



College Building facade
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Latin American Adventist Theological Seminary - IAP Campus

MÁRCIO DONIZETI DA COSTA

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Latin American Adventist Theological Seminary (Seminário Adventista Latino-Americano de Teologia, SALT) is a Seventh-day Adventist Church institution responsible for the theological education in the South American Division. SALT comprises eight regional campuses. One of them operates in the territory of the South Brazil Union Conference and is known as SALT-IAP because it is located at Parana Adventist College (Instituto Adventista Paranaense, IAP), on Highway PR-317, Campo Mourão, km 119 - Gleba Paçandu, lot 80, Zip Code 87130-000, in the countryside of the municipality of Ivatuba, Paraná, Brazil.

Developments that Led to the Institution's Establishment

The history of SALT-IAP goes back to the advances of the Adventist work in the south of Brazil in the 1930s. In 1935, the dream of building schools based on Christian education for the training of missionaries became a reality when Benedito Novo School (Colégio Benedito Novo) was established in the municipality of Benedito Novo, in the state of Santa Catarina. The school was transferred to the municipality of Butiá, in the state of Paraná, in 1939. The classes

were taught in English and German, and the school remained faithful to its Christian roots. In 1947, the school was transferred to a new location, about 15 km away from the center of Curitiba.¹

As the work expanded in the southern regions of Brazil, more missionaries and evangelists needed to be trained. At the end of 1957, Parana Conference (Associação Paranaense) organized the “120 de Hoje” [120 of Today] event to train new missionaries and strengthen the Adventist mission.² The event was held in the State College of Parana Noble Hall. On that occasion, 53 Adventist members were trained. This project signaled the importance of training for missionary service.³

Later, in 1964, the school had its name changed to Parana Adventist College (Instituto Adventista Paranaense). The school had to be relocated to Ivatuba, the countryside of Paraná, because its previous campus in Curitiba was taken by the government. In the new location, the school experienced considerable structural growth.⁴ In 1966, new facilities were built to accommodate the growing number of students, and renovations were made in the dormitories and in the entrance of the school.⁵

The missionary training work continued to be carried out by the IAP in partnership with the administration of the Parana Conference. From October 23 to 31, 1970, pastors Rodolfo Belz and Cláudio Belz conducted a successful Week of Prayer on the campus, motivating and empowering the community for evangelistic involvement.⁶ With the same goal, teachers, and canvassers held several conferences throughout Paraná in the following years. One of them happened at IAP from January 19 to 23, 1973, bringing together more than 300 representatives of almost all churches in Paraná.⁷ On these occasions, special attention was given to preparing leaders to carry out the missionary work.

In the mid-1980s, the growth of the Adventist work was evident in all areas in the southern regions of Brazil,⁸ resulting in the territory of the then South Brazil Union Conference being reorganized and split into two mission fields in 1985. The former South Brazil Union Conference changed its status to Central Brazil Union Conference (União Central Brasileira, UCB) and was tasked with leading the work in the south of the country. After the reorganization, the preaching of the Adventist message expanded in the south and midwest regions of Brazil. Between 2000 and 2005, there was a 20 percent growth in membership in the South Brazil Union Conference, necessitating another reorganization of the territory and giving rise to the West Central Brazil Union Mission (União Centro-Oeste Brasileira, UCOB). In 2006, the Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA) of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists suggested the establishment of the theology program at IAP in order to meet the demands for theological education arising from the growth of the church in the two recent unions.⁹

In 2008, the AAA included the SALT-IAP request for accreditation in its official report. The accreditation process started in 2010 with the arrival of Marlinton Lopes as the new South Brazil Union Conference president and later Gilberto Damasceno as the IAP general director.¹⁰ The school had the help of Noeli Cibely dos Santos, the IAP academic director, and Marta Maria Balbe Pires, the IAP director of academic extension, with the establishment of the theology program. The AAA recommendation was articulated by the then South Brazil Union Conference director of education, who also sought to strengthen the IAP higher education. The South American Division SALT helped with internal documentation procedures, besides cooperating in the nomination process of teachers.¹¹

Foundation of the Institution

In early 2012, the South Brazil Union Conference and the West Central Brazil Union Mission put together a financial plan for the revitalization of the IAP infrastructure as part of the preparations for the inauguration of the new SALT regional campus. The inauguration of the Theology program was planned for January 2015. To this end, in May 2012, a construction team was formed under the leadership of Darci Goulart. Davi Contri, the South Brazil Union Conference financial director, coordinated the financial investments in partnership with the West Central Brazil Union Mission while Eliezer Wesley Santos took care of the administrative execution at IAP.¹² Due to the support received from the General Conference and the unexpected speed with which the authorization to operate the program was obtained from the Ministry of Education and Culture, the SALT-IAP inauguration was anticipated for January 2014.¹³

The inaugural class took place at 10 a.m. on February 17, 2014, when Dr. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, former director of the General Conference Biblical Research Institute, taught the first class of 60 students. The theology program was accredited the same year that marked 75 years of IAP completed and was a case for the celebration event whose theme was “Building a history together.” Around 500 people were present, including students, community members, and visitors as well as the civil representatives of Ivatuba and Floresta and the commander of the Federal Highway Police. Since its beginning, SALT-IAP has set as its primary goal to apply the Adventist educational philosophical principles with a focus on the mission and service.¹⁴

The initial activities of SALT-IAP started in the middle floor of the classroom building, in a space that was shared with the Nursing program. The first administrative board had two pastors. Márcio D. Costa, who transferred from the city of Belém do Pará in the mid-2013, assumed the role of the theology program coordinator; and Paulo Clézio dos Santos, who transferred from Bolivia, became the SALT-IAP director in late 2013.¹⁵ They were also the first two theology teachers.¹⁶

The establishment of the IAP theological seminary provided to the campus and the surrounding communities a long-desired growth. The boarding school, which was predominantly inhabited by high school students, gradually started to receive theology students who brought a new dynamic to the campus routine.¹⁷ The seminary students seized the opportunity to exert positive influence and assist in expanding the Adventist message within the college.¹⁸ The

seminary teachers and students have been strongly involved in regular church activities such as worship services, Sabbath school, weeks of prayer, and evangelistic campaigns.

Thus, from the beginning, SALT-IAP has sought to put into practice its mission statement which is “to prepare pastors for the urban context of society, taking into account the challenges of evangelization in cities and communities that face secularism.” As an Adventist institution, its goal “is to find methods that enable the fulfillment of the mission without mischaracterizing the church and its message.”¹⁹

History of the Institution

In the following years, the campus was expanded to accommodate more students and teachers. In 2015, Sidnei Mendes came from Manaus to coordinate the Applied Theology activities and the internships. The same year, 115 students were enrolled in the theology program, a number that grew to 151 students in 2016.²⁰ To help students in their research and academic work, the new IAP library with 2,000 m² was inaugurated in August 2016. The library had 43,000 titles, including rare works such as a copy of the Spanish Bible from 1884.²¹

In 2017, SALT-IAP had 204 students and had to move its classes from the middle floor to the upper floor of the classroom building. The campus library, which until then was operating on that floor, was relocated to a new building. In 2017, the school classrooms and offices were renovated. In November of the same year, the Ministry of Education of Brazil evaluated the theology program.²² The assessors evaluated faculty, infrastructure, literary archives, and accessibility. After two days of evaluation, the theology program received the maximum grade given to higher education programs in Brazil.

On December 15-17, 2017, the first SALT-IAP graduation ceremony happened, with 37 theology graduates. Most graduates were from the southern and west-central regions of Brazil. The graduation took place in the campus church and was divided in three joint ceremonies. First, there was a celebration for the wives of the graduating students who completed the Women's Area of the Ministerial Conference program (Área Feminina da Associação Ministerial, AFAM).²³ Then there was a service of gratitude and the graduation ceremony. The ceremonies were attended by parents, relatives, friends, community members, the South American Division administrators, the South Brazil Union Conference and the West Central Brazil Union Mission administrators, and the president of the Seventh-day Adventists in Paraguay.²⁴ The theology graduates were called to work in the Adventist church as pastors, school chaplains, evangelism and publication assistants, and Bible workers.²⁵

In 2018, the SALT-IAP curriculum was modified in order to expand the pastoral qualification of students and the service to the church. SALT-IAP offered the pastoral, management, and educational chaplaincy areas to specialize.²⁶ The same year, the school had 191 students. João Luís Marcon assumed the leadership of the seminar, and Fabiano Mendes became the coordinator of the theology program. With the adjusted curriculum, SALT-IAP was able to better prepare future pastors for the specific aspects of the church work, including educational, administrative, and publishing ministries.²⁷ The Brazilian Ministry of Education approved the theology program on December 3, 2019. The government approval meant that the theology students could continue their education in other government accredited schools and teach religion classes in public and private schools. SALT-IAP was the first in Brazil to receive such authorization that expands the professional opportunities of the graduates.²⁸

Historical Role of the Institution

At SALT-IAP, one of the greatest values offered by the theology education is the deepening of doctrinal knowledge as well as practical theology activities in the service of the Adventist church. The teachers with different expertise are united in this purpose. The collaboration between faculty and administration facilitated significantly the institutional and academic development. The trust and good relationship between the SALT-IAP administrators and the South Brazil Union Conference, the West Central Brazil Union Mission, and the North Parana Conference administration provided a favorable environment for the development of outstanding work.

One of the projects developed by SALT-IAP, in partnership with the North Parana Conference, was the “Maringá and region Impact 2015” project. Through this project, the theological seminary students conducted evangelistic revivals in 15 cities in the region, resulting in 15 weeks of baptisms between May and June. During this period, students conducted weekly meetings in churches in order to prepare their members for evangelism.²⁹ As a result of the work done by the Adventist members and the SALT students on the Maringá Impact project, hundreds of people gathered to watch the closing of the program. Three people, who received the Bible studies from the theology students, were baptized on that occasion. The Maringá Impact project continued until December. The people who received the Bible studies continued to receive visits from the SALT students until the second half of December of that year.³⁰

The missionary work in the diverse Brazilian context exposed the SALT-IAP students to various cultures and helped them to learn how to interact with people of differing cultural and religious backgrounds. The invaluable experience helped the students to be better prepared for ministry in different places.³¹

The SALT-IAP students and teachers have sought to serve other students on the campus and work closely with the pastors and Adventist members in the region. In addition to lectures and seminars for the members and church leaders in the South Brazil Union Conference and the West Central Brazil Union Mission, SALT-IAP established extension theology and religion programs to provide training for lay members and church administrators³²

Future Plans

The SALT-IAP plans involve expanding the academic program and research work to serve the needs of the South Brazil Union Conference. SALT seeks advancement and recognition in academic research. There are plans to launch a scientific journal and to hire a scholar who will be responsible for the journal. Finding time for quality research remains a challenge to many faculty who are already heavily loaded with teaching and evangelism³³

The Advent history is a priority subject for SALT-IAP because the Adventist work in Brazil began in the South Brazil Union Conference. To strengthen research in Adventist studies at SALT-IAP, in the second half of 2018, Alberto Timm, associate director at the General Conference Ellen White Center, began the preliminary works for the establishment of Ellen White Research Center and Adventist Memory Center. The project is currently on hold due to financial restrictions. In meantime, the students are encouraged to write papers in Adventist history as part of their class requirements and some teachers engage in historical research.³⁴

Since its official opening in 2014, SALT-IAP has helped in the formation of Adventist pastors and leaders. Through the integration of classroom and practical work in the field, the school continues to contribute to the advancement of the preaching of the gospel in the local community and beyond.

Chronology of Directors and Coordinators³⁵

Directors: Paulo Clézio dos Santos (2013-2018); João Luís Marcon (2018-present).

Coordinators: Marcio Donizeti da Costa (2013-2018); Fabiano Ramos Mendes (2018-present)³⁶

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