East Mato Grosso Conference

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East Mato Grosso Conference (Associação Leste Mato-Grossense or ALM) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church located in the territory of West Central Brazil Union Mission (Uniao Centro Oeste Brasileira or...
East Mato Grosso Conference is headquartered at Dra. Celestina Botelho Street, block 1, lot 2, sector B, Zip Code 78053-770, in the Morada do Ouro II neighborhood in the city of Cuiabá in the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil. Its missionary field covers the eastern part of the state of Mato Grosso with a total population of 1,365,653 inhabitants. Currently, ALM registers 14,307 members spread in 26 pastoral districts with 90 organized churches and 75 groups, a total of 165 congregations. The average in the region is one Adventist per 95 inhabitants.

ALM has a total of 3,762 students in the four institutions of the Adventist Educational Network in its territory, which are: Centro América Adventist Academy in Cuiabá with 620 students; CPA Adventist Academy in Cuiabá with 1,693 students; Natalia de Paula Arruda Adventist Academy, known as Porto Adventist Academy, also in Cuiabá with 768 students; and Rondonôpolis Adventist Academy in the city of Rondonópolis with 701 students.

The field is also served by TV Novo Tempo [Hope Channel Brazil] network, whose signal is openly broadcast in the cities of Rondonópolis (channel 30), Canarana (channel 5), Barra do Garças (channel 6), Pontal do Araguaia (channel 6) and the metropolitan region of Cuiabá (channel 59). The number of potential viewers in these regions is of 770,723 people.

To meet the needs of this missionary field, East Mato Grosso Conference has 810 employees and 76 pastors. Among these 55 are credentialed pastors, of whom 46 work as district or assistant pastors, one works as a chaplain and eight are allocated to administrative functions. The other 21 are licensed pastors, among which are 14 district or assistant pastors, six chaplains and one works in administrative functions.

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

The origin of Adventist work in the state of Mato Grosso dates to the early 1920s when canvassers Antônio Souza and Egídio Machado were sent to work in the southern region of the state. At the same time, Pastor Max Rohde visited the city of Entre Rios, where he organized the first Sabbath School in the region with approximately 10 members. Later, Pastor Rohde met a group of Sabbathkeepers at a site “in the middle of a huge virgin forest” in the region and organized another Sabbath School class with 20 members. The first baptism ceremony recorded in the territory took place in 1921 in the city of Ponta Porã. In the same year (1921), Mato Grosso Mission (presently South Mato Grosso Conference) was established with Max Rohde as president and the only licensed minister. The mission headquarters was then located in the city of Campo Grande and covered the territory that today corresponds with the states of Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul which, back then, formed a single state.

In 1932, a Uruguayan canvasser named Longino Niz was sent to the city of Cuiabá at a time when there were no Adventists in that city. Parallel to this event, a girl called Iracema, the daughter of a lady named Inês, bought a New Testament book from a classmate who had found it in a trash can. The money Iracema used to purchase the NT book had been given by her mother so that she could buy something to eat during the break between classes. Sometime later, when canvasser Longino Niz knocked on the door of that family and made an offer of his materials, Iracema’s mother immediately exclaimed: “Iracema, it is just as that little book says!” Without understanding much, the canvasser wanted to know which book it was she was talking about. It was then that they brought the New Testament and showed it to Brother Longino. Noticing their interest, Longino offered to study the Bible with the family and, straight away, they studied the first lesson together.

God blessed the canvasser’s work and, after some studies, Inês and two of her daughters were baptized on the banks of the Cuiabá River by Pastor Wilcox, who was then president of the former South Brazil Union Conference (present Central Brazil Union Conference). With God’s blessing, several other people were baptized on the banks of that river, including the first canvasser from the state of Mato Grosso named Jerônimo Rocha. Nine years later, in 1941, the first Seventh-day Adventist Church was established in the city of Cuiabá.

The Adventist work continued to advance in several ways in the state of Mato Grosso. In the education area, on March 15, 1943, regular classes at the first Adventist Academy in the state began. This academy was located in the city of Várzea Grande, neighboring Cuiabá. At the end of that same year, the city of Várzea Grande already had at least one Sabbath School with about 50 members and a Primary School with 47 enrolled students. It was in this city that a religious priest, intimidated by the rapid advancement of the Adventist message, visited the inhabitants of the city from house to house, trying to convince them not to attend Adventist meetings any more, recommending that they return to their original church. However, many defended the new faith through biblical arguments and then rejected the clergyman’s advice.

At the end of the following decade, during April 1958, the city of Cuiabá was the stage for a large series of evangelistic meetings held by Pastor G. G. de Oliveira. As a result, 59 people were baptized and many others decided to prepare for the next baptism ceremony. As the work progressed in Cuiabá, it was necessary to renovate the Church building in that city in order to receive both new and old members. That year, at least 180 people attended the Sabbath School meetings in that city, and about 200 people attended regular worship services.

A few years later, the Adventist message reached another city in the region. In 1966, the families of Antônio Ambrosio Filho and Luciano Pereira da Silva arrived in the city of Barra do Bugres. These two Adventist families soon formed a group. The following year, more Adventist families arrived in that city and joined that small group. Not long after, in the waters of a ranch called “Córrego Vermelho” [“Vermelho Stream”], the first baptism was performed as a result of the work done by those brethren. Due to the growing number of people who attended the meetings, in
The Conference Organizational History

With the advancement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church evangelistic work in that region, the need to reorganize the Mato Grosso Mission through the reconfiguration of its missionary field was recognized and took place from November 2 to 4, 1979, during the XVI Biennial Assembly of Mato Grosso Mission in the city of Cuiabá. During that meeting, they approved the reorganization of the Mission as South Mato Grosso Mission (presently South Mato Grosso Conference), which was headquartered in Campo Grande, in addition to the establishment of the new Mato Grosso Mission, then headquartered in Cuiabá. At the time, both administrative units were part of the territory of South Brazil Union Conference (now the Central Brazil Union Conference).

The office of the new administrative unit was initially located at 3682 São Sebastião Avenue in the Santa Helena neighborhood. The Adventist Church in the region then had 4,988 members distributed in 15 churches and organized in seven districts: Barra do Garças, Cáceres, Cuiabá (Central), Cuiabá (Porto), Rondonópolis, Sinop, and Várzea Grande. The first president of the field was Pastor Antenor Cruz da Costa, with Jairo de Oliveira serving as secretary-treasurer.

The first temple inauguration after the establishment of the new administrative field took place in 1980 in the city of Pedra Preta. That same year, 686 people were baptized in the new Mission field. The following year (1981), another 691 people were baptized, with an average of 98 people baptized per pastoral district. During those first two years, the Church received land through a donation from the city of Cuiabá, where the headquarters building of the administrative unit was later built. At the end of this two-year period, the Mission was already serving about 6,352 Adventists, with 18 churches organized throughout its territory.

Later, the administrative unit received a donation of an area of 25,000 m² for the construction of a new temple, a school, a pastoral house, a house for teachers, and a vegetable garden to meet the need of agricultural practices in the future school. Furthermore, the city of Cuiabá donated a building to the Church that became an Adventist elementary school. The Central Adventist Church in Cuiabá was also built in the following years as well as school buildings and the Mission headquarters. During the same period, the cornerstone of Centro América Adventist Academy was launched in Cuiabá.

Notwithstanding, there have been challenges as well. Until May 1996, there were 21 cities with no Adventist presence in the entire state of Mato Grosso. In order to meet this challenge, a meeting of Global Mission volunteer leaders took place that same year in which they were trained for more effective missionary work. This initiative was blessed by God, and it worked. In the following years, Adventist work continued to progress. Such was the progress that, in 2004, the number of members was approximately 27 thousand with about 105 congregations throughout the territory which had a population contingent of 2,572,262 inhabitants. The data shows that in the 20 years or so of the Mission history, the Adventist Church has grown and become strong in the region, with many more people having access to the Gospel message.

As of August 2004, Mato Grosso Mission became part of the West Central Brazil Union Mission, which was created in that year but began to officially operate in 2005. In 2009, the institution underwent a status change, becoming known as Mato Grosso Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Finally, in 2013, after 34 years operating at the same address, the Mato Grosso Conference headquarters was transferred to a new address: 134 Dra. Celestina Botelho Street in the Morada do Ouro II neighborhood, where it is currently located. In 2019, the missionary field of Mato Grosso Conference was restructured. That year, the South American Division approved the reorganization that gave rise to the two fields. Mato Grosso Conference became known as East Mato Grosso Conference, remaining headquartered in Cuiabá, and the new West Mato Grosso Mission (MisOM) was established, headquartered in the city of Várzea Grande.

From then on, the Adventist work has continued to advance in the East Mato Grosso Conference region. One of the ways to achieve that is the “Um Ano em Missão” ("One Year in Mission") project developed in cities where there are no Adventist churches or even members. One of these cities is Nova Marilândia, which is about 260 km away from the city of Cuiabá. In 2018, the Conference staff joined the project volunteers in order to cooperate with evangelism in that city. During the initiative, approximately 1,600 children's magazines and more than 3,000 missionary books were distributed. This and many other missionary actions have witnessed the evangelistic vocation that characterizes Adventist institutions and people in the new Mission region.

Since its establishment, ALM leaders and members have worked diligently and systematically to fulfill the mission of spreading the Gospel. This can be seen in initiatives to open new districts, employ more Bible workers, and expand canvassing and the education work in addition to the evangelistic campaigns in places where there is no Adventist Church yet. At this pace in missionary work expansion, in 2019, the “Impacto Esperança” (“Hope Impact”) project was carried out in its whole region. About 1.5 million missionary books were delivered across Brazil Midwest region. In order to encourage the distribution and reading of the material, videos were produced with comments from each chapter of the book distributed that year. “Esperança Para a Família” ("Hope for the Family").

ALM is currently organized into 21 departments, which work together on different missionary fronts to fulfill the institution's mission of bringing the Gospel message to people. However, several challenges remain. One of the
biggest challenges for SDA activities in that region is certainly related to the large geographical area and the low
demographic density. Due to these characteristics, it is not easy to provide systematic and constant service to the
districts and their respective congregations, considering the long distances. Another challenge is the need for new
converts to consolidate their faith and persevere in it. To overcome that, ALM leadership has sought to encourage
discipleship.\(^{37}\)

Despite the challenges, the ALM journey certainly is motivating. Looking back on the history of the Adventist message
expansion in the Mato Grosso region, it is possible to see that the commitment and passion of the pioneers were
essential for the Church beginning and growing in the state. Those missionaries spared no efforts and took great
strides in planting and establishing Adventism in the territory. These stories bring commitment lessons learned from
the lives of those men that give encouragement and motivation to continue the work in order to fulfill the mission of
Mato Grosso Conference, which is to make disciples through Communion, Relationship, and Mission.\(^{38}\)

Thus, motivated and looking to the future, the Field administration understands that some missionary strategies are
essential to keep moving forward. One of them is to focus directly on new generations through projects that
encourage communion, relationship, and mission. In this regard in the coming years, the work carried out by the
Conference will place special emphasis on missionary activities including the projects “Missão Caleb” [“Caleb
Mission”], “Um Ano em Missão” [“One Year in Mission”], “Dez Dias de Oração” [“Ten Days of Prayer”] \(^{39}\) “Impacto
Esperança” [“Hope Impact”], among others, aiming to provide permanent engagement of Adventist members in the
field in fulfilling the Church mission.\(^{40}\)

**Chronology of Administrative Leaders**

Presidents: Antenor Cruz da Costa (1980-1985); Enio dos Santos (1986); Arlindo Guedes (1987-1989); Manoel
Xavier de Lima (1989-1992); Geovani Souto Queiroz (1993-1997); Aerce Marsola (1997-2001); Mauro Sérgio
Cardoso (2001); Oliveira Joaquim Pires (2002-2004); Eber Liessi (2004-2006); Jessé Martins de Oliveira de (2006-
2007); Charles Antonio Britis (2007-2011); Williams Moreira César (2011-2013); Levinho dos Santos Oliveira (2013-
2019); Jean Quenehen (2019-Present).

Secretaries: Jairo de Oliveira (1983); Oleval A. de Souza (1984-1988); Luís E.B. Gonzalez (1989); Jose O. Alberto
(2000); Mauro Sergio Cardoso (2001-2002); Eber Liessi (2003); Evaldo Zorzim (2004); Jesse Martins de Oliveira
(2005); Usley Peyeri (2006-2012); James W. Silva Lima (2013); Gilberto Aldorino Teixeira (2014-2016); Jean
Quenehen (2017-2019); Wesley Oliveira (2019-Present).

Treasurers: Jairo de Oliveira (1983); Oleval A. de Souza (1984-1988); Jose O. Alberto (1989-1996); Ismael Forti
(1997-1999); Jairo de Oliveira (2000-2001); Evaldo Zorzim (2002-2004); Flávio André Nunes dos Santos (2005-
2008); Regis Gonzales dos Reis (2009-2010); Daniel Grubert (2011-2019); Alex Ramos (2019-Present).\(^{41}\)

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NOTES


3. Ibid.


6. Evangelist canvasser of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the missionary who “develops his ministry by acquiring and selling to the public the publications edited and approved by the Church, to transmit to his fellow-men the eternal Gospel that brings salvation and physical and spiritual well-being.” Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) website, “Colportagem” [“Canvassing”], accessed February 4, 2020, http://bit.ly/2J6tY1I.


10. Ibid.


15. Leonardo R. Jokura, “Igreja Adventista de Barra do Bugres, MT” [“Barra do Bugres Adventist Church, MT”] (Monograph, Brazil College, 2001), 2, 3.


18. Dayane Nascimento’s personal knowledge for working at ALM.


25.
"UCB realiza concílio integrado" ["UCB holds integrated meeting"], Revista Adventista, October 2005, 32.


29. South American Division Minutes, May 2019, vote no. 2019-070; UCOB Extraordinary Executive Board Minutes, held on June 5, 2019, 4:30 p.m. in the city of Brasilia.

30. "The One Year in Mission (OYiM) project promotes the participation of young Adventists in the mission to evangelize urban centers in eight South American countries, combining their talents, resources and professional knowledge with the community needs." Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) website, "Um Ano Em Missão" ["One Year in Mission"], accessed February 4, 2020, https://bit.ly/2sCFyNL.


33. Levino Oliveira (ALM former president), email message to Otoniel Ferreira, March 25, 2019.

34. The project “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-day Adventist in the South American territory." Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) website, "Impacto Esperança" ["Hope Impact"], accessed February 4, 2020, https://bit.ly/34dZROO.


37. Levino dos Santos Oliveira (ALM former president), interviewed by the authors, Cuiabá, Mato Grosso, n.d.

38. Ibid.

39. "The Caleb Mission Project is a volunteer, social service, and testimony program that challenges young Adventists to dedicate their holidays to evangelism in places where there is no Adventist presence, to strengthen small congregations and win new people into the kingdom of God." Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) website, “Missão Calebe 2020” [Caleb Mission 2020], accessed February 4, 2020, http://bit.ly/2HRpvrI.


41. Levino dos Santos Oliveira (ALM former president) interviewed by the authors, Cuiabá, Mato Grosso, n.d.


43. For more information about the East Mato Grosso Conference, access their website at http://alm.adventistas.org/ or their social media on Facebook and Instagram at @adventistaslesteM, on Twitter: @adventistantm and Youtube: Adventistas Leste Mato Grosso.

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