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## North Veracruz Conference

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Noel Jiménez Ramírez, M.A. (Universidad de Montemorelos, Montemorelos, NL, México), oversees the Tuxpan 1 district. His pastoral ministry of over 26 years has been in the northern part of the State of Veracruz. He is married to Ana Ruth Grimaldo Pérez and has two children.

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North Veracruz Conference is a part of the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference in the Inter-American Division. It was subdivided from Hidalgo Veracruz Conference through a restructuring of territory in 2013 and is located in the northern part of Veracruz.<sup>1</sup> The conference territory is comprised of 64 counties, 42 from Veracruz and the rest from the states of Puebla and Hidalgo.<sup>2</sup> It has 10 counties in the state of Hidalgo: Atlapexco, Huautla, Huazalingo, Huejutla

de los Reyes, Jaltocan, San Felipe Orizatlan, Xochiatipan, Yahualica, Tlanchinol, and Calnali<sup>3</sup>

The conference offices are located in Colonia 27 de Septiembre, Poza Rica, Veracruz. In 2018, the conference had 23,456 members and 202 organized churches, and covered a territory with a population of 2,352,836<sup>4</sup>

## Territory and Culture

North Veracruz Conference in the north of the state of Veracruz covers three of the state's ten administrative regions: Huasteca Alta, Huasteca Baja, and Totonaca. It also includes 12 counties of the state of Puebla and ten counties of the state of Hidalgo. North Veracruz Conference is located in the eastern part of Mexico. Its borders are shared with Tamaulipas to the north, the Gulf of Mexico to the east, the states of Puebla and Hidalgo to the west, the state of San Luis Potosí to the northwest, and, to the southeast, the Nautla region, the region of the capital city, the Mountain Region, the Sotavento Region, and the Papaloapan Region.<sup>5</sup>

Within the territory of North Veracruz Conference, the rich cultures and traditions of various ethnic groups can be found. Among these are those who speak Náhuatl, Huasteco, Totonaco, Otomí, and Tepehua. These represent very small populations, but they still keep their own indigenous languages alive<sup>6</sup> The north region of Veracruz is a mix of several cultures, the largest of which is the Nahuatl, as they are half of the indigenous population of the state. Nevertheless, the Totonaca language continues to exist in Veracruz, although, according to anthropologist Sergio Vásquez Zárate, it is in danger of extinction due to the lack of strategies or public policies to preserve this language.<sup>7</sup>

## Institutions of North Veracruz Conference

Anáhuac School is located in the County of Cuauhtémoc City, Veracruz. On February 15, 1986, the first general meeting of Anáhuac District was held; among those present were the elders and leaders of the churches, the directors of the health and education departments, and three teachers, all led by Pastor Juan Martínez. The principal would be Pastor Martínez, and Anáhuac School would begin operations in 1986 on Rivera Street. It started as an elementary school with 23 students.<sup>8</sup> Currently, Anáhuac School offers three levels, preschool, elementary, and secondary, and has a total of 104 students and 15 teachers.

Francisco Javier Clavijero School is located in Tuxpan, Veracruz. It began operations around 1987 under Pastor Juan Martínez, starting with a secondary level in the community of Boca del Monte. In 1987, the secondary school was moved to a house near Veracruz University. In 1988-1993, the school was moved to a two-story house on López Mateos Street. By this time, the school offered preschool, elementary, and secondary levels. Currently, Francisco Javier Clavijero School also offers preparatory level and has a total of 141 students and 20 teachers.<sup>9</sup>

Benito Juárez School is located in Metlatoyuca, Francisco Zeta Mena County, Puebla. It started in children's Sabbath School rooms of the church on 21 Reyes García Avenue. The first teacher was Olga Lazcano Galindo, who taught in 1979-1985. A property on which to build a proper school soon became necessary. During an ingathering campaign, a visit was paid to Enrique Blankenship León. He was well acquainted with the Adventist school system in the United States and was willing to donate a property on which the school could be built. Thanks to the donation of this property, construction began on the land on 4 Reforma, Central Colony, where there are currently five teachers teaching a total of 70 students.<sup>10</sup>

Ignacio Allende School is located in Poza Rica, Veracruz. The school's history begins in 1979. It started operations in the Tajín church's Sabbath School rooms and offered preschool and elementary levels. The school was later moved to 500 Ignacio Allende Street, where they had acquired a plot of land. In 1980, a secondary level was offered. Preparatory level was offered in 1991, with preschool level offered in 2009. By the end of 2019, this school attained K-12 status and has 49 teachers and 535 students.<sup>11</sup>

Refugio Camp is located in La Ceiba, Puebla. Because of membership growth, a camp was needed. A search for a property to hold meetings for the entire conference began. On March 6, 1976, the purchase of land finally became possible. Antonio Fosado San Juan was a member of the church and offered a property at a price much lower than the market price. The plot of land was 8,000 square meters, and the property was purchased on June 9, 1976.<sup>12</sup>

## Origins of Seventh-day Adventist Work in North Veracruz Conference

In 1891, the Adventist Church's message arrived to Mexico through Salvador Marchisio, a self-supporting missionary. This Italian-American arrived to Mexico City distributing "The Great Controversy" in English. Also, in 1891, the General Conference sent a group of missionaries to Mexico.<sup>13</sup> From there, around 1920, the Adventist message arrived to the territories of the current North Veracruz Conference, specifically to the city and port of Tuxpan.<sup>14</sup>

When Salvador Marchisio arrived to the state of San Luis Potosí, he sent missionary colporteurs to Tampico, Tamaulipas. These colporteurs reported great success. For example, in 1920, five of the new colporteurs sold 200 copies of "Patriarchs and Prophets" in five weeks.<sup>15</sup> The names of those pioneers are unknown.

In 1920, Marchisio sent a missionary of the printed page to Tuxpan, Veracruz. He was named "Estanislao," but whether it was his first or last name is unknown. It was usual in those years for people to congregate on the dock at the edge of Tuxpan River to buy and sell goods. Here, Estanislao learned of Don Ramón Cruz and developed a relationship with him, allowing Estanislao to give Ramón the health message. Seeing Ramón's interest, Estanislao

talked with him about the Bible. Ramón agreed to study the Bible with Estanislao and invited his friend, Don Fermín Morales, who was also fascinated with the message. Ramón and Fermín began to study the Bible with keen interest. Because of their happiness in learning of those truths, they shared this message with the García sisters, who agreed to study and offered their home as a gathering place. The García sisters knew of a Don Pedro and his wife, Doña Gregoria del Ángel, who lived in the community of Santiago de la Peña on the other side of the river. They visited them to share the message, and the first group of believers in the territory of North Veracruz Conference was formed.

The chain of connections became stronger. Don Pedro was a good friend of Donaciano Meza, grandfather of Dr. Oziel Mesa, who lived in the Altamira community, County of Tuxpan, Veracruz. Estanislao met Donaciano through Pedro, and he showed interest in the Adventist message and offered his home for meetings. These were the beginnings of the Adventist work.

In 1927, Estanislao left Tuxpan, leaving behind several families who became interested in the message while others were baptized. When Estanislao left, a pastor originally from Oaxaca arrived. He began seeking a place to gather members together as a church. The first church was established on Fausto Vega Santander Street in front of the National Army School. Years later, Pastor Sebastián García arrived and helped the church acquire the property where the current Adventist church is located. During his ministry, the church was consolidated and formally established, starting a new era for the church. By then, new groups had formed in other parts of the current North Veracruz Conference.

## Formative Events: Organization of North Veracruz Conference

North Veracruz Conference has roots in the beginnings of the Adventist Church in Mexico. Adventist history in Mexico starts in 1903, when the Mexican Mission was under the direct supervision of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. In 1922, the Inter-American Division was established with 7,369 members in 203 churches. In 1923, the Mexican Mission, whose territory covered the whole republic of Mexico, had eight churches and 475 members.<sup>16</sup> The Inter-Oceanic Conference was organized in 1948 and reorganized in 1977. Its territory was comprised of the states of Guerrero, Hidalgo, Morelos, Puebla, Tlaxcala, and Veracruz with the exception of the southern part of the state. It had 33,290 members and 114 churches.<sup>17</sup>

In 1989, Hidalgo Veracruz Conference was organized with the state of Hidalgo and the northern part of Veracruz in its territory, 20,345 members, and 69 churches.<sup>18</sup> The Hidalgo Veracruz Conference headquarters were in the port of Veracruz. North Veracruz Conference was organized from the reorganized territory of Hidalgo Veracruz Conference in 2013. With this territory readjustment, North Veracruz Conference had the northern part of Veracruz in its territory, 20,489 members, and 168 churches. Pastor Aarón Omaña Pliego was the president with Pastor Clemente Soto as secretary and Joaquín Velazco Escobedo as treasurer.<sup>19</sup> North Veracruz Conference was also created from the restructuring of Hidalgo Veracruz Conference and South Pacific Conference. Its headquarters were established in Poza Rica, Veracruz. South Pacific Conference established their headquarters in Jiutepec, Morelos. The restructuring also affected Alpine Mission, whose headquarters was in Puebla, Puebla, and Central Veracruz Mission in the city and port of Veracruz.

On August 23, 2013, the Quadrennial Session of constituents was held, and the history of both Hidalgo Veracruz Conference and South Pacific Conference was presented. Pastor Israel Leito, president of the Inter-American Division, began this session with a message to the delegates with the purpose of maintaining unity and accepting the challenge of church growth through restructuring of its sections. He declared the establishment of two new missions, Alpine Mission and Central Veracruz Mission, and the reorganization of Hidalgo Veracruz Conference into North Veracruz Conference. On August 25, after a devotional given by Pastor Daniel Fontaine, the new conference met in formal session with 187 delegates, 89% of them present.<sup>20</sup>

North Veracruz Conference has experienced great growth and development. In the area of evangelism, the statistics show: in 2014, 1,096 new members were added to the conference; in 2015, 1,237; in 2016, 1,389; and in 2017, 1,617.

## Challenges for the Future of North Veracruz Conference

Currently, North Veracruz Conference follows the work plan of the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference. It has implemented new stages in which the needs of the church and its members will be addressed with different ministries. It is also expected that each new member's talents and ministries will be incorporated into the ministry and services of the church and surrounding communities. The conference expects growth, retention, and consolidation as a result. For example, three missionaries are now in areas that had no prior Adventist presence.

North Veracruz Conference experiences challenges to the fulfillment of its mission, including the lack of both jobs and safety in the region. Some areas are also difficult to access with inhabitants who speak dialects or have customs that make it difficult for evangelism. Another challenge to the growth and development of the conference is the churches that had once flourished. A number of churches exist in districts where the distance between churches makes it difficult for district pastors to properly serve their congregations. There is also the lack of participation of members in different activities of the church, particularly in the preaching of the gospel. We hope that the program, TMI ( *Todo Miembro Involucrado*, or "Total Member Involvement"), helps to involve a larger number of members in the fulfillment of the mission.

The lessons from the history of North Veracruz Conference are these: We can trust that the Lord will continue guiding

us as He has until we reach the places that we still need to reach, and that His leadership will come to us when we most need and least expect it.

We cannot ignore that the organization of the conference and the districts has made a better focus on the church possible. This is what we have learned from the history of North Veracruz Conference.

*President*

Aarón Omaña Pliego (2013- ).

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