Sergipe Mission

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Sergipe Mission (Missão Sergipe, or MSe) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church located in the territory of the East Brazil Union Mission (União Missão Leste Brasileira, or ULB). Its headquarters is at Rua Jorge Ferreira Porto, 200, Zip Code 49020-140, Salgado Filho neighborhood, city of Aracaju, capital of the state of Sergipe, Brazil.

Territory and Statistics

MSe mission field comprises the entire state of Sergipe, which has a total population of 2,395,152. The Adventist Church is present in 65 of the 75 municipalities of that state and serves 27,647 members, who are distributed in 304 congregations and organized into 33 pastoral districts. The ratio is one Adventist per 86 inhabitants. Two units of the Adventist Education Network are operating in the region, which together serve a total of 659 students. The units are Escola Adventista de Siqueira Campos (Siqueira Campos Adventist School) in the municipality of Aracaju, with 338 students; and Escola Adventista de Lagarto (Lagarto Adventist School) in the municipality of Lagarto, with 321 students.
To meet the demands of this mission field, MSe maintains 183 staff members, of which 59 are active in schools, two work in Multibom store (selling items for Adventurers), Pathfinders, and youth, and textbooks and uniforms for the Adventist Education Network), 46 work with churches, and 29 work at the mission headquarters. There are also six workers and 41 pastors. Among the pastors, 26 are ordained and 15 are licensed, 33 work in pastoral districts and eight work in the mission’s departments or do administrative work.

The Origin of the Adventist Work in the Mission Territory

On March 16, 1916, during an annual council of the Santa Catharina Conference, now Santa Catarina Conference, the leadership of the conference voted to send its congregations’ Sabbath School offerings to assist in the preaching of the gospel in the state of Sergipe. Later, in 1919, some canvassers began to work in that region. In 1921, José Lemos and M. S. dos Santos sold books in the municipalities of Propríia, in the northeastern part of the state, and Itabaiana, in the central region of Sergipe. These two canvassers also worked in the municipalities currently known as Japaratuba and Capela.

The Adventist message officially arrived in the capital of Sergipe between 1923 and 1924 through Pastor Gustavo Storch, who had been sent by Bahia Mission, now Bahia Conference, to work as a Bible worker. In Aracaju, Storch sold an Adventist book to the governor of the state and three other books—Lar e Saude (Health and Home), Nossa Epoca à Luz da Profecia (Our Day in the Light of Prophecy), and Rei Vindouro (The Coming King) to the city’s public library. The first series of Adventist evangelistic meetings also took place in that location, led by Pastor Leo Halliwell who preached in English and was translated by Storch. The meetings resulted in the conversion and baptism of the first people to become Seventh-day Adventists in the capital of Sergipe.

In 1926, Storch held a series of evangelistic meetings in the city of Aracaju. This time the governor of Sergipe offered use of the hall of the state public library (with capacity of 1,500 people) so that Bible lectures could be given there. The interest of the inhabitants of that city for the Adventist message had been awakened and, on April 10, 1927, another evangelistic series was begun which lasted for around three months and included topics about health and the Bible. One of the strategies used by the evangelist to draw people’s attention to the meetings was to advertise the subjects of study in the city’s newspapers. In addition, the Adventist missionaries used a Question Box, in which the audience deposited their questions to be answered during the meetings.

As a result of the work carried out by those pioneers over the course of four years, 17 people were baptized in Aracaju and, in 1927, the first group of Adventists in that city was organized. The following year, Aracaju’s congregation had a church school with 25 children. On October 4, 1929, the Adventist church in the capital of Sergipe was inaugurated. At that time this congregation had 32 members and another church school with 45 students which was run by Cordélia Brandão.

During the 1930s, the Adventist message reached other places in the interior of the state, such as the region of the Lagarto municipality. A series of Bible studies given by a Presbyterian to a Catholic woman, the two ended up getting to know the Adventist message from the books Nossa Epoca (Our Time) and Rei Vindouro (The Coming King). The Presbyterian man’s name was Severo dos Santos and the Catholic woman’s name was Josefa. Both were residents of Jenipapo village in Lagarto. Later, during a visit by Severo to the municipality’s headquarters, he met Antônio Dias, who gave him some Adventist leaflets and the book Estudos Bíblicos (Bible Studies), from Brazil Publishing House. Severo, who until then had resisted accepting the Adventist message, read the books, was converted and recognized the seventh-day Sabbath as the Lord’s day.

Severo dos Santos later preached the Adventist message to his Presbyterian friends and some of them decided to accept the teachings. Soon a group of Adventist believers was formed in that location and two Sabbath Schools were organized. One of them was established in the Jenipapo village and was directed by Severo and Josefa. The other was established in Lagarto, where it was led by Antônio Dias. By June 1933, there was a total of 29 Adventists participating in those two groups. That same month, Pastor José R. dos Passos led a series of meetings in that municipality. At the end of the meetings on July 1, four people were baptized. Pastor Passos got the groups at Jenipapo and Lagarto together to plan for the construction of a church in that region. It was inaugurated around eight years later.

In 1932 the Adventists from the state of Sergipe were temporarily under the jurisdiction of the North East Mission, due to a reorganization of the East Brazil Union Mission, now Southeast Brazil Union Conference. However, in 1937, Bahia Mission resumed the management of the Adventist work in the states of Bahia and Sergipe. The following year the leadership of this mission appointed Pastor Paulo Seidl to serve the pastoral district of Sergipe. He and his wife, Alicia, had studied nursing and they used their knowledge in the health field to serve the inhabitants of Sergipe. The couple combined medical and gospel missionary work and opened the door for the Adventist message to reach other municipalities in the state. Thus, the Church continued to grow in that part of the country.

The 1940s were marked by advances on different Adventist evangelistic fronts in the state of Sergipe. In 1941 a woman named Alice Duarte, from the congregation of Aracaju, began missionary work among prisoners of the state prison in the capital. As a result of that initiative, in 1942, a Sabbath School class, led by a prisoner converted to the gospel, was already operating in the state prison. Another evangelistic initiative, the program A Voz da Profecia (The Voice of the Prophecy) began broadcasting to the city of Aracaju in 1943, through the Radio Broadcaster of Sergipe. By that time, additional cities in the state had been reached by Adventist preaching. Simão Dias and Monte Alegre operated a Bible class and a school in their own building. In Lagarto there was an Adventist school with its
Beginning in 1948, Bahia Mission came to be known as Bahia and Sergipe Mission, now Bahia Conference. This change was necessary due to the fast development of the Church throughout the territory. Leaders sought to facilitate the care of members by shortening distances between members’ homes and the mission headquarters. At that time, in the two states (Bahia and Sergipe) there was a population of around 5,000,000. The mission, with headquarters in Salvador, served 973 Adventist members, spread across nine organized churches and some smaller groups in both states.\(^{32}\) By 1949 there were 14 Adventist primary schools in operation in the two states and the combined enrollment was nearly 500. Despite these advances there were still some obstacles, such as an insufficient number of workers to serve the entire territory of the mission.\(^{33}\)

Beginning in 1955, the program *A Voz da Profecia* was broadcast by another radio station in Sergipe: Rádio Liberdade (Freedom Radio) from Aracaju.\(^{34}\) The broadcast of the program at that station—financed by the Adventists in Aracaju—resulted in the conversion of one of the announcers, Manoel Silva. This announcer enrolled himself in the Bible correspondence course of the Escola Radiopostal (Radio School)\(^{35}\) and, later he went to study in Northeast Brazil Junior College, now Pernambuco Adventist Academy.\(^{36}\) Also in 1955, the Adventists in Aracaju carried out a series of evangelistic meetings in that city. For four months, more than 600 people attended the meetings daily. As a result, 45 people were baptized on September 24, 1955.\(^{37}\)

On July 16, 1960, another series of meetings was held in the city of Lagarto;\(^{38}\) in that same year, the church of Aracaju distributed 50,000 invitations for the evangelistic series. The invitations were dropped from a plane that flew over the capital of Sergipe. In addition to this strategy, a team was organized to visit the addresses of people who had shown an interest in learning more about the Church. Members also spread posters in the streets, buildings, and even in the highways, inviting the population to listen to the program *A Voz da Profecia* and to watch the meetings in the Adventist church in Aracaju. These methods were successful, and many were baptized.\(^{39}\)

In 1961, a series of meetings was held in the municipality of Santo Amaro das Brotas, where many people were baptized and an Adventist church was built.\(^{40}\) The evangelistic work in the churches of Sergipe continued to expand, so that by the end of 1965, Bahia and Sergipe Mission had 1,281 baptized members.\(^{41}\) Cities like Propriá were revisited during this period. In 1968, after a big evangelistic effort led by Pastor José Carlos Ramos, 50 people from that city were attending the Sabbath School.\(^{42}\) During the evangelistic meetings in Propriá, more than 800 people attended the programs each night for 26 days. Following the meetings, a Bible course was taught and more than 50 people were baptized.\(^{43}\)

Beginning in 1961, the Adventists of Sergipe gained greater prominence in the secular media. Between July and August 1971, Pastor José Carlos Ramos presented a series of five sermons on a television program in Aracaju.\(^{44}\) In parallel to that program every Sunday, his wife presented a program with Bible stories called *Era Uma Vez (Once Upon a Time).*\(^{45}\) These television programs helped to make the Adventist Church better known in the city. The program *A Voz da Profecia* was another important evangelistic outreach in that region. In July 1971, the producers of the program visited Aracaju to carry out an evangelistic event there. The program took place in the hall of the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico de Sergipe (Historical and Geographic Institute of Sergipe) and was attended by more than 1,000 people.\(^{46}\) Due to advances in the preaching of the Adventist message, by then the Sergipe countryside already had two pastoral districts—one based in Aracaju and the other based in the municipality of Lagarto.\(^{47}\)

Between January 2 and 5, 1980, the East Brazil Union Mission decided to carry out another reorganization in its mission field in order to improve its service to Adventist members and continue to grow in the preaching of the gospel. As a result, the Adventist work in the state of Sergipe was then managed by North East Mission, headquartered in the city of Recife, capital of the state of Pernambuco.\(^{48}\)

Beginning in 1981, the city of Aracaju started to host the first northeast branch of Telepaz (satellite) service in the Central Aracaju SDA Church. At the same time, the program *A Voz da Profecia* continued to be broadcast in that city together with the program *Uma Luz no Caminho (A Light on the Way).* These programs were broadcast by Radio News of Sergipe whose board of directors was pressured by a local priest not to broadcast Adventist programs. However, noticing the large audience for the Adventist programs, the board decided not to comply with the priest’s request. The radio director even offered a free hour so that the program *Uma Luz no Caminho* could be broadcast.\(^{49}\) Still regarding preaching through the media, in the same period the television program *Encontro Com a Vida (Encounter with Life),* produced by the South American Division, began broadcasting in the state of Sergipe.\(^{50}\)

In 1984 Aracaju was the stage for an evangelistic campaign led by North East Mission, in partnership with the South American Division. This campaign started on August 25 and lasted for three months, with studies happening in five different locations in four neighborhoods (Santos Dumont, Bugio, Rosa Elise, and Augusto Franco).\(^{51}\) The initiative had the participation of the Northeast Brazil Junior College students and students taking the theology course at Northeast Brazil College, now Bahia Adventist College, as well as Bible workers and pastors from Northeast Bahia Mission and Central Minas Mission.\(^{52}\) As a result of God’s gracious blessings, more than 1,000 people were baptized in the capital of Sergipe. These many baptisms were unprecedented for the missionary work in Sergipe, since the average for annual baptisms had been 130.\(^{53}\) In May 1985, Aracaju had five Adventist congregations and more than 2,000 baptized members.\(^{54}\)

The Mission’s Organizational History

In early 1988, Northeast Mission served 30,351 Adventists spread throughout its territory. In view of the great growth...
in the number of members in that region, the leaders of Northeast Mission and the East Brazil Union Mission realized the need to open a new administrative unit. Thus, during the 13th Ordinary Assembly of the East Brazil Union Mission, the delegates present accepted the vote no. 88-144 of the Northeast Mission, which requested the establishment of Sergipe-Alagoas Mission. This new administrative unit was officially organized on June 22, 1988.

The new administrative unit began operation on January 1, 1989, when it started to manage the Adventist work in the states of Sergipe and Alagoas. Initially, Sergipe-Alagoas Mission was responsible for 10,333 members and 24 churches, organized into ten pastoral districts. The first leaders of the field were Pastors Gerson de Souza Fragoso and Joel Gonsioroski da Silva, who held the positions of president and secretary-treasurer, respectively. The Sergipe-Alagoas Mission headquarters was established in a location purchased by the East Brazil Union Mission, at Jorge Ferreira Porto Street, 200, Salgado Filho neighborhood, in Aracaju, where it continues to operate.

During 1989 the Sergipe-Alagoas Mission engaged in the National 89 Project (promoted by SAD), which consisted of holding several evangelistic series in the main Brazilian capitals. In all the territory served by the mission, 150 preaching points were established. After the evangelistic series these were converted into Bible classes and had the participation of more than 3,000 Bible students. The first result of this initiative in Sergipe-Alagoas Mission was seen in May 1989, when 96 people were baptized during an event at Lourival Batista Gymnasium, in Aracaju. By the end of that year, 1,204 people had been baptized in that mission field.

During the 1990s one of the Sergipe-Alagoas Mission’s main emphases was Global Mission since several cities in the two states covered by the field were well suited to this project. One of the cities that received the missionary efforts of this initiative was Tobias Barreto, in the countryside of Sergipe, with 50,000 inhabitants. Within the months of January and February 1993, the Adventists of that city distributed literature, displayed posters and banners in public places, and offered Bible studies. On February 13, Pastor Elias Pedrosa started an evangelistic series in a local auditorium. More than 500 people participated in the programs each night. As a result, Tobias Barreto (which previously had only one Adventist church and 80 members) now has two Adventist churches and 215 members.

Another city reached by the Global Mission project was Palmeira dos Índios, which had no Adventist presence. Pastor Jefté Carvalho led an evangelistic campaign with the help of some theology students from Northeast Brazil College. As a result of divine blessings on this initiative, 169 people were baptized and an Adventist church was organized in that city. Another advance that happened in 1993 was regarding women’s ministries, when this department was organized in the MSA mission field. The activities developed consisted of qualification and training meetings aimed exclusively at women in the cities of Aracaju and Maceió.

With the expansion of the Adventist message in several places in the northeast region of Brazil, SAD leadership understood that an administrative unit of the Church was needed to serve this geographic region more closely. Thus, during its Quinquennial Council, held from November 28 to December 5, 1995, at Brazil College, Central Campus, now Brazil Adventist University Campus São Paulo, the South American Division leaders voted the establishment of the Northeast Brazil Union Mission. The new unit, established in Recife, was to meet the demands of the Church in the states of Bahia, Alagoas, Sergipe, Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, Piauí, and Ceará, with their respective conferences and missions.

Beginning in 1996 medical missionary work was strongly emphasized in Sergipe-Alagoas Mission. Mobile clinics operated in Sergipe and Alagoas, offering care in diverse medical specialties. Between August and September 1996, almost 1,000 medical appointments were held by the clinic’s staff. There were 1,698 dental extractions and restorations, and there were 3,321 fluoride applications. This service was an effective means of introducing Adventism to the municipality of Riachão do Dantas which had no previous Adventist presence. Through these initiatives, 184 people were attended by the clinic staff in that location and, shortly thereafter, volunteer workers carried out an evangelistic series there.

Medical missionary work was also implemented in Aracaju, where Sergipe-Alagoas Mission invested in the evangelization of the Eduardo Gomes and Marcos Freire II neighborhoods. In these neighborhoods, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency International offered medical and dental care. In the Eduardo Gomes neighborhood, around 800 people received medical assistance, followed by a series of Bible studies that reached around 500 citizens and resulted in the baptism of 154 people. In the Marcos Freire II neighborhood, another 1,000 people received medical assistance and 80 of them were baptized. As a result of these and other missionary endeavors, in January 2000 Sergipe-Alagoas Mission had a total of 25,237 Adventists spread across 78 congregations.

This administrative unit functioned under the name Sergipe-Alagoas Mission until 2011 when its territory was reorganized. The change enabled the establishment of a new administrative headquarters to manage the Adventist work in the state of Alagoas Mission. In addition to the reconfiguration, Sergipe-Alagoas Mission came to be known as Sergipe Mission, serving 19,143 Adventist members in the state of Sergipe. After this reorganization, Adventist leadership committed itself to developing plans that could assist the church members in fulfilling the mission of the Church. Continuing the process of administrative reorganization, in 2012 the East Brazil Union Mission was established to serve the Adventists in the states of Bahia and Sergipe.

The Adventist work continues to grow in Sergipe as leaders in the MSe mission field understand the need to involve all members in the task of preaching the gospel. Courses and congresses have been held to encourage and prepare members to become more involved in missionary projects. One of these events, Women’s Ministries Congress, took place in October 2015. The seminars and experiences presented at this event encouraged around 1,300 women to make the decision to use their talents to speak about the plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.
There was another training congress in the MSe mission field in 2015. On that occasion around 400 local church leaders met to launch a program in which the slogan **Sergipe Adventists: More Growth and Salvation** was launched. The goal for the 2016-2019 quadrennial period was to emphasize communion, relationship, mission, fidelity, and the establishment of more churches. The establishment of new churches is an initiative that has been worked on with the project **Santuários de Esperança (Sanctuaries of Hope)**, in partnership with the East Brazil Union Mission. Through this project, the churches in Sergipe and Bahia were challenged to establish a thousand new churches during the five-year period. Between June 2 and 4, 2016, MSe organized a series of inaugurations in which ten new churches were opened in the state of Sergipe.

Another missionary project that strongly encourages members to carry out their mission is **Impacto Esperança (Hope Impact)**, through which missionary books are distributed to the population. In 2017, Adventists in Sergipe distributed books using an ATM-like machine which made it possible for people to collect books for free. In addition, a project called **Trilha da Esperança (Trail of Hope)**, brings together cyclists from all over Sergipe Mission to distribute the missionary book. Since the project **Impacto Hope** began in the territory of MSe, more than 1,000,000 books have been distributed to the population of Sergipe. In 2019, around 220,000 copies of the book **Esperança para a Família (Hope for the Family)** and another 22,000 copies of the children’s edition of the book were delivered to people in Sergipe.

With the commitment of leaders and members to the projects, Adventism has advanced considerably in the state of Sergipe. There are currently around 1,000 small groups in operation and 1,500 missionary pairs involved in the mission in that state. There are also 70 canvassers working in several student canvassing campaigns throughout the territory of Sergipe. These reports are examples of how MSe has fulfilled its mission “to make disciples of Jesus Christ who will live as His witnesses of love and will proclaim to all people the eternal gospel of the three angel’s messages, in preparation for His soon return.”

In the 30-year journey of MSe, administrators and members have sought to continue the efforts made by the pioneers to establish this mission. Along the way there have been many obstacles, and there are some challenges that remain today. Drought periods have plagued the region. There is a high unemployment rate, which is attributed to the closing of jobs in recent years. This, along with the Brazilian economic crisis, complicates the raising of funds for the execution of missionary plans. Despite the difficulties, Adventists in the state of Sergipe perceive the hand of God guiding the efforts in that region of the country. That is why they remain firm in the certainty that God will continue to guide His work on earth, including providing the necessary resources for its advance.

MSe leaders have many plans for the continuous growth of the work in this field. They include: building a more adequate administrative headquarters; construction of Aracaju Adventist School; serving the upper classes of society in Sergipe; and establishing at least one more district each year. In addition to these plans, it is hoped that soon the mission will be able to obtain the status of a conference. All of these advances continue to be sought with the desire that members and leadership are increasingly active in communion with God and in the preaching of the gospel, grounded in the blessed hope of Jesus’ soon return.

**Chronology of Administrative Managers**


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**NOTES**


3. Laryssa Astéria (Assistant of MSe Executive Secretary), WhatsApp message to Lucas Rodrigues (ESDA writing assistant), July 23, 2020.


5. The Pathfinders Club is for children aged 10 to 15. The club usually meets once a week. The children learn and develop talents, skills and appreciation for nature. They are thrilled with outdoor activities like camping, hiking, climbing, and exploring the woods and caves. They learn how to cook outdoors and make fire without matches. They also fight against the use of smoke, alcohol and drugs. *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) Website*, “Quem somos” [Who we are], accessed on February 4, 2020, [http://bit.ly/2FDRqTh](http://bit.ly/2FDRqTh).


7. Data from the Ministerial Secretariat of the Sergipe Mission, November 18, 2016.


9. A Seventh-day Adventist Church evangelist canvasser is a missionary who sells publications approved by the Church to the public with the objective of transmitting the eternal Gospel that brings salvation, physical and spiritual well-being. *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) Website*, “Colportagem” [Canvassing], accessed on February 4, 2020, [http://bit.ly/2J6tY1I](http://bit.ly/2J6tY1I).


11. Ibid., 16.

12. “Em carta ao nosso director...” [In a letter to our director...]. *Revista Mensal* [Monthly Review], vol. 19, no. 7, July 1924, 16.


Ibid.?


Minutes of the Bahia Mission, June 26, 1938, vote no. 074-38.?


“A Voz da Profecia” [The Voice of Prophecy] is the oldest gospel program on Brazilian radio, starting in 1943. Since its beginning it has featured Arautos do Rei [The King’s 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. He presents the message of hope and salvation through bible-based sermons. “Novo Tempo [Adventist Media Center - Brazil], “A Voz da Profecia” [The Voice of Prophecy], accessed on January 28, 2020, https://bit.ly/2RzGrRt.?

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44. “União Este” [East Union], Revista Adventista [Adventist Review], no. 12, year 66, December 1971, 30.


46. “União Este” [East Union], Revista Adventista [Adventist Review], no. 5, year 69, May 1974, 27.


48. Telepaz was an Adventist service that provided “telephone assistance to people in need of psychological, moral and spiritual support. Its staff were specialized in the area of counseling and psychological help.” Eduardo Alberto Teixeira, “Telepaz,” Wikiasd, May 1986, accessed on February 26, 2020, https://bit.ly/2Tl06Uw.


57. Minutes of the East Brazil Union Mission, June 22, 1988, vote no. 88-084.


63. “Concilio da DSA é marcado por mudanças” [SAD Council is marked by changes], Revista Adventista [Adventist Review], no. 2, year 92, February 1996, 14.

64. “Carentes recebem atendimento médico” [Needy people receive medical care], Revista Adventista [Adventist Review], no. 11, year 92, November 1996, 19.


70. Felipe Lemos, “Fazer discípulos” [To Make Disciples], Revista Adventista [Adventist Review], no. 1248, year 107 (June 2012): 33.


74. Project “Hope Impact is a program that encourages reading and provides the annual mass distribution of books by Seventh-day Adventists in the territory of South America.” Seventh-day Adventist Church (Online) Website, “Impacto Esperança” [Hope Impact Project], accessed on February 4, 2020, https://bit.ly/34dZROO.


77. Laryssa Astéria (Assistant of MSe Executive Secretary), WhatsApp message to Lucas Rodrigues (ESDA writing assistant), July 23, 2020.


80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.


83. More information about Missão Sergipe (Sergipe Mission) can be found on the website: http://mse.adventistas.org/ or on social networks - Facebook: @AdventistasSergipe; Instagram and Twitter: @MissaoSergipe and Youtube: Igreja Adventista Sergipe (Sergipe Adventist Church).