The Rio Fluminense Conference is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and part of the Southeast Brazil Union. It is headquartered at Desembargador Ferreira Pinto Street, no. 721, Zip Code 24800-205, in Itaboraí city Center, in Rio de Janeiro state, Brazil.

The Rio Fluminense Conference covers part of the metropolitan state area of Niterói, São Gonçalo, Maricá, Itaboraí, Tanguá, Rio Bonito e Cachoeiras de Macacu; Fluminense Center Region: Nova Friburgo, Bom Jardim, Duas Barras, Macuco, Carmo, Cantagalo, Cordeiro, Trajano de Moraes, São Sebastião do Alto and Santa Maria Madalena; Fluminense Northwest Region: Itaocara, Aperibé, Santo Antônio de Pádua, Cambuci, São José de Ubá, Miracema, Lage do Muriaé, Itaperuna, Itaiçaba, Bom Jesus do Itabapoana, Natividade, Porciúncula and Varre-Sai; Fluminense North Region: São Francisco de Itabapoana, Cardoso Moreira, São João da Barra, Campos dos Goytacazes, São Fidélis, Quissamã, Conceição de Macabu, Carapebus and Macaé; and the Coastal Lowlands region: Rio das Ostras, Casimiro de Abreu, Silva Jardim, Cabo Frio, São Pedro da Aldeia, Araruama, Armação dos Búzios, Iguaba Grande,
Origin of Work in the Conference

Long before Joseph Bates became a preacher and one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, his work as a sailor brought him to Rio de Janeiro in the spring of 1821. He was amazed by the natural beauty of Rio, especially the range of mountains that form the “Pão de Açúcar” [Sugar Loaf]. Bates did not imagine that seven decades later, the Adventist message he would help to spread throughout the world would reach that metropolis.

In May 1893, three Adventist canvassers (known today as literature evangelists) arrived in the state of Rio de Janeiro from the United States. A man named Albert Bachemeyer accepted the Adventist message and joined the newly started movement in Brazil. Bachemeyer became a canvasser and went to Rio Grande do Sul, where, together with Albert Stauffer, he sold the book “The Great Controversy” in German to the Stein family. Guilherme Stein, Jr. became the first Adventist baptized in Brazil.

On August 12, 1894, other Adventists landed at the port of the then federal capital, Rio de Janeiro, to live and work there. William Henry Thurston and his family came from the United States as volunteer missionaries in the company of Pastor Frank H. Westphal, the first Adventist pastor to arrive in Brazil. Westphal traveled to Argentina, where he worked as a missionary, but later returned to baptize the first converts in Brazil.

Deciding to set up a depository of missionary books for Stauffer’s use, Thurston and his family settled between Rua Cupertino and the Cascadura train station, in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro. The Thurstons also began providing materials for sale in the city of Rio de Janeiro and surrounding regions. At that time, the inhabitants of the former federal capital suffered from the city’s precarious sanitary conditions and the proliferation of diseases, especially in the hottest seasons of the year. Thurston found it difficult to adapt to his new surroundings. He found the city heavily influenced by pagan traditions and “in great spiritual darkness.”

The end of the nineteenth century saw many missionaries from various denominations arriving in Rio de Janeiro. Thurston realized the need to teach Bible studies and began to preach the Adventist message, but his lack of fluency in Portuguese held him back. He couldn’t find a translator to help him preach, and no Adventist literature existed in Portuguese.

Thurston and his family began to testify of the Adventist faith in religious services from other denominations, held by missionaries whom they had befriended. Later, in the midst of adversity, the first meetings were conducted by an English missionary who had purchased some of his books, and to a Portuguese man Stauffer had canvassed.

In 1895 the General Conference sent Huldreich Graf from the United States to Brazil. Arriving that August 20, Graf “dedicated himself to evangelistic work [...] and served as president of the Brazilian Mission.” He is considered “the first pastor ordained to work on Brazilian land.” On October 27, Graf organized the Meier Church, the first Adventist church in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Located today at Joaquim Meier Street, no. 89, in Meier district, it was the second Adventist church organized in Brazil. The Meier church “was formed by families of German and American and/or American workers of German origin living in Brazil (Graf, Thurston, Berger, Hettrick, Stauffer).”

The work of evangelism in Rio de Janeiro gained a new impetus on August 29, 1896, with the arrival of F. W. Spies from Germany. Spies (1866-1935) “was invited by the SDA General Conference to work as a missionary in Brazil. Before his departure, he was consecrated for the work of the ministry.” He was the second effective pastor on Brazilian soil and became president of the Northern Brazil Mission (present-day Rio de Janeiro Conference), headquartered in Rio de Janeiro. Spies took up residence in the city of Rio de Janeiro, though he constantly needed to travel to meet German-speaking people in the colonies in the countryside. In 1898 he baptized the first three converts in the state and the first converts in the capital, including Valentine Yann and his wife, Margarida Yann.

In 1899 Guilherme Stein, Jr. moved to the city of Rio de Janeiro, where he organized a Sabbath school with 16 adult students and two children. In 1907 evangelistic efforts helped the Meier church reach 30 baptized members, of which two thirds were Brazilians. In 1910, Ricardo Wilfart and Antônio Leôncio da Penha made a considerable distribution of literature in Niterói, work which bore fruit in 1913 with the formation of a small group of Adventists in the city. In 1919 the Niterói congregation was finally organized.

In 1919 the East Brazil Union Conference (today’s Southeast Brazil Union Conference) was created, comprising part of the state of Minas Gerais, plus the states of Rio de Janeiro, Espírito Santo, Bahia, Sergipe, Alagoas, Pernambuco, Paraiba, Rio Grande do Norte, Piauí, Ceará, Maranhão, Pará, Amazonas and the Federal District. With this
reconfiguration, the then Rio-Espírito Santo Mission came to be called the Rio de Janeiro Mission (present-day Rio de Janeiro Conference), covering the state of Rio de Janeiro and the Federal District.25

From the 1920s onwards, the first groups of Adventists began to appear in other cities that today are part of the Rio Fluminense Conference, such as Itaboraí and Rio Bonito. In 1925 and 1926, Ricardo J. Wilfart visited the cities of Concejão de Macabu and Campos dos Goytacazes, where he held evangelistic meetings and prepared people for baptism. In November 1927, Guilherme Denz and C. C. Schneider held a series of meetings in the city, baptizing 13 people. In Campos dos Goytacazes, Wilfart held a series of meetings for more than 300 guests, at the home of a man named Amaro Trindade. In October 1928, Henrique Stoehr baptized six people in the Paraíba do Sul River.26

While the churches of the countryside of the state were being organized, in 1928 there was already, in Niterói, an Adventist church organized with 32 members. The services of that congregation were always full of people, and the meetings took place in a hall, “but the members waited for the opportunity to acquire a permanent place.” There, even the newly converted members worked “with enthusiasm and efficiency.” In 1930 the churches of Campos dos Goytacazes and Concejão de Macabu were organized. The latter functioned in a building that had previously been a “wet and dry store, bakery, musical society and a jail.” In March 1930, the Campos dos Goytacazes church opened. In 1935, the Rio-Espírito Santo Mission (now Espirito Santo Conference) acquired land and built the Campos dos Goytacazes Adventist church.27

In 1938 Adventists from Niterói bought land to build a church in the city. The group of believers was growing rapidly, and that October the church approved the plan for construction, presented by Carlos Sperlich. The work started in 1939 with the financial help of the Central Church of Rio de Janeiro, the other local churches of the state, and the East Brazil Union Conference. The first Adventist School in Niterói was founded at Lopes Trovão street, in Icaraí district, at the headquarters of East Union. In 1940 the Niterói Church was inaugurated, and José Baracat was chosen to pastor the congregation.30

In 1943 the radio broadcast “The Voice of Prophecy”31 launched in Brazil, presented by Pastor Roberto Rabello, at the time a resident of Glendale, California. The programs were recorded in the United States with The King’s Heralds Quartet singing in Portuguese. To meet the demand for Bible studies requested from the program, in 1945 an office of the Radio Bible School32 was set up in Niterói. Ilka dos Reis answered all incoming correspondence.33 The headquarters of Voice of Prophecy remained in Niterói until 1962, when it moved to its own headquarters in the Botafogo district, in the city of Rio de Janeiro.34

In 1951 the Rio-Minas Mission was reorganized, giving rise to the Rio-Minas Conference (present-day Rio de Janeiro Conference), which encompassed the entire territory of Rio de Janeiro, including that which currently belongs to the Rio Fluminense Conference.35 In the same period, Adventists from the cities of Campos dos Goytacazes and Niterói were organized in pastoral districts: the Niterói district included the church of Niterói and groups from Itaboraí, Rio Bonito, Braçanã, Mineiros and Araruama; the Campos district included the churches of Campos dos Goytacazes, Concejão de Macabu, Macaé, and other nearby cities.36

In 1960 the church of Niterói, pastored by Evaldo Schlemper, led a great evangelistic effort in the region. In July, the church had already baptized 73 people, and registered 800 people at the Radio Bible School.37 In October 1961, the Adventist school in Braçanã district, belonging to the municipality of Rio Bonito, was inaugurated. The state governor attended the occasion and donated an amount necessary for the school to have access to “piped water and sewage services as well as the teacher’s home.” 38

In 1959 and 1960 the Adventist message reached the city of São Gonçalo. Six members of the church in Niterói moved to the city and started a small group in the Barreto district. At first the group met at the home of a man named Reis, but attendance grew so that, in 1962, the group had to rent a meeting room near the São Gonçalo Forum, in the city center.39 Through the work of Pastor Evaldo Schlemper and other workers, the church in Rio Bonito had 120 members in 1964.40

In July 1968 East Brazil Union acquired a property in Niterói, where the Instituto de Colportagem Adventista [Adventist Canvassing Institute] began operations, on the initiative of Pastor José Jeremias de Oliveira, director of East Union Canvassing.41 This was the result of joint collaboration between all three unions in Brazil, the Brazilian Publishing House, and East Brazil Union leadership. The first group of canvassers graduated November 29, 1968.42 At the end of 1968, the district of Niterói, home to almost half a million people, had three new Adventist groups: Vila Lage, Barreto, and Maria Paula, as well as a group starting in the Barro Vermelho district. The church in Niterói built an elementary school, while the church in São Gonçalo had 146 people enrolled in Sabbath School.43

In the 1970s the Adventist Church advanced on land that had not yet been cleared. On July 26, 1970, for example, 20 people were baptized in a place known as Farol de São Tomé, 50 kilometers from Campos dos Goytacazes. In July 1977, a building constructed for the Adventist school in that same city was already able to receive first grade students, with the expectation that, in 1978, it would offer eight grades of elementary school. “All joined forces for the salvation of children, through the Adventist school.”44

In August 1977, then South American Division President Enoch de Oliveira visited the construction of an Adventist church in Campos dos Goytacazes, noting that it would be “one of the most beautiful Adventist churches in Brazil”. In 1979, the church of São Gonçalo was inaugurated in the center of the city, at São Gonçalo Side Street, no. 198, under the leadership of Pastor Camilo Brito. That April and June the church conducted evangelistic campaigns.47

In 1980 Rio-Minas Conference and East Conference were reorganized, and East Conference became Espírito Santo
Conference. Part of the Rio-Minas missionary field was assigned to Minas Gerais Mission (present Central Minas Conference), and the other part became part of the newly created Rio de Janeiro Conference. At its inception, the Rio de Janeiro Conference had 76 organized churches and 21,610 members. The 1980s saw notable evangelistic advance in the northern region of Rio de Janeiro. At the end of 1985, the Rio de Janeiro Conference already had 106 organized churches and 24,248 Adventist churches. Five years later, there were 141 organized churches and 31,452 Adventists across the territory.

New efforts were made in 1994, this time in the northwest region of Rio de Janeiro. In the city of Itaperuna, home to 100,000 people, doctors from Silvestre Adventist Hospital gave lectures on health, and four theology students from Brazil College (now Brazil Adventist University) did evangelistic work. 134 people were baptized, four new churches were opened, and a church for the new converts was constructed.

In 1995 the conference launched a summer camp for underprivileged children in the municipality of Casmiro de Abreu. The action was supported by the local city hall and companies in the region, and carried out by the youth ministry, Pathfinders, and Adventist Welfare Service of the city church. One hundred children participated in the activities, which included workshops, sports classes, and evangelism.

With the accelerated growth of the Adventist church in Rio de Janeiro, the church decided to create a conference to better serve the south of the state. On November 29 and December 1, 1998, an Extraordinary Assembly of the Rio de Janeiro Conference met, deciding to create the South Rio Conference. The new mission field covered the southern part of the state of Rio de Janeiro. Its territory borders the cities of Duque de Caxias, Nova Iguaçu, and Paraty, which in turn borders the state of São Paulo and Minas Gerais.

Conference Organizational History

In December 2002, the East Brazil Union Conference voted to organize a new field in the state of Rio de Janeiro, the Rio Fluminense Conference. The assembly took place in the Central Church of Niterói, and the office of the new conference began to administer the regions of Central, Serrana, Norte Fluminense and Lagos, in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Its first leaders were Gustavo Roberto Schumann, president; Aroldo Ferreira de Andrade, secretary; Hugo Ernesto Quiroga, treasurer. The conference’s first headquarters were the Training Center in Cachoeiras de Macacu, located at Vinte e Cinco Street, no. 77, Agro Brasil district, where it remained until 2005.

Rio Fluminense Conference began with 13,748 members in 23 pastoral districts, with 159 congregations. The pastoral districts were Itaborai, Itaperuna, Nova Friburgo, Cabo Frio, Rio das Ostras, Venda das Pedras, Miracema, São Gonçalo, Maricá, Campos, Parque Guarus, São João da Barra, Ipiranga, Araruama, Niterói, Fonseca, Jardim Catarina, Calabouço, Rio Bonito, Goytacazes, Alcântara, Parque Leopoldina, and Macaé. It had three schools, located in Bom Jesus de Itabapoana, Campos dos Goytacazes, and Niterói.

In 2003 the conference acquired an 18,300 square meter plot of land located at Desembargador Ferreira Pinto Street, no. 721, in Itaborai, where the administrative headquarters of the field was built. The building was inaugurated in July 2004. Itaborai Adventist Academy, inaugurated in 2007, operates at the same address as the headquarters, where a Home and Health Educational Service store also operates.

In 2011 a new Home and Health Educational Service store opened in Campos dos Goytacazes, in the Salete Building. In 2012, it started operations on Conselheiro Otaviano Street, near the Campos dos Goytacazes Central Adventist Church. Also in 2011, the Rio Fluminense Conference began work on a new unit of Silvestre Adventist Hospital in Itaborai. The conference building was assigned to the hospital, and its administrative headquarters was provisionally installed at the Adventist Training Center of Papucaia (Catre), located in Cachoeiras de Macacu. The hospital facilities were moved to the building in 2012, and the new hospital was inaugurated in 2014. In 2014 the conference headquarters returned to Desembargador Ferreira Pinto Street, no. 721, in Itaborai, where it is today.

Rio Fluminense Conference grew from 13,748 members in 2002 to 15,395 in 2006. Between 2007 and 2010 five new pastoral districts were established, and 15 new churches and 32 new groups were organized, a growth of 5.5%.

Between 2011 and 2014 the conference grew by 2,428 new members, as 25 new groups started, 14 new churches were organized, and four new pastoral districts formed. Between 2015 and 2018 another four districts started to function, in addition to 19 new organized churches and 25 new open groups. In January 2018, the Rio Fluminense Conference had 20,467 members in 41 pastoral districts, 120 organized churches, and 119 groups. Church members credit the membership growth to the creation of the conference.

In 2015 the state of Rio de Janeiro was directly affected by the financial crisis that hit Brazil. The discovery of corruption cases in the Brazilian government and in the business sector interrupted the construction of the Rio de Janeiro Petrochemical Complex in Macaé, and Petrobras’ operations in Itaborai, Macaé and the Campos Basin decreased. The region’s economic turmoil also affected the Adventist Church, and the conference looked for alternatives to get through the financial crisis and continue expanding. One project was Geração ARF + [ARF+ Generation].
The Rio Fluminense Conference aims to intensify the supply of material, resources, and tools for evangelistic work, to reach an even greater number of people with the preaching of the gospel. Campos Adventist School, among other projects and challenges, are included in the conference's plans. The goal is to implement the city's first Adventist school. The building has ten large rooms, an indoor court, and an auditorium for 300 enrolled students and five grades. The Church acquired a well-located and structured site to implement the project Congress of Revival and Reform in all the church's territories.

In the area of education, the conference plans to inaugurate the São Gonçalo Adventist School in 2020, with an initial forecast of 300 enrolled students and five grades. The Church acquired a well-located and structured site to implement the city's first Adventist school. The building has ten large rooms, an indoor court, and an auditorium for 100 people. The school is located in the Colubandé district, in a privileged region of the city. The completion of the administrative building and the high school of Macaé Adventist Academy, and the renovation and expansion of Campos Adventist School, are included in the projects and challenges. The goal is that, through Adventist education, an even greater number of people will be reached with the preaching of the gospel.

The Rio Fluminense Conference conducts the Viva Melhor [Live Better] project in partnership with the Swiss non-governmental organization Advent-Stiftung. The project donates equipment to help low-income people enter the job market, achieve financial independence, and meet the basic needs of their families. Live Better still counts on the Brazilian Service of Support to micro and small companies.

Rio Fluminense Conference was the last conference to be created in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Although its journey is still short, the experiences in this field already represent a precious path of learning, advances and development. This region has been blessed with fast missionary and asset growth, and the field leadership recognizes that it all comes from God. Therefore, what is learned along the way is that “there is nothing to fear about the future, unless it is forgotten what God has already done in the past.”

The Rio Fluminense Conference began with few resources. However, when everything seemed difficult, God opened the doors, provided means, and raised people from different places and regions. The history of Adventism in the countryside has taught members that it is necessary to believe and let God be God, for He is sovereign over all things. However, it must be recognized that there are challenges. The biggest ones involve evangelizing the regions of São Gonçalo and Niterói, in addition to strengthening the Serrana and Noroeste regions, so that there is a harmonious and balanced development in the entire field, as they seek to reach the 4.5 million inhabitants of the territory.

These regions are considered challenging due to their location. In some places there is violence and in others there is indifference to the gospel. Despite this, the Adventist Church believes that, with the right guidelines, it is possible to obtain strong results in these regions. Therefore, among its objectives are to develop evangelistic projects in areas where the Adventist presence is less strong and where there are greater challenges to expansion. Another goal is to make each member a true worshiper through faithfulness and mission, as they understand that it is God who leads the church, and that He puts resources and talents to promote His kingdom at the disposal of His servants. One of the means to achieve this objective will be the realization of the project Congress of Revival and Reform in all churches in the Rio Fluminense field.

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The Rio Fluminense Conference aims to intensify the supply of material, resources, and tools for evangelistic work, to
organize about ten churches a year, and to continue the revitalization and construction of churches, including ones in Carmo and Santa Maria Madalena. Pastors and leadership work together for the total mobilization of members, involving everyone in the project Alcancemos [Reaching], aiming for each church to have at least one hundred people studying the Bible.91

**Chronology of Administrators**92


**SOURCES**


*Centro Nacional da Memória Adventista*. [National Center of Adventist History] [http://www.memoriaadventista.com.br/wikiasd/]

Centro de Pesquisas Ellen G. White. [Ellen G. White Research Center] [http://www.centrowhite.org.br/]


*Geração 148* [Generation 148]. [http://g148.org.br/]
NOTES

1. Adventist Church Management System, ACMS.

2. Maria do Carmo, Rio Fluminense Conference educational coordinator, interviewed by the authors, August 31, 2019.


4. Ibid.


6. A canvasser of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, or literature evangelist, 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.

7.
The Voice of Prophecy is the oldest evangelical program on Brazilian radio, starting in 1943. Since its beginning, it has had the musical participation of the Arautos do Rei [The Kings Heralds] quartet. Currently, the program has its version, also for TV, and is presented by Pastor Gilson Brito, who has been in the pastoral ministry for over 30 years. They are biblical sermons that present the message of hope and salvation.
Pathfinder Clubs are made up of "boys and girls aged 10 to 15 years old, from different social classes, color, religion. They meet, in general, once a week to learn to develop talents, skills, perceptions and a taste for nature." These boys and girls "are thrilled with outdoor activities. They like camping, hiking, climbing, exploring the woods and caves. They know how to cook outdoors, making a fire without matches." They demonstrate "skill with discipline through drill commands and have their creativity awakened by manual arts. They also fight the use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs." Seventh-day Adventist Church, Brazil website, "Quem somos" [Who we are], accessed February 4, 2020, http://bit.ly/2FDRqTh.
Minute of the South American Division, November 2002, vote no. 2002-229; Minute of East Brazil Union Conference, September 2002, vote no. 2002-090.


60. Gustavo Roberto Schumann, former Rio Fluminense Conference president, interviewed by the authors, September 1, 2019.


62. Gustavo Roberto Schumann, former Rio Fluminense Conference president, interviewed by the authors, September 1, 2019.


66. Gustavo Roberto Schumann, former Rio Fluminense Conference president, interviewed by the authors, September 1, 2019.


72. Edson Erthal, former treasurer of Rio Fluminense Conference, interviewed by the authors, August 30, 2019.


74. Geovane Félix, Rio Fluminense Conference president, interviewed by the authors, September 6, 2019.


76. “The Adventurers Club is a program for children from 6 to 9 years old, created by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in 1972. [...] At the meetings, children carry out activities with a focus on physical, mental and spiritual development.” Seventh-day Adventist Church – Central Caxias do Sul – RS, “Clube de Aventureiros: Duquinhos” [Adventurers Club: Duquinhos], accessed February 4, 2020, https://bit.ly/389AQGG.


78. Geração 148 [Generation 148] is a project of youth that are dedicated to missionary work and have as their motto Romans 14:8. Accessed June 6, 2019, http://g148.org.br/.


80.
“Caleb Mission project is a volunteer witnessing and social service 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.” Portal da Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia [Seventh-day Adventist Website], “Missão Caleb 2020” [Caleb Mission 2020], accessed February 4, 2020, http://bit.ly/2HRpvRi.

81. “The project One Year in Mission promotes the participation of young Adventists in the mission to evangelize urban centers in eight countries in South America, uniting their talents, resources and professional knowledge with the needs of the community.” Portal da Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia [Seventh-day Adventist Church Website], “Um Ano Em Missão” [One Year in Mission], accessed February 4, 2020, https://bit.ly/2sCFyNL.


83. “Programação especial que visa alcançar os membros afastados e ex-membros da Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia” [Special programming that aims to reach outgoing and former members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church], in Isadora Schmitt e Michelson Borges, “Mutirão evangelístico” [Evangelistic task force], Revista Adventista [Adventist Review]. no. 11 year 100, November 2005, 26.


85. Jorgeane Melo, Rio Fluminense Conference social worker, interviewed by the authors, August 31, 2019.


87. Leônidas Verneque Guedes, executive secretary of the Southeast Brazil Union, email to Carlos Flávio Teixeira, ESDA associate editor, September 20, 2019.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid.


93. For more information about the Rio Fluminense Conference, access https://arf.adventistas.org, or social media – Facebook: @riofluminense, Twitter: @ARFiasd, and YouTube: centrodemidiaarf.