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Chontalpa Mission

SAÚL HERNÁNDEZ BLAS

Saúl Hernández Blas, B.A. (Universidad Linda Vista, Chiapas, México), serves as a district pastor in the Chontalpa Mission. Previously, he worked at Montemorelos University. He is married to Yazmin Martínez Arias and has two children.

Chontalpa Conference (since 2019; prior to that Chontalpa Mission, a name which is still retained in the SDA Yearbook) is an organization of the Inter-American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Its headquarters are located at Boulevard Ing. Leandro Roviroso Wade S/N, Colonia Centro, Comalcalco, Tab, Mexico. Its activities are governed by principles based on the model constitution of the Inter-American Division of the General

Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Chontalpa Conference is located in Comalcalco County in the state of Tabasco, one of the most prosperous states of the country. In terms of population, it is the third largest county in this state. It lies in the Grijalva River region and the Chontalpa subregion.¹ Its borders are shared with the Gulf of Mexico to the north, the counties of Cunduacán and Jalpa de Méndez to the south, Paraíso and Jalpa de Méndez to the east, and the county of Cárdenas to the west. It covers 723.10 square kilometers. According to a 2010 census, the population of Comalcalco County is 192,802²

Comalcalco is an agricultural county. It is the major producer of cacao and chocolate in the Republic of Mexico. Even though the oil company, *Petróleos Mexicanos*, has important installations and oil wells in the county, Comalcalco has not lost its agricultural look.³ Chontalpa Mission encompasses Comalcalco and two more counties: Paraíso with a population of 86,632 inhabitants, and Cunduacán with a population of 126,416 inhabitants.⁴ This gives the mission a total of 405,850 inhabitants across the three counties.

Statistics (June 30, 2019): Churches, 158; membership, 15, 606; population, 421,718⁵ Since its organization as a mission in 2016, it grew rapidly in fulfilling its mission and consolidating its members. The Chontalpa Conference offices are located on Ingeniero Leandro Roviroa Wade, Central Colony, Comalcalco, Tabasco, Mexico. Chontalpa Conference is a part of the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference of the Inter-American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Institutions of Chontalpa Conference

The conference has four schools with over 50 teachers and staff in strategic locations educating hundreds of students.

Juan Escutia School is located at Pípila Way, corner with Juan Escutia, Morelos Colony, Comalcalco, Tabasco, Mexico, 86370. It offers preschool, elementary, secondary, and preparatory levels.

Carlos A. Madrazo School is located on R/a 3 Yoloxochitl, Cunduacán, Tabasco. It offers preschool and elementary levels.

Vicente Guerrero School is located on 4 Libertad, Cunduacán, Tabasco. It offers preschool and elementary levels.

Niños Héroes School located in, Cunduacán, Tabasco. It offers preschool and elementary levels.

Origins of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Chontalpa Conference

Thanks to the country-wide distribution of the magazine *El Mensajero de la Verdad* ("The Messenger of Truth"), people became interested in the Adventist message, and many were later contacted and baptized. Starting in 1900, the church's message went out from Mexico City throughout the states of Puebla, Oaxaca, and Chiapas by the work of colporteurs who used "The Messenger of Truth." In 1903, missionary work was extended to the states of San Luis Potosí, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Puebla, Veracruz, Tabasco, and others.⁶ Thanks to this ministry of the printed page, the seed of truth was planted in the state of Tabasco.

In the Territory of the Conference

The Adventist message in the territory of Chontalpa Conference has its origins in the early 20th century. When Colporteur José Castrejón arrived in Chontalpa in 1936, the ministry of the printed page was already present in Cárdenas thanks to Adelaido Zulbarán and other colporteurs.⁷ Many members of the Adventist church had been scattered because of the *garridista* persecution. José Castrejón and several dedicated lay members such as Juan Sánchez gathered many of those members and established Sabbath Schools and groups of believers.

The church continued to gain ground and extended through all of Chontalpa in 1940-1960. Around 1936, Marcelino Rivero López visited Gustavo Torrano, a lay member, in whose house José Castrejón was staying, and Marcelino was given a Bible. Although Marcelino could not read very well, he believed in the message and was taught by Gustavo Torrano. The two formed a friendship, and, through this bond, the message of salvation was shared with family, friends, and neighbors who accepted the faith.

Among the most outstanding pioneers of that period are Sixto, Mateo, and Juana Rivera, who evangelized other friends like Bernardo López, Isidoro Bautista, Manuel Ramos, Juan García, Régulo Presenda, and Román Ruiz. Régulo Presenda and his wife, Eutimia Naranjo, and son, Phillip, took the message to the town now known as La Línea. That congregation later moved to Miahuatlán 1. With time, the message continued to spread.

Events Leading to the Organization of Chontalpa Mission

In 2001, Olmeca Mission was organized. Its territory was the northeast of Tabasco and the southeast of Veracruz. It had 155 churches and 31,485 members.⁸ Four years later, its status changed to Olmeca Conference. In 2016, because of the notable growth of Olmeca Conference, it was divided, and Chontalpa Mission was established with the firm purpose of continuing to fulfill the mission of the gospel.

On September 3, 2015, at the administrative meetings of the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference in the city of

Puebla, Puebla, through vote number 4095, it was voted to authorize Olmeca Conference to purchase a property and build offices for the new Chontalpa Mission at a total cost of \$15,743,456.88 MXN to be distributed in the following manner: \$3,500,000 MXN to purchase the property and \$12,243,456.88 MXN to build the project⁹

On November 9-10, 2015, at the year-end Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference Plenary Session in the city of Oaxaca, Oaxaca, with vote number 4176, the report of the nominating committee was approved. The administration of the new Chontalpa Mission was voted: Pastor Oscar Gonzalez Corona as president, Pastor Jorge A. Ultrera Ramírez as secretary, and Accountant Obed Lázaro Carballo as treasurer.¹⁰

On March 16-17, 2016, according to the minutes of the meetings for readjustment of Olmeca Conference at the Adventist Olmeca Camp in Huimanguillo, Tabasco, with vote 4835, it was requested to accept the statement of readjustment of territory. It was voted to accept the statement of territorial readjustment of Olmeca Conference, creating Chontalpa Mission with headquarters in Comalcalco, Tabasco. Pastor Israel Leito, president of the Inter-American Division, read the declaration on March 16, 2016.¹¹

Development of the Mission into a Conference

When Chontalpa Mission was approved to begin operations, the organization of the following departments and directors was also approved: Sabbath School, personal ministries, stewardship, communication, and ministerial secretary: Pastor José Morales Mojica; youth, publications, family life, chaplains, and ADRA: Pastor Urías Leyva Pérez; women's ministries: Professor Rocío Santos Alejo; infants and adolescents: Rosa A. Delgado Pérez; and auditor, legal matters, religious liberty and philanthropy: Accountant Omar López Martínez.

The workers of Chontalpa Mission seek to fulfill the initiative taken by the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference to open new fields. Since 2016, they have established 67 new fields. Their objective is to reach an additional 45. There is also a newly formed district: Cunduacán 4. The mission's goal is to have a total of 15 districts.

Due to the growth Chontalpa Mission has experienced, the stability of its institutions the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference voted at its year-end plenary session in the city of Cuernavaca, Morelos, on November 16, 2018, to change the status of Chontalpa Mission to that of a conference.¹² The change of status from mission to conference was accomplished on June 29-30, 2019, at Olmeca Camp in Huimanguillo, Tabasco, with the presence and under the direction of the president of the Inter-American Division and the administrators of the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference.¹³

From its inception to the present, Chontalpa Mission (now Chontalpa Conference) has maintained close ties with Olmeca Conference, from which it was created, and the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference, which at all times has supported its creation, development, and consolidation.

The Future of Chontalpa Conference

As our mission is to make disciples and expand the assigned territory, we believe that the strategy of establishing small groups is the appropriate one to fulfill our mission as the conference enters new territories. By January 2018, by the grace of the Lord, Chontalpa Conference (then a mission) had entered 88 places where there had been minimal or no Adventist presence. With this method, it reached its goal of baptizing 2,375 new members by 2018.

Chontalpa Conference forges its history with members who have learned that it is not through human power but by the power of the Spirit that the goals they have set for themselves are met.

List of Presidents

Oscar Gonzalez Corona (2016); Noé Valderrama Martínez, (2016-).

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