on June 27, 2019, http://bit.ly/2KH7PdN.


“Quebrando o Silêncio [Breaking the Silence] is an educational and prevention project against abuse and domestic violence promoted annually by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in eight countries in South America (Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay) since the year 2002.” Accessed on October 09, 2019, https://bit.ly/2HFxj8K.


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