Southwest São Paulo Conference (APSo) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Central Brazil Union (UCB). Its headquarters is located at St. Oswaldo Martins, 100, 18045-490, in Jardim Refúgio neighborhood, city of Sorocaba, state of São Paulo, Brazil.

APSo’s territory comprises the southwestern portion of the state of São Paulo. The conference is responsible for the regions of Sorocaba, Hortolândia, Tatuí, Piracicaba, Indaiatuba, Avaré, and Capão Bonito. Sorocaba, where the headquarters is located, is the fourth most populous region of the state (preceded by Campinas, Sao Jose dos Campos and Ribeirao Preto) and the most populous city in the southern of São Paulo, with an estimate of 679,378 inhabitants.

The territory covers 101 cities, with a total population of approximately 4,253,700 inhabitants. Currently, APSo serves 52 pastoral districts, 183 churches, 128 groups, and 35,937 baptized members. There is approximately one Adventist per 118 inhabitants in the territory. 758 workers serve the church. Among these, 181 work directly at the institution’s headquarters, with 79 employees, 30 workers, 59 ordained pastors, and 13 graduates.

The conference has seven educational institutions for basic education, five from elementary to high school, and two from early childhood education to elementary education. They are Hortolândia Adventist Academy, in the city of
Hortolândia, with 1,004 students; Itararé Adventist Academy, in Itararé, with 440 students; Piracicaba Adventist Academy, in Piracicaba, with 1,005 students; Sorocaba Adventist Academy, in Sorocaba, with 1,096 students; Tatui Adventist Academy, in Tatui, with 860 students; Indaiatuba Adventist Academy, in Indaiatuba, with 753 students; and Porto Feliz Adventist School, in the city of Porto Feliz, with 372 students. In all, there are 5,530 students enrolled, 254 teachers, and 179 other servers.

The conference also has an Adventist Training Center (CTA) in the city of Araçoiaba da Serra, with an area of 368,314.64 square meters, used for institutional events. There are four centers of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). They work in the cities of Itaberá, Apiaí, Araçoiaba da Serra, and Hortolândia, and help promote quality of life to poor communities.

Three well-known South American Division institutions are located in the conference. One of the three campuses of Brazil Adventist University (UNASP) and the headquarters of the Adventist Technology Institute (IATec) are in Hortolândia. Brazil Publishing House (CPB) is located in Tatui.

Origin of Seventh-day Adventist Work in the Conference Territory

In April 1895, in the Piracicaba River, the first Adventist baptism in Brazil was held. Pastor Frank Westphal baptized Guilherme Stein Jr., and soon after went on to Indaiatuba, where he organized the first Sabbath School on Brazilian soil.

In 1899 Rodolpho Zimmermann got to know the Adventist message when Pastor Frederick Weber Spies visited the city of Itararé. In January 1900 Spies baptized Zimmermann, and Zimmermann began to preach the Adventist message to the other inhabitants of that region. After these first missionary efforts, in May 1902, the Brazil Mission (the present-day Rio de Janeiro Conference) was elevated to the status of conference, with 900 members.

In February 1906 Spies baptized 13 people and organized a 36-member church in Itararé. This congregation is considered the third organized Adventist Church in the entire state of São Paulo. Pastor Emilio Holze stayed in the city to assist the new members and continue evangelizing. The Brazil Conference was reorganized, and the mission field started being administered by São Paulo Mission.

In 1907 the headquarters of Brazil Publishing House moved from the south of the country to the city of Santo André, where its employees founded “the first church within the premises of the publishing house which grew rapidly.” In 1913 the cities of Itararé and Santo André became the municipalities with the highest concentration of Adventists in the São Paulo Mission. In 1922 the mission gained the status of conference. The following year, 193 people were baptized. At the time the South Brazil Union (present-day Central Brazil Union) managed the church in the South of Brazil (Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná and Santa Catarina) and in São Paulo territory.

The Brazilian Revolution of 1930 occurred when opponents of President-Elect Júlio Prestes alleged electoral fraud. The revolution was led by three states of the federation, Rio Grande do Sul, Minas Gerais, and Paraíba, and drastically transformed the country’s political landscape. This situation affected even the smallest cities, such as Itararé.

On October 4, 1930, military troops started to arrive in Itararé. The shops closed, the squares were empty, and soldiers started supervising churches to hear what was spoken to the members. Many residents, including Adventists, fled to neighboring cities. On October 24 São Paulo inhabitants surrendered, and those who fled were able to return safely to their homes.

At that time, the Seventh-day Adventist church in Itararé operated at Rui Barbosa street. The number of members increased and soon the building became too small to continue hosting meetings and services. A new church was built in 1939, next to the Adventist school that was located on Amazonas Ribas Street. On September 21, 1939, the church was consecrated to God. Soon after, an evangelistic campaign was held that lasted at least 30 days, with meetings every night.

In 1949 a team of workers conducted evangelistic meetings in the city of Piracicaba. The meetings were held on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays, with an audience of about 500 people every night. On April 29, 1950, 23 people were baptized. The first Sabbath School in that city was organized, attended by at least 60 students, and every Sabbath more interested people arrived to see the project. Thus, in the city where the first Adventist baptism in Brazil took place, about 54 years later, a group of missionaries once again propelled the Adventist movement.

Until then, services in Piracicaba were held in small rented halls, because local members had not yet obtained enough money to purchase land where a church could be built. It was only in 1965 that Adventists in the city were able to gather enough resources to buy land, and start building the temple. Some time later construction started. In 1969 members started using the lower floor of the building and, in 1973, the upper floor. The dedication ceremony of the church took place in 1975.

In 1977 the São Paulo Conference became the largest Adventist conference in the world, surpassing 50,000 members. With this significant expansion, leaders concluded that it would be necessary to “divide to multiply.” A new field would have better conditions to meet the demand of the church in the interior of the state. On September 18 and 19, 1977, it was voted to divide the mission field in two. East São Paulo Conference was based in the city of São Paulo, and West São Paulo Conference was based in Campinas.

In 1985 steady growth prompted a reorganization of the territory, which became known as Central Brazil Union. Then,
in 1987, leaders reorganized the mission field in the east and west regions of São Paulo, which became official December 20, 1988. The division of the eastern region gave rise to the South São Paulo Conference (APS), and the division of the western region resulted in the Central São Paulo Conference (APaC), based in Campinas. The newly created West São Paulo Conference (APO) was based in the city of São José do Rio Preto.

The expansion of the church in the Central São Paulo Conference, which had 63 pastoral districts, 402 congregation, 46,132 members, and a territorial population of 8.7 million, made the Adventist church recognize once again the need to improve service to congregations and promote evangelism in the central and southwest regions of São Paulo. With the lessons learned in all the changes and adaptations previously made, the denomination started new plans, put into practice in 2009.

Organizational History of the Conference

On March 8, 2009, the Extraordinary Denominational Assembly of Central São Paulo Conference met to propose the formation of a new administrative headquarters in the city of Sorocaba. Later, on November 22, 2009, the Assembly of Organization and Installation of the Southwest São Paulo Conference was held, in which administrators and departments were appointed.

Southwest São Paulo Conference started its activities in 2010. When founded, it had 30 pastoral districts, 22,789 baptized members, 101 municipalities, and approximately 3.9 million inhabitants throughout the territory. There were already some health clinics, such as the Hortolândia Adventist Clinic and the Hortolândia Physiotherapy Unit. In addition, there were already some assistance centers to help children, such as the Day Care Center Bom Samaritano, in Apiaí; the Day Care Center Institute of Formation and Assistance for Children, in Itaberá; the Day Care Center Vinde a Mim, in Hortolândia; and the Lar Infantil Vovó Josefa, in Araçoiaba da Serra.

When created, the Southwest São Paulo Conference defined its mission as “reaching all people in APSO territory, inspiring and enabling our church members to preach the gospel, preparing them for Jesus return.” The institution’s vision was defined as “a faithful church, united in its doctrines and mission, known and committed to serving the community.”

Initially, the Southwest São Paulo Conference’s headquarters was established in a rented building in Sorocaba, located at Caracas, 846, in Jardim América neighborhood. However, on May 9, 2011, construction began on a permanent headquarters, with 4070 square meters, located at Oswaldo Martins 100, in the Jardim Refúgio neighborhood. On May 16, 2012 the new building was inaugurated.

The headquarters inauguration ceremony was attended by Ted Wilson, president of the General Conference; Erton Köhler, president of the South American Division; Domingos José de Sousa, president of the Central Brazil Union; Aurelino Aurélio Ferreira, president of the Southwest São Paulo Conference; Jeremias de Sousa Silva, then conference secretary; and Celestino José de Sousa, conference treasurer. They were joined by Carlos Dornelles, design engineer; Alessandra Maximiano, architect; and the former owner of the land, Mrs. Ivone, who made a point of honoring the moment. Attendees commemorated the missionary efforts that had shaped the conference.

Through the years, the Southwest São Paulo Conference team has worked with the South American Division in its efforts to spread the gospel. On May 15, 2010, the conference’s employees were involved in Hope Impact. In Tatuí alone, 30,000 books, 50,000 magazines, and 5,500 pieces of clothing were distributed. About 80 youth participated in a blood donation drive in the city.

Though Hope Impact, at least 4,500 people in Tatuí interested in studying the Bible have been identified. In the second half of 2010 the city conducted an evangelistic campaign aimed to reach these people. This campaign was held alongside other social projects, including an anti-smoking course. Initial expectations were surpassed, reaching the mark of 185 baptisms, in addition to another thousand people who participated in the course offered.

In June 2011, the Supermission project was carried out by young people from the southwest region of São Paulo. The youth of Sorocaba renovated houses, painted Bible scenes on walls, marched against smoking, distributed 25,000 books, 8 tons of food, and 13,000 pieces of clothing, planted trees, and delivered an ambulance to the Children’s Cancer Hospital. The ambulance was purchased with funds collected by recycling aluminum cans (31 thousand reais), together with a donation made by the conference. Other projects promoted by the division and carried out by the conference include the Caleb Mission Project, Vacation Bible School, and Breaking the Silence.

The conference ordained its first pastors to the ministry, with Pastor Hilton de Oliveira Leite, on November 26, 2011. The conference secretary; and Celestino José de Sousa, conference treasurer. They were joined by Carlos Dornelles, design engineer; Alessandra Maximiano, architect; and the former owner of the land, Mrs. Ivone, who made a point of honoring the moment. Attendees commemorated the missionary efforts that had shaped the conference.

In June 2011, the Supermission project was carried out by young people from the southwest region of São Paulo. The youth of Sorocaba renovated houses, painted Bible scenes on walls, marched against smoking, distributed 25,000 books, 8 tons of food, and 13,000 pieces of clothing, planted trees, and delivered an ambulance to the Children’s Cancer Hospital. The ambulance was purchased with funds collected by recycling aluminum cans (31 thousand reais), together with a donation made by the conference. Other projects promoted by the division and carried out by the conference include the Caleb Mission Project, Vacation Bible School, and Breaking the Silence. The conference ordained its first pastors to the ministry, with Pastor Hilton de Oliveira Leite, on November 26, 2011.

On August 6, 2016, in Hortolândia, Southwest São Paulo Conference leaders inaugurated the first African Adventist Church in Brazil. In the beginning, this church had at least 100 people of eight different nationalities. This is one of the many multicultural missionary initiatives operating in the territory of APSO.

Some lessons were learned throughout the Association’s journey. With the reorganization of the mission field and the creation of new churches in new districts, a new perspective on structural growth has emerged, and greater interaction between leaders and followers has become possible, at the regional and local levels.

The leaders of the Southwest São Paulo Conference will work so that the next divisions of the mission field have balance in several indexes, such as tithes and offerings, districts, churches, members, institutions, and number of schools and students. A major challenge for this advance is to promote solid growth with less spending, and an appropriate number of pastors and other paid employees. It is necessary to maximize resources, and expenditure
control is essential.41 Despite the challenges it faces, the conference praises God for the growth it has experienced.42

**Chronology of Administrative Leaders**


Treasurers: Celestino José de Sousa (2009-current).44

**SOURCES**


Associação Paulista Sudoeste [Southwest São Paulo Conference]. https://apso.adventistas.org/.


Data provided at the opening of Southwest São Paulo Conference and in the annual planning agenda of January 2010.

Data provided in the Ministerial collection of the Southwest São Paulo Conference, April 15, 2019.


Da Redação [From Editorial]. “Da Amazônia à Albânia” [From the Amazon to Albania]. *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], September 2011.


UNASP website. https://www.unasp.br/.
NOTES


4. Data provided by the secretary of Southwest São Paulo Conference, April 10, 2019.

5. Data provided by Adventist Church Management System. Online Church Secretary system, April 10, 2019.

6. Data provided by the HR of Southwest São Paulo Conference and Adventist Secretary Administration System, April 10, 2019.

7. Data provided by the Education Department of Southwest São Paulo Conference, April 11, 2019.

8. Data provided by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency of the Southwest São Paulo Conference, April 10, 2019.


10. Data provided by Luvercy Ferreira (responsible for the history of the Seventh-day Adventist church in the city of Itararé), April 16, 2019.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.


14. Data provided by Luvercy Ferreira (responsible for the history of SDA in the city of Itararé), April 16, 2019.


16. Ibid., 20-22.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 23-25.


21. Ibid., 3-4.


27. Data provided at the opening of Southwest São Paulo Conference and in the January 2010 annual planning agenda.

28. Collection of APSO’s communication and media department.

29. Ibid.

30. “Hope Impact is a program that encourages the practice of reading and provides a mass annual distribution of books on the part of the Seventh-


32. Ibid.


34. From Redação [From Editorial], “Eventos com propósito” [Events with purpose], Revista Adventista [Adventist Review], August 2011, 26.

35. “Caleb Mission project is a volunteer social service and witnessing program that challenges Adventist youth to dedicate their vacations to evangelism in places where there’s no Adventist presence, to strengthen the small congregations, and gain new people for the kingdom of God.” Accessed October 9, 2019, http://bit.ly/2HRpvR8; Da Redação [From Editorial], “Da Amazônia a Albânia” [From the Amazon to Albania], Revista Adventista [Adventist Review], September 2011, 25.

36. “Vacation Bible School is a very effective means of evangelism with children. They are attracted by the joyful and differentiated program, full of activities and participation.” Accessed January 22, 2020, https://bit.ly/2ty0XIS.


38. Data provided in the Ministerial collection of the Southwest São Paulo Conference, April 15, 2019.


40. Hélio Coutinho Costa (APSo secretary), email message sent to Carlos Flávio Teixeira (associate editor of ESDA), May 27, 2019.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.


44. More information about APSo can be found at the website: apso.adventistas.org, or in the social media - Facebook: @PaulistaSudoeste, Instagram: @adventistasapso, Twitter: @apsonoticias and Youtube: Associação Paulista Sudoeste.