



Current North Rio Grande do Sul Conference headquarters.

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# North Rio Grande Do Sul Conference

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North Rio Grande do Sul Conference (Associação Norte Sul Rio-Grandense, ANSR) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Brazil and part of the South Brazil Union Conference (União Sul-Brasileira, USB). Its headquarters is on Pedro Adams Filho Ave., 3224, Zip Code 93410-038, in Pátria Nova neighborhood, in the city of Novo Hamburgo, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

## Territory and Statistics

The ANSR comprises the north and northeast regions of the state of Rio Grande do Sul and the Vale dos Sinos (Bell's Valley) in the same state. In 2019, there were 207 municipalities and an estimated population of 3,095,181

inhabitants in this territory. The Adventist Church was present in 85 of the municipalities in that region and serves 21,220 members and 247 congregations, of which 146 are churches and 101 groups. The average in 2019 was one Adventist per 146 inhabitants. The ANSR congregations are organized in 38 pastoral districts in order to serve members and advance the Adventist work in the best possible way.<sup>1</sup>

Seven Adventist schools exist on the ANSR territory: 1) Alvorada Adventist School (Escola Adventista de Alvorada), in the city of Alvorada, with 778 students; 2) Canudos Adventist School (Escola Adventista de Canudos), in Novo Hamburgo, with 410 students; 3) Erechim Adventist School (Escola Adventista de Erechim), with 181 students; 4) Esteio Adventist Academy (Colégio Adventista de Esteio), in Esteio, with 820 students; 5) Gravataí Adventist Academy (Colégio Adventista de Gravataí), in Gravataí, with 1766 students; 6) Novo Hamburgo Adventist Academy (Colégio Adventista de Novo Hamburgo), in Novo Hamburgo, with 522 students; and 7) Cruzeiro do Sul Adventist College (Instituto Adventista Cruzeiro do Sul, IACS), in Taquara, with 1427 students. In 2020, altogether, 5,904 students were served by the Adventist education network in this region of Brazil.<sup>2</sup>

TV Novo Tempo (Adventist Media Center – Brazil) operates in the North Rio Grande do Sul Conference territory as a strong ally in the preaching of the gospel. The TV programs are broadcasted in the cities of Erechim, Ronda Alta, Três Coroas, Passo Fundo, Carazinho, and Novo Hamburgo. An estimated nearly one million people in these six cities are reached with the Adventist message through the TV Novo Tempo.<sup>3</sup>

In 2020, the ANSR had a total of 112 employees. Of these, 57 are pastors.<sup>4</sup>

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

The history of the Adventist work in the territory of the North Rio Grande do Sul Conference began in the early 1890s when Adventism reached Brazil. Guilherme Frederico Kümpel, a German Adventist who immigrated to this part of Brazil in 1895, is considered this region's early Adventist pioneer. Soon after his arrival, a small wooden chapel was built in a place called Não-Me-Toque, in the municipality of Lagoa dos Três Cantos. In 1898, a school was also established in that place. Until this day, that region is popularly known as "Boa Vista do Guilherme" (Guilherme's Good view). The ANSR headquarters is currently located in Novo Hamburgo, some 280 km from Não-Me-Toque.<sup>5</sup>

In the mid-1890s, an entire Baptist community was converted to Adventism in Ijuí, some 130 km from Não-Me-Toque.<sup>6</sup> In November 1897, the pioneer pastor Huldreich Ferdinand Graf established an Adventist Church in Ijuí. That church was the first organized Adventist Church in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. A month later, the second Adventist church was established in Santa Cruz do Sul. In the following year (1898), Pastor Graf baptized 41 people in Passo Fundo, and in October of that same year, a church was organized in Não-Me-Toque. Thus, the first and third Adventist churches organized in the state of Rio Grande do Sul are currently located in the territory of the North Rio Grande do Sul Conference.<sup>7</sup>

From then on, the Adventist message spread quickly in that region. In 1904, to accommodate the needs of the growing Adventist community, the Adventist leaders decided to organize an administrative unit that is currently known as Rio Grande do Sul Conference (Associação Sul Rio-Grandense, ASR). The newly established conference's headquarters was on the farm where the then Taquary Training School (Colégio Missionário) was previously established,<sup>8</sup> in the municipality of Taquari, in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul. As both the conference's headquarters and the school were on the same property, the conference was established under the name of School Society of the Seventh-day Adventists in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (Sociedade Escolar dos Adventistas do Sétimo Dia do estado do Rio Grande do Sul).<sup>9</sup>

In 1913, the conference's headquarters was moved from Taquari to Porto Alegre and the Adventist school in Taquari was closed. In meantime, the Adventist work was advancing in the north of the state. In 1915, small groups of Adventists were established in Novo Hamburgo, Erechim, Taquara, and São Leopoldo.<sup>10</sup> In 1920, Pastor Augusto Rockel organized two congregations in the region of Palmeira das Missões.<sup>11</sup> Another milestone for the Adventist work in that territory came in 1927 when the Adventist church was organized in Erechim, which about two years later had 53 members.<sup>12</sup>

The late 1920s witnessed great advance of the Adventist work in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. In 1927, Pastor Abraham Classen Harder conducted a series of Bible conferences in the city of Taquara, where several Adventist families, including the famous Adventist family Bergold, already resided. Pastor Harder shared the message in German because there was a large community of Teutonic origin in that city. Harder had the support of the German pastors Otto Keppke, Siegfried Hoffmann, and Huldreich F. Graf. The series started on December 7, 1927 and around 400 people attended the meetings daily.<sup>13</sup> In the following year, Pastor Harder purchased with his own resources a farm in Taquara that belonged to the Bergolds. There, together with his wife Mary, he established a boarding school Taquara Academy (Colégio Cruzeiro do Sul), currently known as Cruzeiro do Sul Adventist College (Instituto Adventista Cruzeiro do Sul, IACS). In its early years, the school was not run by the Church, but all of its teachers were Adventists.<sup>14</sup>

During the 1930s, the Adventist education thrived in that region. In addition to Taquara Academy, which offered elementary and high school education, there were also Adventist primary schools in the municipalities of Ijuí and Esteio. In 1937, the Esteio school, then led by Professor Lucy Scheffel, already served 35 children, 29 of whom were children from non-Adventist families.<sup>15</sup> In that same year, the Ijuí school was already considered a benchmark school for Adventists in Rio Grande do Sul and for the South Brazil Union Conference because of its infrastructure.<sup>16</sup>

During the following decade, the Adventist message advanced in other places of Rio Grande do Sul. For example, in Passo Fundo, in 1942, Pastor Araceli Melo and Eugênio Weidle held a series of Bible conferences for six weeks. As a result, at the end of the series, around 50 people became interested in the Adventist message.<sup>17</sup> Visits and Bible studies continued after the series and a Sabbath School was established with more than 80

members in Passo Fundo. Later, another 12 people were baptized.<sup>18</sup> The Adventists of Passo Fundo initially met in rented halls and later, in 1950, the cornerstone of the new church building was laid. The construction works lasted two years, and the Passo Fundo Adventist temple was inaugurated on September 20, 1952.<sup>19</sup>

In the following years, the Adventism was consolidated in other municipalities, such as Novo Hamburgo. Although that city already had had a small group of Adventists since the 1910s, the Adventist work did not progress significantly there until about 40 years later. In 1953, Antônio José Francisco and his family, who were Adventists, settled in the countryside of Novo Hamburgo, in the Canudos neighborhood. Antônio began to preach about the return of Christ to his neighbors and to other people in the community. It did not take long before the first people interested in the Adventist message appeared. As a result of the work of that Adventist pioneer, in 1956, there was already a group of 93 people who met every Sabbath to worship God.<sup>20</sup>

On April 9, 1960, Pastor Enoch de Oliveira, assisted by a group of Bible workers, began a series of conferences in Petrópolis neighborhood, which was considered an upper middle class community in Novo Hamburgo.<sup>21</sup> The series of Bible conferences resulted in the establishment of a new Adventist congregation in that neighborhood. As a result of Pastor Enoch series the enrollment at the Novo Hamburgo church Sabbath School increased from 93 to 160 participants.<sup>22</sup> On December 26, 1964, the Petrópolis Adventist church building was inaugurated, the then largest Adventist church building in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.<sup>23</sup>

Pastor Arno Köhler held a new series of Bible conferences in the Novo Hamburgo region in September 1966. The efforts were focused this time on Canudos neighborhood. The series was carried out in partnership with Radio School (Escola Radiopostal)<sup>24</sup> that broadcasted the “The Voice of the Prophecy” program.<sup>25</sup> For two Sabbath, the Adventist members of Novo Hamburgo distributed invitations in the neighborhood of Canudos to join the program at Radio School. On the third Sabbath, 200 people were registered for the Bible course at Radio School. Pastor Köhler’s Bible series began a month later. And as a result of these evangelistic initiatives, a new Adventist congregation was established in the city of Novo Hamburgo.<sup>26</sup>

Adventist groups were established in the tourist city of Gramado. In 1968, the Rio Grande do Sul Conference administrators visited the city to find land for the construction of the Adventist church.<sup>27</sup> Establishment of new congregations contributed to the successful growth of the Adventist work in Rio Grande do Sul. In 1970, there were already 20 pastoral districts in that state, including cities like Novo Hamburgo, Taquara, Passo Fundo and the district of Cruzeiro do Sul Adventist College.<sup>28</sup> Just in the city of Taquara, for example, there were already four Adventist churches, in addition to the Taquara Academy’s congregation.<sup>29</sup>

During the 1970s, one of the most prominent missionary fronts was The Voice of Prophecy program (A Voz da Profecia). People who were invited to listen to the program were also invited to enroll in the Radio School free Bible course. The Voice of the Prophecy directors in conferences and missions visited the interested Radio School participants and invited the community to watch the series of Bible studies. That was a successful method of sharing the gospel. For example, a series of Bible conferences was successfully held in Alvorada and

Gramado that still did not have Adventist presence.<sup>30</sup> Efforts were made to also reach the cities that still had only a few Adventist members, such as Gravataí.<sup>31</sup> During 1976 and 1977, Pastor Wilmar Borba held a series of Bible conferences in Gravataí that resulted in several baptisms and the establishment of an Adventist congregation with 75 members in that city.<sup>32</sup> In September 1978, another series was held in the municipalities of Vacaria and Sapiranga.<sup>33</sup> Another city reached by the Adventist message at that time was Igrejinha, which was considered a strong Lutheran refuge, located 14 kilometers from Taquara. In that city, the evangelistic work was developed by the Cruzeiro do Sul Adventist College students who, every Sabbath, went to that region to distribute Adventist leaflets and offer Bible studies.<sup>34</sup>

In 1980, another municipality reached by the Adventist message preaching was Parobé, located around nine kilometers from Taquara. There, the Adventist work began through the involvement of the Taquara church members with students and teachers of Cruzeiro do Sul Adventist College. Over time, contacts with those interested to know the Adventist message were made, and a small Adventist congregation was established in Parobé.<sup>35</sup>

In late 1981, an Adventist church was inaugurated in the city of Sapucaia do Sul. Until that year, that was the only city in the Porto Alegre metropolitan region without Adventist presence. One of the tools used for the evangelization of that city was the How to Quit Smoking program,<sup>36</sup> taught by the doctors Lutero Renck, Elias Morshe, and Jair Oliveira. After the health program, Pastor Aldrovando Araújo held a series of Bible conferences, with an average attendance of 400 people every day.<sup>37</sup> Soon an Adventist church was inaugurated in the Porto Alegre with around 160 people enrolled in the Sabbath School and 110 baptized members.<sup>38</sup>

Lay members have always carried the Adventist message to new places. For example, in October 1981, Carlos and Euclides Sá and Amilton Menezes, members of the Miraguaí Church, started broadcasting a radio program called "A Voz da Mocidade" (The Youth's Voice). The program was broadcasted on the municipality of Tenente Portela radio and reached listeners in both Rio Grande do Sul and the state of Santa Catarina and even in Argentina. The program included songs, Bible trivia, and lessons from the Bible course called "Encontro com a Vida" (Encounter with Life). Still in its first year of activities, "A Voz da Mocidade" (The Youth's Voice) yielded good results, including the baptism of 17 new members.<sup>39</sup> Realizing the success obtained through the radio program, Amilton Menezes established the Maranata Network of Radio Programs (Rede Maranata de Programas de Rádio) in 1985 that included the Adventists youth in the region.<sup>40</sup>

The Adventist education was another missionary front that contributed to the rapid growth of the Church in the 1980s. For example, in February 1987, the new building of the Novo Hamburgo Seventh-day Adventist School (Escola Adventista de Novo Hamburgo), currently named as Novo Hamburgo Adventist Academy (Colégio Adventista de Novo Hamburgo) was inaugurated. The building had been under construction since 1981 and, when it was inaugurated, was considered "the most beautiful among the school buildings in the city."<sup>41</sup> In 1987, the state of Rio Grande do Sul had 33 Adventist schools, 11 of which offered elementary education.<sup>42</sup>

In November 1989, the Rio Grande do Sul Conference held its 36th Triennial Assembly in the city of Santa Maria. In that year, the Rio Grande do Sul Conference had 32,500 Adventist members and 285 congregations. However, at least 187 municipalities in the countryside of the state, mainly in the north and northwest, still did not have an Adventist presence. Even so, the Adventist Church was steadily growing. Due to the distance of the countryside of the state to the capital Porto Alegre (where the Conference's headquarters was located), the establishment of a new administrative unit was necessary to manage the work in another part of the state. At the 36th Assembly of the Rio Grande do Sul Conference, the delegates voted to request the South Brazil Union Conference and the South American Division to consider reorganizing the Rio Grande do Sul mission field.<sup>43</sup>

The 1990s began with a strong emphasis on Global Mission<sup>44</sup> in Rio Grande do Sul. Several cities and neighborhoods in large cities were reached by the Adventist message. In Novo Hamburgo, for example, in 1992, 100 people were baptized in the Santo Afonso neighborhood, in the city's South Zone, where there was no Adventist presence until then, and a church was established there. The neighborhood of Vila Vistal, in the pastoral district of Canudos, in Novo Hamburgo, was also evangelized during the same evangelistic campaign in 1992 and a congregation of around 150 people was established there, meeting in a rented hall.<sup>45</sup>

In 1992, the Rio Grande do Sul Conference purchased a radio station in the city of Sapiranga. Due to its privileged location, the radio could reach a vast area, including the cities closest to Porto Alegre.<sup>46</sup> In November 1993, the city of Palmeira das Missões started to host Palmeira das Missões Adventist Children's Home (Lar Adventista Infantil de Palmeira das Missões). That Children's Home operated under the Adventist Development and Relief Agency International.<sup>47</sup> The Home was operated by the Church until 2014, when it came under the jurisdiction of the municipality of Palmeira das Missões.<sup>48</sup>

The 1990s were also marked by several advances in the area of Adventist education. On June 26, 1994, for example, Esteio Adventist Academy (Colégio Adventista de Esteio) new building inauguration took place, which at that time served a total of 820 elementary and high school students. Since then, this school, established in 1929, has an area of 2,500 m<sup>2</sup> and has classrooms, libraries, administrative rooms, multi-sport gymnasiums, an auditorium, and a music conservatory. With that new structure, Esteio Adventist Academy was at the time, the largest school in the field Rio Grande do Sul Conference.<sup>49</sup>

## The Conference Organizational History

The various inaugurations of churches, schools, and other Adventist institutions in the state of Rio Grande do Sul provided evidence of the successful growth of the Adventist Church in that part of Brazil. In 1993, the field reached the mark of 33,708 members,<sup>50</sup> number that increased to 34,841 members in 1994.<sup>51</sup> By the end of 1995, there were 35,806 Adventists in the region. However, the Church growth was concentrated in certain regions of the state and there were many municipalities in Rio Grande do Sul without Adventist presence. This made the need to create a new administrative unit in that state urgent.<sup>52</sup>

During the 38<sup>th</sup> Triennial Assembly of the Rio Grande do Sul Conference between December 20 and 23, 1995, Western Rio Grande do Sul Mission (Missão Ocidental Sul Rio-Grandense, MOSR) was created in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Pastors José Elias Zanotelli and Wilson Hanelt were elected president and secretary-treasurer of the new mission.<sup>53</sup> Western Rio Grande do Sul Mission was officially established on February 26, 1996.

At the beginning of the work of this new administrative unit, there were 7,657 Adventists in its territory, gathered in 92 congregations, organized in 13 pastoral districts. In that region, 33 evangelist canvassers worked,<sup>54</sup> and there were 14 Pathfinder clubs,<sup>55</sup> and 904 students in the Adventist schools. At that time, the Adventist Church was already present in 179 cities. The first headquarters of the new Mission was on Benjamin Constant street, 790, downtown neighborhood of the municipality of Ijuí.<sup>56</sup>

Since its establishment, the Western Rio Grande do Sul Mission has been fully engaged in the Adventist mission, especially with the initiatives to reach cities and neighborhoods where there was no Adventist presence. In 1996, one of the projects to reach cities was “Missão Global 2000” (Global Mission 2000) that involved each district pastor and his team. Through this project, several cities without an Adventist presence were reached, including, for example, the municipalities of Crissiumal, Santa Maria, Santa Rosa, Guarani das Missões, and Alegrete. The evangelistic work was led by the congregations and the Mission helped with leaflets, invitations, posters, Bibles, Bible courses, and multimedia equipment.<sup>57</sup> In 1996, plans were made for at least 74 cities to be reached by the Church by 2000.<sup>58</sup>

The results of these campaigns began to bear the first fruits in the following year (1997) when the Mission reported that 807 people were baptized by the end of 1996. Western Rio Grande do Sul Mission leaders have also focused on other evangelistic fronts, including Adventist education. For example, in 1997, the construction of the new building for Erechim Adventist School was already in progress.<sup>59</sup>

In 2005, the Western Rio Grande do Sul Mission headquarters was transferred to Barão do Rio Branco St., 489, downtown of Ijuí. At that time, the Mission had 8,918 members and 35 organized churches.<sup>60</sup> On April 2, 2006, more than 600 people from the 19 regions that comprised Western Rio Grande do Sul Mission filled the Municipal Theater of the city of Santo Ângelo to participate in a program called “Reencontro” (Reunion).<sup>61</sup> The believers, who participated in the 40-day spiritual journey of dawn prayer (from February to April), gathered together for praise and testimonies. That initiative helped to further strengthen the Church in its mission to preach the gospel and, in that same year, two new churches were established, in the neighborhoods of Alto da Boa Vista and Jóquei, in the city of Santa Maria.<sup>62</sup>

In 2006, the Mission’s leadership also promoted a project entitled “PODER” (Power) that was designed to encourage the Adventists in the region to become more involved in evangelism. The project’s name referred to five different initiatives: Small Groups,<sup>63</sup> Intercessory Prayer, Missionary Pairs, Public Evangelism, and Bible Class Meetings.<sup>64</sup> In addition to this project, during the 2000s, the Missionary School (Escola Missionária) program was promoted as part of the PODER project. This program began to be put into practice in 2009, with the

participation of 1,000 lay members, including 600 Bible instructors and 400 Small Group leaders.<sup>65</sup> Over the decade, initiatives as those yielded their fruits, and so the Western Rio Grande do Sul Mission had 10,015 members in the early 2010.<sup>66</sup>

In November 2012, the Western Rio Grande do Sul Mission headquarters were moved to São Cristóvão St., 618, in the Hammarston neighborhood, in Ijuí.<sup>67</sup> To accommodate the growth of the Adventist Church in the region, on August 27, 2017, the South Brazil Union Conference steering committee voted the proposal to reorganize the Western Rio Grande do Sul Mission and sent it to the South American Division. The division approved the proposal during its Annual Council on November 3-7, 2017.<sup>68</sup>

The reorganization allowed the Western Rio Grande do Sul Mission to start serving the municipalities in the north and northwest of Rio Grande do Sul, as well as the Vale do Sinos region. The mission's name was changed to North Rio Grande do Sul Mission (Missão Norte Sul Rio-Grandense) on May 4, 2018.<sup>69</sup> The administrative headquarters was moved to Pedro Adams Filho street, 3224, Pátria Nova neighborhood, in the city of Novo Hamburgo.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the administrative changes, the Mission maintained its focus on preaching the gospel. In 2018, the Adventist message was preached on more than 700 locations during the Holy Week. The same year, during the Impacto Esperança (Hope Impact) project,<sup>71</sup> more than 328 thousand missionary books were distributed free of charge.<sup>72</sup> Besides that, the Caravana da Esperança (Caravan of Hope)<sup>73</sup> passed through four cities Alvorada, Gravataí, Passo Fundo, and Taquara, attracting thousands of people to listen to the truths of the gospel.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to evangelistic campaigns, the Mission holds other community-based programs. In April 2019, for example, it inaugurated the "Espaço Vida e Saúde" (Life and Health Center) center of influence with the goal of providing the community with physical, mental and spiritual health care. The center is located on Bento Gonçalves St., 1426, in Novo Hamburgo, and offers services such as massage therapy, Pilates, and family therapy. In this center of influence, training courses are also offered in several areas, such as the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) classes, music therapy, healthy cooking classes, and English language classes.<sup>75</sup>

The Mission has strong Adventurers<sup>76</sup> and Pathfinders clubs for children and youth of the Church to guide them in service to God.<sup>77</sup> Between June 14 and 16, 2019, the "*Instacamp*" - a Campori<sup>78</sup> done on Instagram - was done with the theme "Conectados com Cristo" (Connected with Christ). 36 Club leaders and 71 Pathfinders participated.<sup>79</sup>

In April 2019, the Mission's leadership laid the foundation stone for a new administrative headquarters on the street corner between 5 de Abril and 25 de Julho Sts., 46, in the city of Novo Hamburgo. The new headquarters and other plans seek to meet the growing demands of the Adventist work in the region. On November 24, 2019, during the first Quadrennial Assembly of the North Rio Grande do Sul Mission, the Mission received conference status along with a new name - North Rio Grande do Sul Conference (Associação Norte-Sul-Rio-Grandense).<sup>80</sup>



North Rio Grande do Sul Conference's plans for the future include reaching many municipalities in its territory still without an Adventist presence, expanding the work in the most populous countryside cities with small Adventist presence, and consolidating the work across the region. In addition, plans for the coming years also involve building projects, among them the conclusion of the renovations of Alvorada and Esteio school, the starting of the construction of the new facilities of Novo Hamburgo Adventist Academy, and the completion of the new Conference administrative headquarters. The North Rio Grande do Sul Conference remains firm to its commitment of "leading the Church to act in accordance with the will of God."<sup>81</sup>

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

Presidents: José Elias Zanotelli (1996-2000); Ênio dos Santos (2000-2004); Moisés Mattos (2004-2006); Ilson Arlei Geisler (2006-2010); Elieser Canto Vargas (2010-present).

Secretaries: Wilson Hanelt (1996-1997); Demir Dener di Berardino (1998-2002); Jose Pinto Garcia (2003-2005); Valdilho Quadrado (2006); Jose Pinto Garcia (2007-2008); Sandro Rogerio Fagundes (2009); Valdilho Quadrado (2010); Derli Agostin (2011); Alex Oliveira Palmeira (2012); Elieser Ramos (2013-2019); Walter Teixeira de Lima (2019-present).

Treasurers: Wilson Hanelt (1996-1997); Demir Dener di Berardino (1998-2002); Iva Batista de Souza (2003-2005); Marlon de Souza Lopes (2006); Josias Souza da Silva (2007-2008); Elton Otero Bueno (2009); Davi Contri (2010); Elton Otero Bueno (2011-2012); Everson Teixeira Braga (2013-2014); Joao Rodrigues Ortiz Jr (2015-2019); Harlei Queiroga (2019-present).<sup>83</sup>

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