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South Veracruz Conference

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The South Veracruz Conference is part of the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union Conference in the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

The South Veracruz Conference is located in the city of Minatitlán, Veracruz, at 209 Justo Sierra Avenue, Nueva Mina Colony. Its offices were inaugurated on March 15, 2016, by Pastor Israel Leito, president of the Inter-American Division, at the end of the meetings for the readjustment of the conference territory.

It is formed by three geographic zones: Minatitlán, Cosoleacaque and Ríos. The counties within its territory are Chinameca, Cosoleacaque, Hidalgotitlán, Jaltipan, Mecayapan, Minatitlán, Oteapan, Pajapan, Soteapan, Tatahuicapan de Juárez, and Zaragoza.

The South Veracruz Conference has 19 districts, 173 organized churches, and a membership of 18,840, in a population of 997,800.¹ It administers three educational centers, two in Minatitlán: Ignacio de la Llave Adventist School and the March 21 Educational Center which has four levels - pre-school, elementary, secondary and preparatory; and the Rafael Ramírez Educational Center in Oteapan, Veracruz which has the elementary level and is currently working on having the preschool level.

Origins of Church in Territory

There are few sources of information about the beginning of the Adventist work in the south of Veracruz. In 1907, the Tehuantepec Railroad was inaugurated with a length of 310 km; it linked the ports of Salina Cruz and Puerto México.² This would become a link throughout the whole territory, so that the gospel could be taken to the southeast of Mexico. In 1907, the Mexican Mission covered the whole republic. The decision was taken to divide the Mexican territory into six districts; one of them was the southern district that covered the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Tabasco, Yucatán and the southern part of Veracruz.³

The ease that the Tehuantepec Railroad provided for reaching Puerto Mexico in 1912, made it possible for Antonio Sánchez, first elder of the church in Salina Cruz, Oaxaca, to move to Puerto México to evangelize it.⁴ The 1914 yearbook notes that he was assigned to Puerto Mexico,⁵ a city which, by decree, in 1936 had its name changed to Coatzacoalcos. A letter written in 1914, by Pastor G. W. Caviness, president and treasurer of the Mexican Mission, confirms that Antonio Sánchez made a trip with him and remained in Puerto México.⁶

The distance from Puerto Mexico to Minatitlán is only 21.6 km. The railroad went through Minatitlán, and this had a strategic impact on the evangelism of the south of Veracruz.

Some pastors who ministered in this part of the territory include Ladislao Arriaga, who was called in 1932, to take care of the work in Minatitlán, Veracruz.⁷ Florencio Avelino Dominguez, a layman who was baptized in Díaz Mirón, the first church of the city of Minatitlán named Paciente Trinidad as his pastor.⁸ Blas Covarrubias who graduated from Montemorelos in 1948, was also sent to Minatitlán.⁹

There are two accounts of the beginning of the work in Minatitlán. One of them told by some members from the church of Díaz Mirón, is that the gospel arrived in 1912, coming out of the state of Oaxaca. Another version is that it began in 1932, when Pastor Ladislao Arriaga, was sent to Minatitlán. What is documented is a photograph showing Pastor Ladislao Arriaga with a group of members from that period in Díaz Mirón. There is also a photograph of a choir in the second trimester of 1929, and a photograph of the Adventist church in the Díaz Mirón Colony of Minatitlán in 1940.

On January 22, 1948, the board of the Mexican Union voted to give a new name to the missions.¹⁰ They would now be called corporations. This designation was used for the next eight years.¹¹ The territory of the south of Veracruz was included in the Southeast Mexican Corporation, which was previously called the Yucatán Mission, with offices in Mérida, Yucatán.¹² The area of the corporation included Quintana Roo, Yucatán, Campeche, Tabasco, and the south of Veracruz up to Acayucan.¹³ This vast territory was taken care of by four pastors and the headquarters was relocated to Villahermosa.¹⁴

In 1945, the work of the church extended toward Cosoleacaque. Brothers Florencio Avelino, Narciso Silva, and Trujillo nurtured a small group that met in the house of Lucila and Martita Zúñiga Hernández. Soon after, Francisca Novoa Palma joined them, and they all gathered at the church of Díaz Mirón where they actively participated.¹⁵ In 1948, brother Florencio Avelino took the message to Zaragoza, Oteapan and Chinameca. Blas Covarrubias was the pastor. In 1953, Pastor Sergio Moctezuma Ponce was sent to Minatitlán. His district included Minatitlán, Jaltipan, Texistepec, the Riberas, Coatzacoalcos, San Cristobal, Río Chiquito, Uxpanapa, and the Mezcalapa Lagoon.¹⁶

In the biography of Pastor Sergio Moctezuma, it is stated that the largest and most important church in his district was in Esperanza.¹⁷ Pastor Moctezuma saw great potential in the youth, and took advantage of this opportunity to teach them how to engage in missionary service. With the passing of time, many congregations around Esperanza received the message through those young people. Some places described by Pastor Moctezuma include Galeras, Ranchoapan, Tenochitlan, Coapiloloya, La Esperanza, Peña Blanca, Chichigapa, Hidalgotitlán, El Encanto, Buena Vista, and others in which there is currently an Adventist presence.¹⁸

Events Leading to Organization of the Conference

In 1956, the nomenclature of corporation was changed back to mission, and so Southeast Corporation became Southeast Mexican Mission. In 1975, there was a change of status from mission to conference. In 1981, the executive committee of the Mexican Union Conference requested the Inter-American Division to create a new

conference whose territory would be formed by the south part of Veracruz, from Angel R. Cabada to the Cerro de Nanchital, and the state of Oaxaca.¹⁹ The formation of this new conference necessitated a readjustment of territory that involved the Southeast, Interoceanic and South Mexican Conferences.

On January 13, 1982, the inaugural session of the Isthmus Mexican Conference was held. Headquartered in Oaxaca, the leaders elected were Pastor Israel Guízar Vidaña as president, Pastor Arcadio González Camacho as secretary, and Jesús Hernández as treasurer.²⁰

From 1982 until 1987, the south of Veracruz was part of Isthmus Mexican Conference. Plans were made to readjust the territories of some of the fields in the union, so in the mid-year meetings of the South Mexican Union, held June 3-4, 1986, in the Vocational Center of Oaxtepec, it was recommended that the Isthmus Mexican Conference be divided in January 1988. After studies and analysis of the Isthmus Conference, the Inter-American Division approved the request for the division of the conference in 1988.²¹ The offices were located on the top floor of the building of the Gilbert Furniture Store and remained there until the dedication of their own building the following year.²²

Official Organization of South Veracruz Conference

The triennial session of the Isthmus Conference took place on January 16-18, 1988 in the city of Oaxaca. It was attended by the administrators of the South Mexican Union, Pastor Agustín Galicia Montesino, president, Isaac Gómez Tenorio, secretary, and Pablo Balboa, treasurer.²³ The readjustment of the territory resulted in the creation of two fields - the Oaxaca Mission with headquarters continuing to be in Oaxaca, and the South Veracruz Conference with headquarters in Venustiano Carranza Street, Catemaco in the offices of the former Isthmus Conference. The first administration of the South Veracruz Conference was Pastor Israel Guízar Vidaña, president, Pastor Isaías Hernández Hernández, secretary, and accountant Irán Molina Alegría, treasurer.

The territory of the South Veracruz Conference would include the area from Angel R. Cabada, Veracruz to the border of the state of Tabasco. In a population of 3,000,000 in this region, the conference started with 93 organized churches, 35,823 members, ten ordained, and 19 licensed pastors.²⁴

Under the leadership of Pastor Guízar, there was infrastructural development. Land was bought on which to build the headquarter offices and land was also acquired on the outskirts of the city of Catemaco for a campsite. The Colina de las Aguilas Camp was built on that property and it became a very useful facility for the South Veracruz Conference and the South Mexican Union Conference. In order to give the campsite greater capacity, the executive committee of the union authorized the South Veracruz Conference to buy the land next to the camp.²⁵ By the end of the first triennium, the South Veracruz Conference had 101 organized churches and 41,312 members.²⁶

Development of the Conference

The following triennium, under the leadership of Pastor Arcadio González Camacho, who was both president and evangelist, there was an evangelistic explosion in the conference with baptisms being held in the lagoon in the city of Catemaco. In 1993, there were 5,365 persons baptized throughout the conference.²⁷ The organized churches had grown from 101 to 156 in only two years. In 1995, the conference ended with a membership of 46,789 and 185 organized churches.²⁸ In 1998, the church had grown to a membership of 50,330 members, with 209 organized churches and 453 companies.²⁹ The South Veracruz Conference was growing in all aspects, and this necessitated a readjustment of the territory in the following years.

The South Veracruz Conference in 2000, had 236 organized churches 395 organized groups, and a membership of 52,441. Just in that year, 4,643 persons were baptized.³⁰ In addition, there were 130 companies and a total of 39 districts.³¹ In 2001, during the leadership of Pastor Reynold Zebadúa, the conference territory was reorganized to form the Olmeca Mission. The districts that the South Veracruz Conference ceded to the Olmeca Mission were Nanchital, Agua Dulce I and II, Choapas I and II, Ixhuatlán and Cuichapa. It is important to note that the South Mexican Union Conference was divided in 2001 to form the Interoceanic Mexican Union Conference.

With the growth of the church in mind, a property between Coatzacoalcos and Minatitlán was acquired for a camp. On April 17, 2002, it was purchased for \$450,000.00 Mexican pesos. A special offering was taken for the camp between June 1 and July 6, 2002.³² This camp would be known as the Jobo Camp and has been a blessing for the church in the South Veracruz Conference.

After the territory was reorganized, the South Veracruz Conference became a part of the Interoceanic Mexican Union Mission. The conference was placed in a tenuous financial situation since the districts that it ceded were in the economically strong area with petroleum resources. Its second quadrennial session was held on August 18-20, 2005, at Colina de las Aguilas Camp in Catemaco, Veracruz, with 265 delegates present, and at this session, 43 newly organized churches were accepted into the sisterhood of churches.³³ At the end of 2005, there were 238 organized churches, 362 organized groups, and a membership of 38,060.³⁴ There was a vote of gratitude made at the 2007 year-end meeting of the conference, giving thanks for 40,197 members, 160 colporteurs, 14 schools and 135 teachers in the field.³⁵ Various spiritual activities called "Mega Vigils" were carried out in different areas including Coatzacoalcos, Minatitlán, Acayucan, Catemaco, and Isla. The church experienced a revival that permitted it to go forward with the fulfillment of its mission.

In the year-end meeting of December 11, 2007, it was voted to accept the request to cede three districts, namely

Playa Vicente, Jesús Carranza, and Uxpanapa from the South Veracruz Conference to the Oaxaca Mission, effective 2008.³⁶ The Oaxaca Mission was reorganized in 2008, into the Oaxaca Conference and the Isthmus Mission. The three districts became part of Isthmus Mission with headquarters in Juchitán, Oaxaca. This new mission's request of two additional districts - Campo Nuevo and Nuevo Morales was approved.³⁷

On December 8, 2008, a request was sent to the union to study the possibility of a readjustment of territory between the South Veracruz Conference and the Olmeca Conference. The purpose of this readjustment was to form a new mission in Coatzacoalcos. The South Veracruz Conference gave up Coatzacoalcos I, II, III, IV, and Allende, and the Olmeca Conference gave up the part of Veracruz that was in its territory.³⁸ On August 11-13, 2009, the third quadrennial session of the South Veracruz Conference was held where the new administration elected was Pastor Noé Valderrama Martínez, president, Andrés Aguilar Ramírez, secretary, and accountant Osiel Caamal Turrubiates, treasurer.³⁹ The vote of thanks of this quadrennial session gave thanks to God for the 248 organized churches, 186 organized groups, 114 companies, a membership of 32,692, a pastoral staff of 36, three chaplains, and three educational centers located in Acayucan: Francisco I Madero Adventist School, Minatitlán, Ignacio de la Llave Adventist School in Coatzacoalcos and Ignacio Zaragoza Adventist School.

In 2010, the Southeast Veracruz Mission was formed with offices in Coatzacoalcos.⁴⁰ The South Veracruz and Olmeca Conferences, and the Interoceanic Mexican Union had set aside the amount of \$1,033,333.34 (Mexican pesos) each to purchase the offices for the Southeast Veracruz Mission.⁴¹ In the reorganization of its territory, the South Veracruz Conference ceded three more districts than planned to the new Southeast Veracruz Mission: Cerritos, Ribera I and Ribera II. In total, eight districts were passed over to the Southeast Veracruz Mission. At the end of 2010, the South Veracruz Conference had 202 organized churches, 145 organized groups, 75 companies, 36,190 members, and 27 pastors.⁴²

On September 27, 2011, Pastor Noé Valderrama, president of the South Veracruz Conference was elected as Sabbath school and personal ministries director of the Interoceanic Mexican Union.⁴³ In his place, Pastor Andrés Aguilar Ramírez was elected as president of the South Veracruz Conference and Pastor Filiberto Cruz Gonzalez, as secretary.⁴⁴

The fourth quadrennial session of the South Veracruz Conference was held on June 30, 2013 with 298 delegates in attendance.⁴⁵ At this meeting it was voted to readjust the territory of the South Veracruz Conference to create a new mission.

On November 27, 2014, in a plenary session of the South Veracruz Conference, the constituency voted on this reorganization and to move the headquarters of the South Veracruz Conference to Minatitlán.⁴⁶ The name for the new mission -Tuxtla Mission and the area and districts of which it would be composed, were approved on February 12, 2015.⁴⁷ At a subsequent constituency meeting, it was voted to authorize a reserve of \$3,000,000.00 (Mexican pesos) for the purchase of land and construction of new offices for the headquarters of the South Veracruz Conference. On June 11, 2015, a vote approved the purchase a building on 209 Justo Sierra Avenue in the Nueva Mina Colony of Minatitlán, Veracruz for \$6,000,000.00 (Mexican pesos).⁴⁸ This purchase was authorized by the executive committee of the Interoceanic Mexican Union Conference on September 3, 2015. The final cost of the building was \$6,264,575.00 (Mexican pesos)⁴⁹ and on November 5, 2015, the \$3,000,000.00 (Mexican pesos) fund set aside for new fields to finance the offices and equipment was applied to the remodeling of the offices.⁵⁰

At the end of 2015, it was decided which personnel would remain in the Tuxtla Mission and which would go to the new headquarters of the South Veracruz Conference.⁵¹

The districts that formed part of the Tuxtla Mission were: Dolores, La Esperanza, Oluta, San Juan Evangelista, Santa Rosa, Sayula, Texistepec, Calería, Catemaco, Guinda, Isla 1, Isla 2, Juan Díaz Covarrubias, Rodriguez Clara, Santiago, Tuxtla, San Andrés Tuxtla and Tlapan.⁵²

The South Veracruz Conference, was divided into three geographic zones for its organization: Minatitlán Zone: Díaz Mirón, Díaz Ordaz, Hidalgo, Insurgentes, Playón and Santa Clara; Cosoleacaque Zone: Chinameca, Soacotla, Cosoleacaque, Jaltipan, Modelo, Oteapan, Tatahuicapan, Zaragoza; and Ríos Zone: Ribera I, Ribera II, Ribera III, Hidalgoitlán.⁵³

At the year-end executive committee meeting of the Interoceanic Mexican Union held November 2015, in Oaxaca, Oaxaca, the date for readjustment was set for March 14 -15, 2016.⁵⁴ On January 20, 2016, in Coatzacoalcos, all the administrators involved made decisions in relation to the distribution of assets between the South Veracruz Conference and the Tuxtla Mission. It was agreed that South Veracruz Conference would receive 55.22 percent and Tuxtla Mission 44.78 percent. The Colma de las Aguilas Camp which was valued at twelve million Mexican pesos would belong to both entities following the established percentages. Both fields would be responsible for the administration of the camp on a two-year rotation period beginning with Tuxtla Mission. The distribution of the offices and pastoral houses was also decided.⁵⁵

At the end of 2015, the South Veracruz Conference had 276 organized churches, 275 organized groups, including companies, 30,386 members, 34 pastors, two chaplains and two educational institutions, one in Acaycan and the other in Minatitlán.⁵⁶

At the session for readjustment of territory held March 14-15, 2016 with 298 delegates present, Pastor Oved Ortiz Rinza was elected as president, Pastor Epifanio Cajal Témich, as secretary, and Eulogio Gil Andrade, as treasurer of the South Veracruz Conference.⁵⁷ The new offices were inaugurated by Pastor Israel Leito, president of the Inter-American Division, and Pastor Moisés Reyna Sánchez, Pastor Abraham Sandoval and accountant Benjamín Lázaro

Carballo from the Interoceanic Mexican Union. Once the territory was readjusted, a new district, North Minatitlán, was formed.

At the year-end plenary session in 2016, after the division of territory, the South Veracruz Conference thanked God for 154 organized churches, 160 groups, 18,704 members, 19 pastors and a chaplain.⁵⁸ The year 2017, was one of both challenges and victories. The conference was chosen as the site for the baptism for the “Lord, Transform me” evangelism campaigns. On April 1, 2017, the program was broadcast live by satellite to the entire division through Hope Channel. A crowd of about eight thousand persons filled the Convention Center of Minatitlán to worship, to witness the transformation of new believers and commit to nurturing those members in their new life in the church. Pastor Melchor Ferreyra had an audience full of visitors and members in the Convention Center each night of the campaign prior to the great baptism. Up to April 1, the South Veracruz Conference with its pastoral team baptized 1,500 souls.

Pastor Oved Ortiz Rinza, who had been reelected as president of the South Veracruz Conference for the quadrennial, got ill and was hospitalized. He died on December 11, 2017. One week before his death, he sent a short message to the young people who were meeting at the Youth Festival in the Convention Center of Minatitlán, encouraging them to be faithful to the Lord. Funeral services took place on December 12 in the South Veracruz Conference, and on the 13th in the Central Church of Coatzacoalcos of the Southeast Conference. The message of consolation at the funeral service in the Conference office was given by Pastor Abraham Sandoval Jiménez, Secretary, and at the Coatzacoalcos Central Church by Pastor Moisés Reyna Sánchez, President of the Interoceanic Mexican Union. Most presidents of the fields in the Union were present.

On January 24, 2018, with the administrators of the Interoceanic Mexican Union conference present, in plenary session of the Conference, Pastor Epifanio Cajal Témich was elected as president, and Pastor Benjamín Camacho Jiménez, as treasurer.

Future Perspectives for the Conference

The years 2016 and 2017 were very difficult financially for the South Veracruz Conference. Income was not as expected in the strategic planning that justified the territorial readjustment.

The church in this conference had a team of pastors committed to “Mission First.” In 2018, the church, continuing faithfully, committed to evangelization and consolidation of its members. Finances began to improve. The goal is to end the quadrennium with operating capital and liquidity one hundred percent in accordance with the guidelines. God will guide His church and provide the means to finish His work. There is a plan to form new districts where the church has grown greatly. One project considered by the current administration is the acquisition of a property for a campsite that will fulfill the needs of the territory.

There are also challenges. The church is growing in areas where there are possibilities for building churches and there are properties available. However, in the cities where there is the necessity to plant new churches, land is costly, and this slows progress.

List of Presidents

Israel Guízar Vidaña (1988-1991); Arcadio González Camacho (1991-1995); Jairo Tenorio Carvallo (1995-1998); Reynold Zebadúa Pérez (1998-2005); Rubén Quetz Delgado (2005-2009); Noé Valderrama Martínez (2009-2011); G. Andrés Aguilar Ramírez (2011-2013); Oved Ortiz Rinza (2013-2017); Epifanio Cajal Témich (2018-).

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