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## East Minas Conference

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The East Minas Conference (AML) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) located in the territory of the Southeast Brazil Union Conference (União Sudeste Brasileira or USEB).

The East Minas Conference's headquarters are located on Afonso Pena Street, no. 3402, Zip Code 35010-001, in the center of the city of Governador Valadares in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Altogether, there are 180 municipalities located in the valleys of Jequitinhonha, Mucuri, Rio Doce, and Zona da Mata that belong to the Conference's territory of which 108 have an Adventist presence. Nowadays, the AML has 20,465 Adventists, and they are spread across 242 congregations. With a total population of 2,958,692 people, the overall average is one Adventist per 144 inhabitants in the territory. Its office has 321 staff members, 39 of whom are ministers, 28 of whom are credentialed, and 11 are licensed.<sup>1</sup>

In the AML territory, there are three school units for Adventist Education: Ipatinga Adventist Academy, in the city of Ipatinga, with 520 students; the Adventist Educational Center Dr. Otto Keppke, in Governador Valadares, with 642 students; and the Teófilo Otoni Adventist Academy, located in Teófilo Otoni, with 289 students.<sup>2</sup> Together, the three schools have a total of 1,451 students.

The Adventist Media Center - Brazil can be watched and heard in eastern Minas Gerais. In this territory, TV Novo Tempo [Hope Channel Brazil] has a potential reach of around 360,000 people, and has open channels in the cities of Aimorés (channel 9), Conselheiro Pena (channel 3), Governador Valadares (channel 34), Ipanema (channel 9), and Father Paraíso (channel 13). New Time Radio can be heard in Governador Valadares on 107.7 FM and reaches about 280 thousand people.<sup>3</sup>

## The Origin of the Work in the Territory of the Conference

The Adventist message reached the Mucuri Valley in 1895 through the canvassers<sup>4</sup> and Brothers Alberto and Frederico Berger. The two started their sales in the localities of São Jacinto and Lajinha, which today are part of the municipality of Teófilo Otoni, until then a village full of German Lutherans.<sup>5</sup> In São Jacinto, the pair met the Klaus family, who offered them a room so they could hold evangelistic meetings. From those meetings, the Klaus's were the first family to accept the Adventist message in the region.<sup>6</sup> Later, Frederico and Alberto married sisters Amanda and Leslie Klaus.<sup>7</sup>

It did not take long for the message preached by the Berger brothers to result in religious persecution. Many people accepted the Adventist message, which generated conflict with some local Lutherans. The meeting hall was attacked and destroyed, but the new Adventists came together and bought land outside the city, where they started building the church.<sup>8</sup> That congregation was officially formed in 1896 with about 20 people baptized on October 20 by Pastor F. W. Spies. This is considered the fifth Adventist Church in Brazil.<sup>9</sup>

In 1902, it was decided to create the Brazil Conference (presently the Rio de Janeiro Conference). At that time, the country had 15 Adventist churches and 860 members, and the first president of the Conference was Pastor Hulderich F. Graf. Of these 860 members, only 150 belonged to the Portuguese-speaking community. All the others were from German colonies spread over the South and Southeast of Brazil, including the one that existed in Teófilo Otoni. The organization of the SDA Church in South America continued to grow. In 1906, 150 delegates representing more than 2,000 Adventists from the continent met in the city of Paraná, Argentina, where the formation of the South American Union Conference (presently the Argentina Union Conference) was approved. At the time, Pastor J. W. Westphal was elected president of the Union and H. F. Graf, vice president. In addition, the Brazil Conference was split into several parts, giving rise to the Rio Grande Conference, the Santa Catarina And Parana Conference, the São Paulo Mission, and the North Brazil Mission.<sup>10</sup>

Nine years after his first visit to Teófilo Otoni, F. W. Spies visited the city again in December 1907, and he stayed there until January of the following year. In the city, the pastor held services both in German and Portuguese, and he baptized eight people--seven young people and one lady. On his visit, the pastor stressed the need for a "schoolmaster" to teach the children of the church.<sup>11</sup> Four years later, in March 1912, Benedito Câmara went beyond Teófilo Otoni and visited the locations of São Miguel do Jequitinhonha, Itaipé, São Pedro and Itinga (all in the Jequitinhonha Valley), selling Adventist literature and Bibles.<sup>12</sup> Two months later, Pastor Spies returned to Teófilo Otoni, and his description of what was happening was even more encouraging since five people were baptized. There were already 63 members in this new church.<sup>13</sup>

In 1916, the Minas Geraes Mission (nowadays the Central Minas Conference) was founded, and three years later, it was reorganized to give rise to the East and West Minas Geraes Missions.<sup>14</sup> Within 1918 and 1919, Pastor F. W. Spies' yearning for a primary school to be established in Teófilo Otoni was realized.<sup>15</sup> In April 1919, there were 22 students enrolled in the small school run by H. Hoefft, who served as a pastor and teacher. In August of that year, 29 children were enrolled in the school, and they were studying the subjects of Calligraphy, Reading, Spelling (in Portuguese and German), Old Testament History, Arithmetic, Portuguese Grammar, and Health Studies. Arrangements were also made to teach horticulture for boys and sewing for girls.<sup>16</sup> However, the teacher did not have time to see the fruits of his work since he ended up dying on July 9, 1921,<sup>17</sup> and later, Alberto Knuepfer assumed his post.<sup>18</sup>

Even with the death of H. Hoefft, the Adventist work continued to advance in the region. In 1924, Emílio Storch was sent from the Brazil College (Colégio Adventista Brasil or CAB, presently the Brazil Adventist University, Centro Universitário Adventista de São Paulo or UNASP) to work as a pastor in the church of São Jacinto. In 1926, while Storch was working in the locality of Liberdade, which is a few kilometers from São Jacinto, he inaugurated a primary school linked to the local church with 32 students.<sup>19</sup> In June of that same year, nine people were baptized in Teófilo Otoni during the visit of the pastors L.G. Jorgensen from the East Brazil Union Mission (União Oeste Brasileira or

UEB, presently the Southeast Brazil Union Conference), and C. C. Schneider from the Espírito Santo Mission (presently the Espírito Santo Conference).<sup>20</sup> At the time, the region was under the administration of this Mission both because of its geographical proximity to Espírito Santo and the fact that there were no other Adventists in the entire state of Minas Gerais.<sup>21</sup>

In 1931, the Adventist Church in Brazil underwent a new administrative reorganization. On that occasion, the states of Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and Espírito Santo started to be assisted by the Mission Rio-Minas Geraes (presently the Rio de Janeiro Conference) and Rio-Espírito Santo (presently the Espírito Santo Conference). While the Rio-Espírito Santo Mission administered the church in the eastern region of Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, and the northern region of Rio de Janeiro, the Rio-Minas Geraes Mission administered the rest of the state of Minas Gerais and the southern part of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>22</sup> In January 1932, the Rio-Minas Geraes Mission had nine organized Adventist churches and 824 Adventist members<sup>23</sup> while the Rio-Espírito Santo Mission had 13 organized churches and 967 members.<sup>24</sup>

In the late 1930s, a new group of Adventists began to reunite in the Poton district of Teófilo Otoni. The group started with a man named Manoel Rodrigues dos Santos, who became acquainted with the Adventist message through a canvasser named João Leme de Souza. Manoel was baptized in 1932 by Pastor Carlos Kaltenhäuser, and within 1939 and 1940, new baptisms were performed by Pastor Jorge Hoyler in the region. Under the direction of Pastor Kaltenhäuser, the 33-person church was organized in the Poton District in December 1941.<sup>25</sup> Also in that year, the first baptism took place at the headquarters of the municipality of Teófilo Otoni where Sebastião Borges and his wife, Maria Madalena, were baptized as well as their children Cacilda and Nazareno. Sebastião Borges' family took the first steps towards the founding of the Teófilo Otoni Central Adventist Church.<sup>26</sup>

In 1945, an Adventist church already existed in the city of Mantena in the Vale do Rio Doce. In this city, Mrs. Gláucia Lira founded the Dorcas Society<sup>27</sup> and the Dorcas Adventist Infirmary with the support of the local city hall and Brother José Secundino da Fonseca.<sup>28</sup> The work started by the Dorcas Society made it possible for the church of Mantena to be inaugurated on October 22, 1949, since until then, the members met in a commercial building owned by José Secundino.<sup>29</sup>

Until 1950, the group of Adventists from the center of Teófilo Otoni used to meet at Sebastião's house, with Pastor Kaltenhäuser teaching the Sabbath School lessons in Portuguese and German. However, in 1951, construction began on the Teófilo Otoni Central Adventist Church<sup>30</sup> and, the following year, an Adventist primary school in the city began to operate under the responsibility of Derly Peixoto. The Teófilo Otoni Central Church was inaugurated on August 15, 1953 (at the time known as the Grão Pará Adventist Church) as a result of a financial campaign among members and former pastors who had worked in Minas town.<sup>31</sup>

In August 1957, pastors João Ortega Perez and Waldemar Will and worker Nilza Lemos started a series of meetings in the city of Nanuque. The conferences lasted for about three months, and after the series, 14 people were baptized by Pastor Manoel Ost of the Espírito Santo Conference. The baptisms resulted in the formation of the Nanuque Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>32</sup> The following year (1958), Daniel Correia, an Adventist worker, started working in the city of Governador Valadares, founding a group that gathered in Lourdes district in the central region of the city. Under the leadership of Ricardo Martins, a prayer and study group was organized, and as a result, Sisters Maria and Penha de Assis were baptized. In September of that year, Pastor Arnaldo Anniehs conducted a series of meetings in the city, also resulting in the conversion of many people.<sup>33</sup>

After the meetings, the new converts began to meet in a small establishment on Quintino Bocaiúva Street in Governador Valadares. Considered "small and uncomfortable" by the members, the place was used for a short time until the Espírito Santo Conference donated land on Brasil Avenue in the downtown area. There, church members built a temporary shed that became a temple in October 1958.<sup>34</sup> As a result of divine blessings and evangelistic campaigns undertaken in those two decades (1940-1950), in January 1960, the Espírito Santo Conference reached the mark of 46 congregations and 5,139 Adventists throughout the territory covered by it<sup>35</sup>

In February 1963, the Eastern Region of Minas Gerais administered three organized pastoral districts: Teófilo Otoni, under the leadership of Pastor Rafael Lopes Pereira; Mantena, led by Daniel Correia de Jesus; and Almenara, led by Pastor Waldemar Will.<sup>36</sup> In January 1965, the city of Nanuque already had its Central Adventist Church built and planned to build an even bigger church that was inaugurated on January 8, 1966, with the presence of pastors Palmer Harder and Harry Bergold.<sup>37</sup> In addition, the church of the Reta district in Nanuque, and the church of the village of Três Corações, 25 kilometers from the city, were also under construction.<sup>38</sup> Almost two years later, on December 30, 1967, the new Adventist temple of Governador Valadares was inaugurated, and it later became the city's Central Adventist Church.<sup>39</sup>

The Adventist Church in the region continued to grow steadily during the 1970s. In 1975, for example, the city of Aimorés received the Adventist message through evangelistic conferences conducted by Pastor José Cavaliere and assisted by Marco Aurélio Prata and Adilson Soares. As a result of the series held there, about 250 people were baptized.<sup>40</sup> Also in 1975, the construction of the Governador Valadares Adventist Educational Center (presently the Adventist Educational Center Dr. Otto Keppke) started through the initiative of physician Otto Keppke.<sup>41</sup> The school started operating in March 1976 with the first four grades of elementary school, and in 1980, it already offered complete elementary school education. Also in 1976, the Adventist Church in the city of Itaobim in Minas Gerais was inaugurated.<sup>42</sup> The following year, the Adventist school in Governador Valadares was officially inaugurated.<sup>43</sup>

In 1978, the city of Joaíma, also in the Eastern Region of Minas Gerais, began to receive their first missionary activities of the Adventist Church. There, Pastor Nazário Lüdtke held an evangelistic series during the Holy Week

period, resulting in the baptism of 30 people--seven in Joáima and 23 in Itaobim where the construction of a school began. In addition, 20 people were baptized in the city of Pasmado, and two other churches were built in the cities of Rio do Prado and Palmópolis. Also in 1978, a new church was inaugurated in Teófilo Otoni in the Vila Barreiros district.<sup>44</sup>

In 1980, in the EBUC territory, there were 279 organized churches and 84,387 Adventists,<sup>45</sup> making it necessary to reorganize their mission fields. This happened during the 11th Quadrennial Assembly of the Union when all the local camps were reorganized: Espirito Santo Conference changed its status to East Conference (presently the Espirito Santo Conference) and started to administer only the churches of the state of Espirito Santo; Rio de Janeiro Conference started to manage congregations in the state of Rio de Janeiro; and the Minas Gerais Mission began to direct churches throughout the Minas Gerais territory.<sup>46</sup>

The accelerated growth contributed to a new reorganization of the Church in the territory of Minas Gerais, this time in June 1982. During the Mid-Annual Plenary Board of Directors of the South American Division, the division of Minas Gerais field was voted into the North Minas Mission which was headquartered in Belo Horizonte, and the South Minas Mission, headquartered in Juiz de Fora.<sup>47</sup> The decision was ratified in December 1982 with a change: the North Minas Mission became the Central Minas Mission and the South Minas Mission became the South Minas Conference.<sup>48</sup> With this reorganization of the field, part of the eastern territory of Minas Gerais, such as the cities of Governador Valadares and Mantena, were under the responsibility of the South Minas Conference.<sup>49</sup>

In 1984, the Governador Valadares Adventist School was renamed Adventist Educational Center Dr. Otto Keppke, in honor of its pioneer and founder.<sup>50</sup> The church in the Central and Eastern regions of Minas Gerais continued to develop until in December 1989, the number of churches organized totaled 78 with 25,796 members.<sup>51</sup> In February 1991, the Central Minas Mission changed its name to the Central Minas Conference (CMC) during its Extraordinary Assembly.<sup>52</sup>

In 1995, the city of Governador Valadares started to have a New Time Radio station, making it one of the first cities in the country to have an Adventist radio station. The station was the former Rádio Educadora Rio Doce and was acquired through donations from entrepreneur and philanthropist Milton Afonso. At the time of its inauguration, the station operated at a frequency of 1230 KHz.<sup>53</sup> As part of the radio's evangelistic projects, the Voice of Prophecy program team<sup>54</sup> traveled through Governador Valadares to hold a large evangelistic campaign with full radio coverage.<sup>55</sup> Their new studios were inaugurated in December 1995.<sup>56</sup>

## Conference Organizational History

At the end of 2000, the CMC had 155 organized churches and 39,876 Adventists in its missionary territory.<sup>57</sup> The large number of Adventists suggested the need for the mission field in Minas Gerais, which was already divided into two associations, to undergo a new reorganization. Thus, in October 2000, the studies for the reorganization of the Field provided for in the Ecclesiastical Regulation of the SDA were carried out by the CMC, the South Minas Conference (SMC), and the East Brazil Union Conference.<sup>58</sup>

With these studies ready, on November 16, 2000, the board of directors of EBUC met in assembly and took the decision to request the creation of another administrative unit, the East Minas Conference (Associação Mineira Leste or AML). After being authorized, the new unit started operating on January 1, 2001, with the mission of better serving Adventist members in the Eastern Region of the state of Minas Gerais.<sup>59</sup> In the beginning, the camp had 14,489 members and administered the Ipatinga Adventist Academy located in the city of Ipatinga, and the Adventist Educational Center Dr. Otto Keppke in Governador Valadares.<sup>60</sup>

Its first president was Pastor Eurípedes Vieira Carvalho, and the headquarters were located on Afonso Pena Street, no. 3313, in the city center of Governador Valadares. In June 2004, the EBUC authorized the change of address from the AML's administrative headquarters to number 3402 on the same street where it currently operates. Since its foundation, this Conference has not changed its name or territory.<sup>61</sup> However, since its inauguration, Adventist missionary actions have intensified in eastern Minas Gerais.

In the educational area, in September 2009, the Teófilo Otoni Adventist Academy was inaugurated and, in January 2010, the school's activities officially began. This educational unit was built with resources from the East Minas Conference and the Southeast Brazil Union Conference in addition to financial support from some businessmen. The school started its activities with teacher Sílvia Barbosa as director, with 11 students in Early Childhood Education, and 65 in Elementary School I. Currently, the educational unit has a total of 289 students.<sup>62</sup>

In the AML territory, several important projects have been developed to benefit society. This is the case, for example, with the course "Quitting Smoking is Easy," which has been conducted by the Governador Valadares Central Adventist Church since 1994. The course is organized by a cardiologist and lasts eight days, containing lectures given by health professionals and Bible studies in addition to medicines handled by pharmacists.<sup>63</sup>

Since 2016, the camp has maintained an Influence Center in the Cidade Nobre district in Ipatinga. The building is ecologically sustainable and was built using containers as a base, also bringing good value for the Church. The Influence Center has meeting rooms, a kitchen, and an auditorium.<sup>64</sup> One of the projects offered at the site is “Saúde em Pauta” [“Health in Agenda”] which consists of offering free medical care in the specialties of general practice, neurology, endocrinology, ophthalmology, neuropsychology, and child psychotherapy. The project also offers healthy cooking courses and craft workshops.<sup>65</sup>

The “Breaking the Silence” project is also carried out annually by the AML.<sup>66</sup> In 2019, the project gained prominence in the City Council of Guanhães where a lecture was given about the program and about how it can help in the fight against child sexual abuse.<sup>67</sup> Also, in Guanhães, young Adventists from East Minas Conference participate in the project “One Year in Mission”<sup>68</sup> where social actions relevant to the community are developed, such as urban cleaning,<sup>69</sup> lectures on self-esteem for teachers,<sup>70</sup> presentations about hope and motivation for nurses and nursing technicians,<sup>71</sup> and music for children.<sup>72</sup>

Another project that should be highlighted is the “Invisible GV,” which was developed by the Governador Valadares Central Adventist Church. The project consists of giving visibility to homeless people, which includes publishing a black and white photo of the person on the social network Instagram. As one of the results of this work, in 2019, the project helped to bring together a homeless mother, who lived in Governador Valadares, with her children, who lived in the state of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>73</sup>

The AML is also engaged in the Hope Impact project.<sup>74</sup> In the 2019 edition, the participation of a university student named Brenda Souza received a special highlight. She had received the book “The Power of Hope” in the 2018 edition of the project, and in March 2019, she moved to Governador Valadares where she started attending an SDA church. Even without being baptized, she decided to get involved in the program, and together with the members of her church, she went to the streets of Governador Valadares to distribute the book “Esperança para a Família” [“Hope for the Family”].<sup>75</sup> In this edition of the project, the students and teachers of the Governador Valadares Adventist Academy also participated in the action, delivering about 300 books on the streets of the eastern city of Minas Gerais.<sup>76</sup>

As a result of all missionary actions, there has been much fruit for the kingdom of God. In 2001, when the AML started its activities, there were 64 churches organized in 17 pastoral districts, and 13,793 Adventist members. In a progressive analysis over the years, it is possible to see that, in 2008, the number of districts rose to 21 with 234 congregations and 14,797 members. In 2016, the field had 30 pastoral districts, 250 congregations, and 18,788 members. Two years later, it had 32 districts and 242 congregations with 20,370 members. In 2019, the East Minas Conference reached the mark of 20,465 Adventists in 242 congregations. In this way, it is possible to see that the establishment of the Conference contributed to the advancement of the preaching of the Gospel in the region.<sup>77</sup>

Since its inception, the East Minas Conference has been founded on three pillars: (1) *The fulfillment of the mission*. With a smaller territory, it becomes possible to reach places where the Adventist presence is minimal or nonexistent through better pastoral care and missionary training; (2) *Spiritual stability*. Nurtured spiritually and more constantly through revival activities local or regional, church members are kept in the Adventist faith and doctrines; and (3) *Strengthening loyalty*. This is developed through the frequent contact of Church segments with their members. Thus, fidelity in the four areas of Christian Stewardship will be growing, which will provide the Church with all the necessary resources to continue in the fulfillment of its mission.<sup>78</sup>

For the coming years of activities, the main focus of the AML administration is to shepherd members and further qualify church leaders. However, some challenges need to be overcome. One is that the camp covers a territory of 180 municipalities of which only 109 have an Adventist presence. Most of the cities in the territory are quite small (several with only about 5,000 inhabitants), and in some cases, they are located many kilometers from the district headquarters or in places of difficult access (another element that makes adequate assistance difficult). Also, many small groups of believers have emerged, but due to lack of local leadership, they have been unable to remain active. Reaching these cities with quality and strong leadership is a major challenge for the AML management.<sup>79</sup>

Despite being a field of many challenges, in the past 18 years, the Adventist work in eastern Minas Gerais has grown significantly under the leadership of the AML. Its institutional trajectory has been marked by the realization of several evangelisms in the form of engaging conferences. From these experiences, it was possible to realize the importance of the personal work of each of the members across the field.<sup>80</sup> Nowadays, the pastors of the Conference act as facilitators in the process of evangelism promoted by the members of each church. More and more, members have been involved in Bible studies and personal testimony, showing that they are convinced of their faith and willingness to be permanently qualified to carry out the work of preaching the message of Christ to everyone in this region of Minas Gerais.<sup>81</sup>

## Chronology of Administrative Managers<sup>82</sup>

Presidents: Eurípedes Vieira Carvalho (2000-2007); Edinelson Sudré Storch (2008-2010); Kleber Pereira Reis (2010-2018); Valdomiro Alves dos Santos (2019-present).

Secretaries: Jarci Lourenço Reis (2000-2005); Edinelson Sudré Storch (2005-2008); Claudiney Cândido dos Santos (2008-2013); Valdomiro Alves dos Santos (2013-2018); Davi Roberto França (2018); Marco Alexandre Bueno (2019-present).

Treasurers: Jarci Lourenço Reis (2000-2006); Sérgio Luiz de S. Faria (2006-2011); Jander Campos de Oliveira (2011-2014); Wesley Carvalho Oliveira (2014-2017); Leandro Ferreira de Brito (2017-present)<sup>83</sup>

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