



South Maranhão Mission headquarters in 2019.

Photo courtesy of South Maranhão Mission Archives.

South Maranhão Mission

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South Maranhão Mission (MSMa) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church located in the territory of the North Brazil Union Mission (UNB). It is headquartered at Avenue Bernardo Sayão 1300, Jardim Tres Poderes, 65903-250 Imperatriz, Maranhão, Brazil.

The mission field of MSMa comprises the southern region of the state of Maranhão. In 2018, the field had a total of 53,954 members spread across 536 congregations. With an estimated population of 3,059,544 inhabitants, the average in the region is of one Adventist per fifty-six people. In order to manage the ecclesiastical activities of the field, the South Maranhão Mission employs fifty-eight staff members of which there are thirty-six

ordained pastors, fifteen licensed pastors, five licensed workers, and two support employees.¹

The mission field operates five schools with a total of 2,312 students. They are *Colégio Adventista de Imperatriz* (Imperatriz Adventist Academy), located in the municipality of Imperatriz, with 805 students; *Escola Adventista de Imperatriz* (Imperatriz Adventist School), also in Imperatriz, with 360 students; *Escola Adventista de Porto Franco* (Porto Franco Adventist School), in Porto Franco, with 412 students; *Escola Adventista de Bacabal* (Bacabal Adventist School), in Bacabal, with 292 students; and *Escola Adventista de Santa Inês* [Saint Ines Adventist Academy], in Santa Inês, with 443 students.²

The Adventist Media Center–Hope Channel Brazil operates in the territory of the South Maranhão Mission as an open channel with a potential reach of just over 400,000 people, distributed across the cities of Imperatriz, Balsas, Dom Pedro, and Carolina.³

The Origin of the Adventist Work in the Mission Territory

Adventism arrived in Maranhão in 1922 due to the missionary work carried out by Firmo Marinho, an Adventist hairdresser from the state of Pernambuco.⁴ Working independently from any denominational entity, he started Sabbath gatherings with a group of people in the city of São Luís, the capital of Maranhão. Hans Mayr, a canvasser⁵ who pioneered the sale of Adventist publications in the Lower Amazonas Mission (now the North Para Conference), found these Adventists in 1927.⁶ At the same time, Pastor John L. Brown, then president of the Lower Amazonas Mission, conducted evangelistic meetings in São Luís. As a result of the meetings, twelve people were baptized and a small church of fifteen members was organized, the first in the field.⁷

In the 1930s, Adventist publications reached the village of Juçaral dos Saraivas, a neighborhood in the city of Vitorino Freire, in the countryside of Maranhão. There, Roger Wilcox from the North Coast Mission (now the Ceara Conference) baptized several people. Meanwhile, the new president of the Lower Amazonas Mission, Leo B. Halliwell, continued to support the work in the state. In 1935, upon arriving in the city of São Luís, Halliwell visited a small group where there were a few baptized members in the mission territory. Accompanied by the leader of this small company, Halliwell visited an elderly 99-year-old man interested in studying the Bible. During a Bible study with this man, he said he would help to build an Adventist church in that location. He fulfilled his commitment, before his death at the age of 101. Six years later, Halliwell returned to find a group of thirty-five people, of whom five were ready for baptism.⁸

Thus, after the inauguration of the first church in São Luís, Maranhão, other groups began to emerge in the countryside of the state.⁹ The canvasser Pedro Cunha Linhares contributed to this development, visiting places in the countryside of Maranhão such as Santa Inês, Bom Jardim, Chapéu de Couro, São Francisco, and Coqueiros, and presenting the Adventist message. Thanks to the work of these pioneers, membership growth by 1936 required the North Brazil Union Mission to reorganize. The pastoral districts in the states of Maranhão and Piauí became part of the North Coast Mission. Its headquarters were in the city of Fortaleza in the state of

Ceará.¹⁰

In 1940, the mission commenced plans to expand the Church into new locations further afield. To this end, a canvassing course was held in the city of Fortaleza for ten canvassers who carefully studied methods for proclaiming the Advent message through literature. By the end of the course, fifteen people were baptized by pastors Halliwell and Wilcox. Through preparation, encouragement, and the cooperation of workers, church members, and canvassers, the North Coast Mission continued to reach more people in the states of Ceará, Maranhão, and Piauí.¹¹ In 1949, in the small town of Parnarama, Maranhão, Pastor F. C. Pritchard preached a series of sermons to a group of people interested in the gospel. On the afternoon of April 8, 1950, seven people were baptized. Pritchard continued his evangelism work based from the small launch, *Luzeiro III*, which took him to Parnarama and the region of Matões.¹²

The idea of establishing a mission field of its own in the state of Maranhão arose around 1951 when the Central São Luís church was inaugurated. Year after year the Adventist membership grew through baptism. Adventist leaders viewed the growth with enthusiasm, and during annual meetings of Adventist church administrators, the creation of a new mission field to specifically meet the needs of the state of Maranhão was proposed.¹³ However, the proposal was not approved quickly.

Although, the work in Maranhão was progressing across the state, by 1960 a local mission had still not been created. In 1960, notable events pointed to the development of the work in the regions of Bacabal and Presidente Dutra. Pastors H. E. Walker and José Bessa attended the inauguration of the new church in the village of Ingá in the municipality of Presidente Dutra. Up to then, the services had been held in a wood and mud house covered with straw. In Bacabal, a region characterized by the great commercial rice movement, the Adventist message also prospered. On March 19, 1960, a group of fifty-four members was organized as a church. The pastor of the district, Raul Sersum de Lima, had already baptized twenty-four people toward a goal of fifty baptisms.¹⁴

Growth continued throughout the 1960s. On September 7, 1963, an Adventist church was dedicated in the city of Rosario. The president of the North Brazil Union Mission was present during the ceremony, as well as the president of the North Coast Mission. In addition to church members from Rosario and visiting friends, more than one hundred Adventists from São Luís also attended.¹⁵ Pastor João Wolff held a revival week in the city of Imperatriz in 1969. Earlier that year, Brother José Ponciano had done an extraordinary missionary work in the region, and as a result Sabbath School had reached more than 100 people by October. On the same occasion, Wolff also started the course *A Bíblia Fala* (The Bible Speaks), in which 110 people participated.¹⁶ All of this evangelistic led to significant church growth. Rafael Monteiro became responsible for the region in 1978. That year, about 200 people were baptized through his work in the municipality of Imperatriz.¹⁷

Over the following ten years, the Adventist missionary work continued to continuously expand in the state of Maranhão. As a result, during the North Coast Mission triennial, held from July 27 to 30, 1988, in the Central São

Luís church, the long-awaited Maranhão mission field was finally created by the UNB, receiving the name of Maranhão Mission (now the Maranhão Conference or AMa). At the time, there were around 20,000 Adventists in Maranhão, organized into more than 300 congregations in fifteen pastoral districts. The creation of the new mission was a blessing for the Adventist Church in the state, which could now expect more direct assistance from the UNB.¹⁸ In 1991 in the COHAB Anil district under the leadership of Carlos Franca, 1,039 people were baptized. It was a great achievement made possible through the collaboration of various missionary fronts!¹⁹

The ensuing years were also years of preparation and training for missionary outreach in the field. In 1997, for example, the mission promoted several meetings and training sessions, seeking to encourage and train its members and pastors. Among the church ministries benefited by the training was the personal ministries, led by Osmar Reis, personal ministries leader for the SAD at the time. On that occasion in addition pastors, more than 500 leaders were received training.²⁰ In December 1999, 284 people were baptized in two evangelism series coordinated by Belmiro Miranda. In the city of Vargem Grande, around 350 guests filled an auditorium every night to hear the message.²¹ In São Luís, evangelism led to the baptism of 1,411 in 1999.²²

By 2000, the Maranhão Mission had reached a membership of 70,296 Adventists.²³ This growth necessitated a reorganization of the mission to better serve the members and preach the gospel more effectively.²⁴

The Mission's Organizational History

In 2000, the UNB began to study the possibility of creating a new mission field. As a result, in 2005 the South Maranhão Mission was created with headquarters in the city of Imperatriz.²⁵ The reorganization occurred during meetings held on December 11 and 12, 2005. On that occasion, union secretary, José Clodoaldo Barbosa, informed the delegates who were present that the SAD had authorized, through vote 2004-253, the reorganization of the Maranhão Mission. He presented the proposal to create South Maranhão Mission, which was approved unanimously. Marlinton Souza Lopes, the then UNB president, called for the creation of the organizing committee and the first leadership appointments for the new field were defined.²⁶

Thus, MSMa started its activities in 2006, with Samuel Muniz Bastos as president, and José Carlos de Aguiar Bezerra and Edinaldo Pinto Martins as secretary and treasurer, respectively.²⁷ The field headquarters were established at Bernardo Sayão Avenue, no. 1,300, Jardim Três Poderes, Imperatriz, where it remains as of 2020. When it was established, the field registered a total of 38,363 Adventists, distributed in nineteen pastoral districts and 147 organized churches, within a population of 2,812,110 people. There was an Adventist school in the south region of the state, *Colégio Adventista de Imperatriz* (Imperatriz Adventist Academy).²⁸

With the mission's support, excellence in full-time education became a constant pursuit for the school. And the results soon began to be noticed. In 2009, Imperatriz Adventist Academy won the first place among private schools in the south region of Maranhão and among Adventist academies throughout Brazil in the National High School Exam (ENEM) conducted by the federal government.²⁹ The average test score of its students was quite

high. Sixteen students had best average scores for the essay portion of the test in the region, and a seventeenth student received the highest score for the essay.³⁰

The new South Maranhão Mission was challenged with nine Global Mission cities³¹—places which had no Adventist presence yet. Thus, the MSMa leadership sent pastors to the cities of Luiz Domingues, Altamira do Maranhão, and São Francisco do Maranhão.³² In March 2015, several small groups³³ sprang up in the city of São Francisco do Maranhão and, in October of the same year, three points of evangelism were inaugurated. After several series of evangelistic meetings in these places, sixty-seven people decided to be baptized. In the city of Luiz Domingues, several evangelistic series were also carried out that year. Finally, in Altamira do Maranhão health fairs³⁴ were run and small groups were organized. As a result of the work carried out by missionaries who accepted the challenge of spending a year in mission in these regions, by the end of 2015 an Adventist church had been built in each one with congregations on a regular basis.³⁵

On September 4 and 5, MSMa celebrated its ten-year anniversary. The occasion was marked by a camp meeting which attracted approximately three thousand people. Representatives of the South American Division and the North Brazil Union Mission were present. During the celebration, the leaders emphasized the importance of recognizing past efforts with gratitude for the legacy inherited. The importance of learning from overcome obstacles was also highlighted, and campers were encouraged to learn from the lessons of the past and to carry out gospel commission in the future.³⁶

From 2016 onward, the emphasis was on integrated evangelism projects already well consolidated in South American territory. In May 2017, for example, when the SAD's "Impacto Esperança" [Hope Impact] project²⁷ reached its ten-year anniversary, MSMa leaders and members carried out a series of activities, among them a movement to raise awareness of and fight against sexual abuse. On May 18, they met at the *Escola Costa e Silva* (Costa and Silva School), located in the city of Buritirana, sixty kilometers from Imperatriz, promoted the distribution of literature and gave lectures related to the theme. The deputy mayor of the local municipality spoke about the importance of the social actions carried out by the Adventist Church. Through this program and many others, MSMa staff members have been actively involved in evangelism.³⁸

Another project of great impact in South Maranhão was the *Missão Calebe* (Caleb Mission).³⁹ In 2018, volunteers renovated a support house for cancer patients in the city of Imperatriz. At the time the building, inaugurated in 2015, housed ninety-six people including patients and companions. In addition to the revitalization project, the Caleb Mission participants also gave Bible studies and carried out campaigns to collect mattresses and food for the people who were served by the institute.⁴⁰ Through actions like these, the Adventists in South Maranhão have been working in an integrated way to fulfil their mission.

Throughout its history, MSMa has been attentive to the peculiarities that characterize the Adventist work in its field. To promote the church's growth, training, capacitation, and evangelistic events are planned to correspond with local needs. Examples include forty *Equipes Distritais de Mordomia Cristã* (district Christian stewardship

teams or EDMC) scattered throughout MSMa and *Caravanas da Fidelidade* (loyalty caravans) which promote stewardship ministries. In addition, the mission's leadership organizes periodic celebrations such as *Acampamento de Pequenos Grupos* (small groups camp or Acampg) and *Acampamento de Líderes* (leaders camp or Lidercamp). The mission also maintains Project 1 + 1, a challenge launched by the personal ministries department, in which each member is encouraged to take the message to at least one person who does not know the gospel. The program's motto is "each one saving one, because God wants more." In addition to these programs, there are also many church planting.⁴¹

Although MSMa has experienced a high success rate among its many programs, the mission still faces some challenges. Among them is its large geographic area, the low Human Development Index (HDI), and the demographic void in the south region of Maranhão. These are all factors that require more investment in order to advance the work in the field. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), more than 50% of the population in the region lives with half of a minimum wage. This has a significant impact on members' ability to financially support the work of the Church. Despite financial difficulties, most of the members have shown loyalty to God in tithes and offerings. This is how the work has progressed, despite the scarcity of resources.⁴²

And although the challenges mentioned above continue to exist, progress has been made and plans for the future continue to be developed. For the coming years, MSMa intends to fulfill the goals that will allow it to achieve the status conference status. In addition, it plans to build an Adventist school in the municipality of Balsas, open eight new pastoral districts, create eighty new churches in neighborhoods and villages in its vast territory, and promote broadcast programs from the Adventist Media Center in several countryside cities with an open signal.⁴³ In the pursuit of such achievements, the MSMa leaders and members will continue steadfast in their mission to proclaim the Advent message to all people in their field, making disciples through communion, relationship, and mission.⁴⁴

Chronology of Administrative Managers⁴⁵

Presidents: Samuel Muniz Bastos (2006-2010), Gilberto dos Santos Ribeiro (2011-2014), Alexandre Meneses (2015-present).

Secretaries: José Carlos de Aguiar Bezerra (2006), Ozéias de Souza Costa (2007-2008), Elias Tamari F. da Silva (2009-2010), Alexandre de A. Meneses (2011-2014), Valmir Teixeira Barros (2015-2018), Laurentino Silva de Andrade (2019-present).

Treasurers: Edinaldo Pinto Martins (2006-2010), Roberto Batistas Barbosa (2011-2014), José de S. Miranda Júnior (2015-2018), Iran Vieira (2019-present).⁴⁶

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NOTES

1. Érica Tavares, MSMA journalist, interviewed via web by Êmili Viana dos Santos, ESDA writing assistant, June 17, 2020.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Emmanuel de Jesus, *A história do adventismo no Maranhão: 80 anos de história e milagres* [The Adventism History in Maranhão: 80 Years of History and Miracles], (São Luís, Maranhão, Colombia: Printing and Publishing Maia, 2002), 6, 23.
5. A Seventh-day Adventist Church evangelist canvasser is the missionary who “develops his ministry by acquiring and selling to the public the publications edited and approved by the Church, with the objective of transmitting to their fellow men the eternal Gospel that brings salvation, physical and spiritual well-being.” “Colportagem” [Canvassing], *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil)*, accessed February 4, 2020, <http://bit.ly/2J6tY1I>.
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8. “Com Cem Anos de Edade” [Being One Hundred Years Old], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], July 1935, 10-11.
9. Walter Jonathan Streithorst, *Minha Vida na Amazônia* [My Life in the Amazon], (Tatuí, São Paulo: Brazil Publishing House, 1993), 16-21.
10. Olga C. Storch, *Leo Halliwell na Amazônia* [Leo Halliwell in the Amazon], Santo André, (Tatuí, São Paulo: Brazil Publishing House, 1979), 78-79; Melvin Northrup, *Pão sobre as águas: a fantástica história de um missionário na Amazônia* [Bread over the waters: the fantastic story of a missionary in the Amazon] (Tatuí, São Paulo: Brazil Publishing House, 2005).
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12. “Parnarama e o Evangelho” [Parnarama and the Gospel], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], September 1950, 13.
13. “Nasce a Missão Maranhense: Um sonho de 37 anos” [The Maranhense Mission is born: A 37-year-old Dream], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], October 1988, 38.
14. “Nossa Seara” [Our Harvest], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], no. 8, year 55, August 1960, 27.

15. W. S. Lima, "Mais um Templo na Missão Costa-Norte" [Another Temple in the North Coast Mission], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], February 1964, 24.
16. Isaías Andrade, "Uninorte Notícias" [North Union Mission News], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], February 1970, 27-28.
17. "União Norte Brasileira em 1977" [North Brazil Union Mission in 1977], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], January 1978, 19.
18. Ibid.
19. "Mais de mil pessoas pela segunda vez" [More Than a Thousand People for the Second Time], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], August 1993, 34.
20. "Capacitação global" [Global Training], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], May 1997, 40.
21. "A Bíblia para o povo" [The Bible for the People], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], January 1999, 17.
22. "Rápidas" [Brief News], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], March 2000, 22.
23. "Maranhão Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Silver Spring, MD: The General Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000), 268.
24. Minutes of the South Maranhão Mission Organization and Installation Assembly, December 2005.
25. Ibid.
26. Minutes of the South Maranhão Mission, January 2006, vote no. 2006-002, Annex I.
27. Minutes of the South Maranhão Mission, January 2006, vote no. 2006-001.
28. "South Maranhão Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2007), 269.
29. The National High School Exam (ENEM) was created in 1998 and aims to evaluate the student's performance at the end of the basic schooling. "ENEM is used as a selection criterion for students who wish to apply for a scholarship in the University for All Program (PROUNI). In addition, about 500 universities already use the exam score as a selection criterion for the entrance into higher education, either by complementing or replacing the entrance exam." *Brazilian Ministry of Education*, "ENEM—Apresentação" [ENEM—Presentation], accessed February 4, 2020, <http://bit.ly/35XZGb7>.
30. Felipe Lemos, Jael Enéas, Cristiane Lüscher, Anita Leite, Elissa Kido, Tatiane Lopes, Charlise Alves, Cláudia Martins, Márcio Tonetti, Olivandro Maia and Wendel Lima, "Entre a cruz e o mercado" [Between the cross and the market], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], no. 1234, year 106 (February 2011): 24-27.

31. "Global Mission is the frontline mission branch of the Adventist Mission, a worldwide department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Global Mission projects start as local initiatives. It supports local frontline ministry initiatives in non-penetrated areas [by the Adventist Church] and helps to involve all church departments in this task." *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil)*, "O que é Missão Global" [What is Global Mission], accessed February 4, 2020, <http://bit.ly/35Wz9e0>.
32. Sabino Rocha, "Missionários são enviados a cidades sem presença adventista" [Missionaries are Sent to Cities Where There is No Adventist Presence], *Notícias Adventistas [Adventist News]*, March 18, 2015, accessed September 24, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2lp9IRh>.
33. "A Small Group is a group of people who meet weekly under the coordination of a leader aiming for spiritual, relational and evangelistic growth, with the goal of multiplication." "Pequenos Grupos" [Small Groups], *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil)*, accessed February 4, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2NtcXj7>.
34. "The Health Fair is a one, two or more days event, open to the public of all ethnicities and beliefs, without cost or profit. It is usually organized in public places such as gymnasiums, schools, parks, squares, and malls. The community is invited to participate and receive the benefits of the tests and instructions." Luiz Fernando Sella and Daniela Tiemi Kanno, *Manual da Feira de Saúde [Health Fair Manual]* (South American Division, 2015), 15.
35. Simone Joe, "Missão Global é a linha de frente da missão adventista no sul do Maranhão" [The Global Mission is the Frontline of the Adventist Mission in the South of Maranhão], *Notícias Adventistas [Adventist News]*, December 30, 2015, accessed September 25, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2lcqnr>.
36. Simone Joe, "Missão Sul Maranhense celebra 10 anos com grande campal" [South Maranhão Mission Celebrates 10th Anniversary with Big Camp Meeting], *Notícias Adventistas [Adventist News]*, September 10, 2015, accessed September 25, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2mRKUI>.
37. "The Hope Impact Project encourages reading and provides a huge annual distribution of books by Seventh-day Adventists in the territory of South America." "Impacto Esperança" [Hope Impact Project], *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil)*, accessed February 4, 2020, <https://bit.ly/34dZROO>.
38. Simone Joe, "Impacto Esperança: alunos recebem literaturas e palestra sobre abuso sexual" [Hope Impact: Students Receive Literature and Seminar About Sexual Abuse], *Notícias Adventistas [Adventist News]*, May 18, 2017, accessed September 23, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2klePvG>.
39. "The Caleb Mission Project is a voluntary, social service and testimony program that challenges young Adventists to dedicate their vacations to evangelism in places where there is no Adventist presence, to strengthen small congregations and win new people into the kingdom of God." "Missão Calebe 2020" [Caleb Mission Project 2020], *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil)*, accessed February 4, 2020, <http://bit.ly/2HRpvRi>.

40. Simone Joe, "Jovens voluntários revitalizam instituto de câncer no Maranhão" [Young Volunteers Revitalize Cancer Institute in Maranhão], Notícias Adventistas [Adventist News], August 2, 2018, accessed July 13, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3iVhqeS>.
41. Ibid.
42. Sâmia Renata, MSMA secretary assistant, message sent by email to Carlos Flavio Teixeira, ESDA associated editor, September 4, 2019.
43. Ibid.
44. Sâmia Renata, MSMA secretary assistant, message sent by email to Carlos Flavio Teixeira, ESDA associated editor, September 4, 2019.
45. "South Maranhão Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagersrtown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2007), 269; "South Maranhão Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2018), 242. For a more detailed list of all administrative leaders of the South Maranhão Mission, see the yearbooks from 2007 to 2018.
46. More information about the South Maranhão Mission can be found on the website: or on social networks —Facebook: @advsulma; Twitter: @AdventistasMsma; Instagram: @adventistassulmaranhao or YouTube: Adventistas Sul Maranhão [South Maranhão Adventists].

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