



North Santa Catarina Conference.  
Photo courtesy of North Santa Catarina Conference.

## North Santa Catarina Conference

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### RENATO GROSS

Renato Gross

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North Santa Catarina Conference (ANC) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Brazil. Its headquarters is located at Joaçaba street, 355, zip code: 89221340, Saguçu neighborhood, in the city of Joinville, in the state of Santa Catarina, Brazil.

Since its creation, the ANC has been operating in the same location at a venue opened in 2012. Its geographical area of operation extends from one end of the state to the other, starting at the coast, and through the mountains at the center, midwest, and Santa Catarina plateau. The estimated population of this territory is 3,445,854 inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> Of this total, there are 15,790 members,<sup>2</sup> divided into 38 districts, with 128 churches and 99 organized groups.<sup>3</sup> The average is one Adventist per 218 inhabitants.

In this conference territory, there are 10 schools located in seven cities, four of them in Joinville. By the end of 2018 these schools received approximately 4,000 students. The school units in operation are as follows: Santa Catarina Adventist Academy (IAESC) in the city of Araquari with 520 students; Blumenau Adventist School (EAB) in the city of Blumenau with 213 students; Chapecó Adventist School (EAC) in the city of Chapecó with 386 students; Rio do Sul Adventist School (EARS) in the city of Rio do Sul with 100 students; São Francisco do Sul Adventist Academy (CASFS) in the city of São Francisco do Sul with 595 students; Indaial Adventist Academy (CADI) in the city of Indaial with 497 students; and the four schools located in Joinville: Joinville Adventist School (CAJ - Centro) with 143 students; Joinville Adventist School (CAJ - Bom Retiro) with 318 students; Joinville Adventist School (CAJ - Costa e

Silva) with 354 students; and finally, the last one, Joinville Adventist Academy (CAJ - Saguauçu) with 811 students. Between 2012 and 2018, approximately US\$ 5,000,000 were invested in renovations at these schools<sup>4</sup>

In the territory of the CAJ there are two official channels of communication, a website and a magazine. The site is the premier Adventist internet news portal within the territory and is a space from which members of congregations can download church materials. The site [anc.adventistas.org](http://anc.adventistas.org) receives a monthly average of 10,000 internet users. Through this internet space, Adventists in northern Santa Catarina also learn about the news and decisions made by the local church.

All the work, activities, and functions of this conference are carried out by 543 servers: 41 credentialed pastors, 12 licensed pastors, four credentialed workers, and 10 licensed workers. The others work in the school network and other activities.<sup>5</sup>

This whole structure results from a history of considerable evangelistic effort that goes back to the early days of Adventist work in southern Brazil.

## Origin of SDA Work in the Conference

European immigration in the state of Santa Catarina occurred via two seaports, which characterized, in the Adventist case, two very distinct forms of arrival. In the south-central region of the state, it occurred via the port of Itajaí, reaching the city of Brusque and Gaspar In Alto, at the direct initiative of Battle Creek (at the time the Adventist world church was based in this city), recent converts, mostly German, of the Lutheran faith, were directly reached by the Seventh-day Adventist message.

On the other hand, the northern part of the state of Santa Catarina had as its gateway to immigration the post of São Francisco do Sul, which received Europeans from a more diverse origin: Germans, Russians, and Italians. In both cases, the counties of Itajaí and the post of San Francisco, a network of smaller rivers allowed them to go further inland when these canals were navigable. Thus, the existing counties of Blumenau and Joinville and their respective areas of influence were reached.

Unlike the city of Itajaí, the northern side of the state received, via Russian and German immigration, the Sabbath message and later the message of the second advent. Although no documentation has been found, what is known is that on February 22, 1895, Pastor F. H. Westphal left Buenos Aires for Brazil.<sup>6</sup> After visiting the state of Sao Paulo, he arrived in Joinville in May. Canvassers, such as A. B. Stauffer and A. Bachmeyer, had previously traveled through this region and aroused interest in the Sabbath and the return of Christ.

In the city of Joinville, there was already a “large” group of Sabbath keepers.<sup>7</sup> They were Prussian dissidents of the Seventh-day Baptist Church, immigrated from the 1860s and followers of Stangnowsky. They called themselves the Apostolic Group of the Christian Church,<sup>8</sup> and waited for the return of the Messiah, which they believed would occur in 1896, when paradise would be established at the North Pole. “The history of this group of Sabbath keepers in Joinville backs the date of observance of the Seventh-day Sabbath in Brazil.”<sup>9</sup> It is unknown how many days Pastor Westphal remained in Joinville, and there is no news that there was a baptism, even though that Sabbath keeping group was there. However, he reports that about half of Stangnowsky’s followers immediately “joined us” as soon as the truth was presented to them.

From the city of Joinville, Pastor Westphal organized a 20-member Sabbath School.<sup>10</sup> The following families became interested in the Seventh-day Adventist message: Henning, Voos, Schünemann, Anniess, Geisler, Hoffmann, Milbratz, Rutz, among others whose surnames are still on the lists of members from the region and/or Brazil!<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, in the current county of Rio dos Cedros, in the locality of Rio Cunha, there was another group of Sabbath keepers who arrived by water after landing at the San Francisco post, as recorded by municipal history. They were Russians, who in 1890 erected a small half-timbered chapel<sup>12</sup> for their Sabbath services. On Sundays they gave it to the Lutherans. It is assumed that this was the first Adventist church in Brazil. In 1919 it went to Catholic domain, and was demolished in 1991.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the chapel there was also a school. In 1911, the magazine *Revista Mensal* [monthly magazine] reported that the school and house of worship had long been abandoned!<sup>14</sup>

In time, the Italian immigrants, mostly Catholic, eventually harassed the Russians, who decided to relocate altogether to Corupá in the hills above the Alto Benedito Novo neighborhood. The Seventh-day Adventist Church reached them, many were converted, including many Germans, and in the same location the second Adventist church was organized in Santa Catarina in 1897. The first elder was Carl Lenz.<sup>15</sup>

In 1898 a parish school was opened, the second in Brazil. It operated for the first two years in the living room of Brother Samuel Gross’s house (from the group of converted Russian immigrants)<sup>16</sup> and was active until 1985, when it was closed.<sup>17</sup> It is noteworthy that as soon as the first two churches (Gaspar Alto and Alto Benedito Novo) were organized, they provided for the opening of the first two Adventist parish schools in Brazil, an example followed by other Adventist congregations during the first decades of the last century. They were essentially rural schools.

With the closure of the Gaspar Alto boarding school, which was transferred to the city of Taquari, since the turn of the twentieth century, the state of Santa Catarina did not have a larger college that allowed young Adventists to better prepare to enter the work, or move on to the Seminar in São Paulo. Thus, in 1935, in Alto Benedito Novo neighborhood, the primary school was expanded to offer the first two grades of junior high school.

These schools all functioned in the same way as the pioneer years of Battle Creek Academy (Michigan, USA): girls

and boys from outside stayed in the homes of church members. The academy had a very short life: it was closed by Governor Nereu Ramos in 1938, as a result of the nationalization of education. The director was the German immigrant João Bork (later ordained to the ministry). Teaching was all in German, and the Ministry of Education issued ordinances prohibiting such practice. It was in the middle of World War II.

But as early as December 1938, at an administrative meeting of Paraná-Santa Catarina Mission, held in the county of Corupá, a new boarding school was set up in 1939 in the city of Butiá, near the counties of Rio Negro and Mafra, on the border of the states of Santa Catarina and Paraná.<sup>18</sup> This was the genesis of the current Parana Adventist College and the Parana Adventist Academy, currently operating in the city of Ivatuba, PR.

For decades Santa Catarina, which already had two Adventist boarding schools (Gaspar Alto and Benedito Novo), was left without this important educational institution. Then in 1997 it acquired in the county of Araquari, near the city of Joinville, an area of 72 hectares for a new boarding school, the IAESC - Santa Catarina Adventist Academy.<sup>19</sup>

In the early days, other localities were gradually evangelized, either by canvassing or by the missionary zeal of recent converts who shared the Good News with their families and acquaintances scattered throughout the colonial lots. As early as 1901, in the city of Blumenau, the first Adventist literature in all of South America was published under the name *Der Missions Arbeiter* (The Mission Worker). It was written in German and edited by Pastor John Lipke.<sup>20</sup>

On May 12, 1906, as a result of the expansion of the Adventist fronts of evangelism, Santa Catarina Conference was organized in the state of Paraná. Its headquarters was in Brusque until 1927 and its first president was Pastor Waldemar Ehlers (1869-1929).<sup>21</sup>

Another important moment occurred on June 11, 1919, on a Sabbath, when Brusque City Church was organized. The meeting took place at Brother Pieper's house. The church, composed of 23 members and under the leadership of "Presbyter" (name given to elders at the time) Reinaldo Fukner, baptized seven other people.<sup>22</sup>

These facts mark the beginning of Adventism in the territory of the ANC. The Church grew remarkably in the state of Santa Catarina throughout the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first century.

## Conference Organizational History

As of 2011, Santa Catarina Conference (AC), headquartered in the city of Florianópolis, had 31,831 members in 378 congregations, 203 churches, and 175 groups organized in 57 pastoral districts. Taking into account the growth of Santa Catarina Adventist Church, the large territorial extension of the state, as well as its 293 counties, of which 156 are considered Global Mission, and in view of the need to streamline, multiply, and intensify service and training to the regions by the administration and field department leaders, AC, through vote 2010-071 and USB through vote 2010-099, requested the South America Division (DSA) to hold a study evaluation commission to reorganize the territory of the AC and to create a new conference.<sup>23</sup>

The South America Division, under vote 2010-253, accepted the evaluation commission report and approved the reorganization of the territory of the then Santa Catarina Conference. Already created under this status, the North Santa Catarina Conference, based in the city of Joinville named as its first president Pastor Ezequias Guimarães, who directed the administrative work of the ANC from November 13, 2011 to April 5, 2013. The first Ordinary General Assembly of the new camp was held on November 20, 2015 at Santa Catarina Adventist Academy.<sup>24</sup>

At the end of 2011, the ANC began its work with 111 churches, 91 groups, and 15,977 members in a territory with a population of 2,974,387. Its field of activity was and continues to be the entire northern state of Santa Catarina. There were no changes in its administrative region, or its name since it was already organized as a conference. Its headquarters is located at the same address since its creation at Joaçaba, 355, in Saguapu neighborhood.<sup>25</sup>

The ANC Mission "is to call people of all nations to be disciples of Jesus Christ, to proclaim the everlasting Gospel contained in the three angels' messages (Revelation 14: 6-12), and to prepare the world for Christ's soon coming."<sup>26</sup> During its few years of existence, this conference has been fulfilling its mission and achieving success in all its projects. It has assisted the state of Santa Catarina and Brazil in accomplishing this very important feat of preaching to save, and will continue to develop programs, missions, and other activities.

Over the few years of ANC history some programs and ministries have stood out. These include evangelism and global mission departments, to which much effort and financial resources have been devoted. The purpose of the investment was to support these ministries, pastors, and members in carrying out public evangelism, harvesting, and reaching cities without an Adventist presence. In four years, hundreds of harvest weeks were held in 160 separate preaching points, reaching thousands of people.<sup>27</sup>

As a result of the efforts of these and other departments of the conference, in 2017 the membership increased to 18,290. Compared to the initial numbers (15,977), there was an increase of 2,313 people. That same year, the number of churches increased to 132 and 105 groups, in response to the growth and need of receiving new members.<sup>28</sup>

Since the opening of this administrative unit, 9,136 Bibles have been distributed, 129,160 Bible courses have been offered, and millions of leaflets and pamphlets have been delivered. In 2018 alone, 667 preaching points were established, 511 Bibles shared, and 3,450 Bible studies conducted. The Adventist presence was brought to 16 new Global Mission cities. Consequently, 57 new congregations were established.

The Youth Ministry has 114 Pathfinder clubs, 74 Adventurers clubs, 144 Adventist Youth Societies, and 74 Bases of the Project Geração [Generation] 148.<sup>29</sup>

The Women's Ministries is responsible for the formation and continuity of 136 prayer groups in the communities. Since the beginning of ANC activities, 1798 women have been invested in the project *Mulheres Espalhando Luz - MEL* [Women Spreading Light], (*MEL* means "honey" in Portuguese), which aims to involve women in social and missionary actions. They represent most Adventist members in the region. Always involved in the mission of saving, they actively participate in missionary fronts with the vision "Each one saving one" (E1S1). In 2018, 107 prayer groups were formed, and the number of women invested in the WSL Project was 2,873, accumulated from 2017.<sup>30</sup>

Regarding the establishment of new churches, 27 parcels of land were also purchased for the establishment of new churches and 52 churches began renovations or construction. To support the diverse needs of the Church, about \$ 1,500,000 was invested. In its first four years (2012-2015) tithing growth reached 39.08 percent and offerings 30 percent.<sup>31</sup>

In the educational field, many worked diligently to elevate and enhance spiritual values. Consequently, 691 students were baptized by virtue of the involvement of the servants of the E1S1 vision, which encourages members to use their gifts to carry the gospel message to others. Everyone can preach, either through a sermon or by a simple act of kindness. Through E1S1 there was also full involvement of church members. The positive results of the project encouraged South Brazil Union (SBU) to apply the E1S1 vision to its territory.<sup>32</sup>

The publications ministry has also advanced in the northern region of Santa Catarina. In the last four years approximately 335 students and permanent canvassers have worked in the region. The average distribution of books was 94,500 and 514,340 magazines from 2012 to 2015. In the summer and winter holidays of 2014 (January and July), 285 student canvassers sold about 50,793 books and magazines totaling approximately \$ 333,813,00<sup>33</sup>

As a result of so many campaigns, projects, and missionary actions, nearly 7,000 people were baptized in the last quadrennial, and the number of churches and groups grew by 22 percent, resulting in a 31 percent increase in districts. A large evangelistic investment was also made in cities without an Adventist presence, that is, in so-called global mission territories. Approximately 160 preaching points were organized, bringing peace, knowledge, and good news to the unreached. Consequently, 16 cities now have an Adventist presence, a victory for all who participated. The average number of pastors per member is now 1 to 501.<sup>34</sup>

Although the state of Santa Catarina is the cradle of Adventism in Brazil, growth has been static for decades. The best development of Adventism in the region came after the establishment of the administrative headquarters in the state, which made it possible for the leaders and members to connect, facilitating understanding, and attending to their needs. The growth came as a result of the increased involvement of members in personal evangelism in response to missionary mobilization initiatives. Investment in education also contributed, and the highlight was the foundation of Santa Catarina Adventist Academy (IAESC) in 2008.

Over the past few years ANC has received many blessings, but it has also experienced many challenges. Many of them have been defeated and some have yet to be achieved, such as reaching all cities without an Adventist presence. The continued preparation of new canvassers to replace those in the jubilation phase has also been a challenge. In the area of education, the priority is to maintain the spiritual differential with its mission *Educating to Save*, which is increasingly challenging today.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to strengthening members' involvement in CRM (Communion, Relationship, and Mission) through initiatives such as the Mana Project,<sup>36</sup> the field aims to inspire members to be more committed to Sabbath School, to the care and conservation of converts, and faithfulness in the return of tithes and offerings. These initiatives will also encourage the growth and regularity of givers and discipleship, and will seek to increase the number of people participating in a small group of leaders. Finally, encouraging them to multiply the number of churches to fulfill the mission is the supreme target of this institution.<sup>37</sup>

## Chronology of Administrative Officers

Presidents: Ezequias Guimarães (November 13, 2011- to April 5, 2013);<sup>38</sup> Apolo Streicher Abrascio (April 5, 2013- to July 23, 2014); Ronaldo Bertazzo (August 1st, 2014-).<sup>39</sup>

Secretaries: Apolo Streicher Abrascio (2011-2012); Charles Edson Rampanelli (2013-2016); Harry James Streithorst (2017-).

Treasurers: Everson Teixeira Braga (2011-2012); Elton Otero Bueno (2013-2017); João Ortiz (2018-).<sup>40</sup>

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40. Information about the ANC can be found on: <http://anc.adventistas.org/>; or the social medias - Facebook: @adventistas.amc and Youtube: Associação Norte Catarinense.?

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