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Josafá da Silva Oliveira

Kevin Vinicius Felix Oliveira

The Grão Pará Adventist Institute (Instituto Adventista Grão-Pará or IAGP) is a day school that offers elementary and high school education in Brazil. It belongs to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and is part of the Adventist world education network.

The Grão Pará Adventist Institute is operating in the mission field of the North Brazilian Union Mission (União Norte Brasileira or UNB). The academy is located at 3577 Barão do Triunfo in zip code 66095-050 in the Marco neighborhood of the city of Belém, the capital of the state of Pará, Brazil.

The institution currently has a total of 1,262 students and a team of 60 teachers. The academy also works with one of the distance learning centers of Brazil Adventist University (Universário Adventista de São Paulo or UNASP). The facilities available include, in addition to the classrooms, a multi-sport gymnasium, an auditorium, a library, and a living area. There is also a wing dedicated to Early Childhood Education that includes a court and a swimming pool.

Developments that Led to the Establishment of the School

As far as it is known, the Adventist message in the North Region of Brazil began in 1918 through a printed book...
donated by an Adventist woman living in the state of Pernambuco to an Amazonian man. The first seeds germinated and, in the beginning of the following decade (1920), the north region of Brazil was visited by the administrators of the South American Division. The leaders went there to get to know the territory and evaluate the possibility of establishing the Adventist Church in that region, which took place in January 1927. That year (1927), the leadership of the East Brazil Union Mission (currently the Southeast Brazil Union Conference) organized the Lower Amazonas Mission (Missão do Baixo Amazonas or MBA, now the North Pará Conference) with its headquarters in Belém. Pastor John Lewis Brown was sent to become president of that field and later, canvassers André Gedrath and Hans Mayr joined him to assist in the work.

The mission field in northern Brazil developed a lot until the North Brazil Union Mission (União do Norte do Brasil or UNB) was formed in 1936. Since its founding and up until the early 1960s, the UNB had no Adventist schools that offered high school education in its territory. The closest Adventist school to that region with this degree of education was the Northeast Brazil Junior College located in the state of Pernambuco, at about 1,940 kilometers away. As a result, from the lack of means of transportation and of roads built, the few young people who managed to go to that junior college had to spend a lot to go there. The aggravating factors were that the route could only be made by air or water transport and tickets cost the equivalent of more than half the regular salary received during an entire year of work.

In the early 1960s, most Adventist members linked to the North Brazil Union Mission were young people. They were looking forward to an Adventist educational institution offered boarding school that was nearby. In addition, the possibility of studying the First Grade (currently Middle and Elementary School) and the Second Grade (high school) in the Adventist Education Network was attractive not only to Adventists, but also to the non-Adventist population in that region. Thus, the request for the establishment of an Adventist school came from the general population. However, due to the lack of resources for the construction of a boarding school, the leadership of UNB decided to build an elementary day school.

The School Establishment

The city of Belém was chosen for the location of the school. In the 1960s, Belém had seven organized Adventist churches and other groups in addition to Belem Adventist Hospital (Hospital Adventista Belém or HAB) there. Back then, government institutions were not open to the Adventist faith principles or to full religious freedom. Therefore, Adventist students who went to public schools faced difficulties in regard to subjects that were taught on Saturdays. Thinking of building an Adventist educational unit to serve this group, UNB’s leadership, in partnership with the leaders of MBA and HAB, asked permission from the South American Division to establish a day academy that could offer high school. Based on the reasons presented, the request was accepted, and IAGP became the first Adventist school of this nature in Brazil.

The place where the entire educational complex was established was donated by Belem Hospital, and it was next to the headquarters of that health institution. This proximity to the HAB was very convenient since many of the school’s first students were the hospital employees’ children. The funds for construction came from the Union itself with the assistance of the South American Division. A contractor was hired to direct the construction of the building, and his work was monitored and supervised by Union leadership. The work began in the early 1960s and, a year later, the entire construction was complete. On February 21, 1961, the academy was inaugurated, and it initially had five classrooms in addition to other rooms for the administration and the library and a sports court.

The name chosen for the school was “Pará Academy,” and it did not include the word “Adventist” due to the strong prejudice that still existed at the time regarding Protestant churches. The term “Grão Pará” was chosen because, in the Brazil imperial period (1822-1889), the state of Pará was known as the province of Grão Pará. For the inauguration ceremony, the then-state governor was present, and he cut the symbolic ribbon. Other authorities also participated in the ceremony, including the Secretary of Education of Pará and the North Brazil Union Mission leaders.

On this occasion, registrations for the college entrance exams were also opened. The institution had its operation authorized by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) through Ordinance No. 298 of MEC, and it was published in the “Diário Oficial da União” [Official Diary of the Union] on April 19, 1961.

The opening of the institution encouraged Adventists in that region since from that moment on they could enroll their children in a school that would give them peace of mind regarding Sabbathkeeping. In addition, they were certain that the education they would promote the influences compatible with Christian doctrines. The presence of Adventist Education in that region benefited many of the young people who lived in the neighborhoods near the institution, both Adventists and non-Adventists. Over time, several parents who were not Adventists began to make sure their children attended that school because they preferred the Christian educational principles that guided the work of the institution.

When the school started its activities, it offered only elementary education with classes from 1st to 4th grade. The school’s first official director was Gerson P. de Araújo. He and the other leaders were surprised by the immediate and positive response from Adventists and supporters of the educational work in the region where the academy was established. Even though the entrance exams were done much later, about 450 students were enrolled in the school. More and more students sought the institution, and by the end of 1962, the school already had approximately 700 students. That same year (1962), the school’s name was changed to “Pará Day Academy.” In 1963, the great demand forced the administration to limit the number of students enrolled due to the lack of space and the work overload for the teachers, who had to teach more than 50 weekly classes.
One of the main challenges faced by the school’s leadership at the beginning of its activities was finding and hiring Adventist teachers. For this reason, many students were encouraged to pursue degrees in education so that, in the future, they could be teachers of the various subjects that comprised the curriculum of Pará Day Academy. In addition to this incentive, documents were sent to the “Inspetoria da Seccional da Educação” [Education Section Inspectorate] in order to apply for authorization (in a Precarious Title) so that these students could legally teach before their respective graduations. Nevertheless, the initial need for teachers was met with the provisional hiring of other (non-Adventist) teachers who had graduated in different areas of study in Belém. About five years after the academy’s foundation, the entire teaching staff (13 teachers) was already formed by Adventist professionals.

Later, another difficulty was noticed. The Union’s mission field was vast, taking up about 4,363,714 km². Therefore, the journey of many students to the institution was not viable due to the distance from their homes. There was a need to build more educational institutions, including offering a boarding school, to enable more young people to receive an Adventist education. In this circumstance, the Church’s leadership, through the first quarter of 1964 Sabbath School Study Guide, directed the missionary offering to the South American Division. The intention of this missionary project was described in the back cover of the Study Guide as “to establish a boarding school for the young people from the North region of Brazil.” As a result, the first Adventist boarding school in the north of Brazil in the Amazon state was built in 1966. It was called the Adventist Agricultural-Industrial Academy, and it was located in the municipality of Rio Preto da Eva. Likewise, around a decade later, another boarding school was established, in 1977 in the state of Pará, the municipality of Uruará, and it was called the Agro-Industrial Adventist Trans-Amazon Academy.

### History of the School

In the expanding scenario of the Adventist education in the north region, the IAGP also continued to grow. After some years offering only from the 1st to the 4th grades, the Accounting Technician classes were implemented in the academy. The students were prepared professionally with those classes, and after their graduation, many were hired by SDA organization offices as professionals. Both the Elementary School and the Accounting Classes were organized according to the curriculum provided by MEC, and they included Bible classes conducted three times a week. Noticing the success of that first technician course, the institution’s leadership decided to implement Teaching classes that were also at the high school level. This course prepared future educators to teach the Elementary School years (1st to 8th grades).

In 1974, when religious intolerance had decreased considerably in that region, the institution was renamed the Pará Day Academy. From 1976 onwards, the IAGP went through several structural and educational changes including improvements in its facilities and teaching staff training. In 1978, the institution had completed 17 years of existence, there were 879 students enrolled from Kindergarten to high school. The entire student body was served by more than 30 Adventist teachers and staff. That year, the construction of a new wing in front of the school was underway, and it would provide six classrooms, a playground, and a library with the capacity for more than 3,500 volumes.

In the following year (1979), about 60 percent of the school students were young non-Adventists. The opportunity to evangelize through Adventist Christian education was obvious. Still with focus and an evangelistic thinking in mind, that year, the Marco Seventh-day Adventist Church was inaugurated close to the school and the hospital. That congregation started when a group of 15 people who had previously been attending services in the chapel of the Belem Hospital decided to move the meeting place to a room at the Grão Pará Adventist Academy. The goal was to form an active and evangelistic church. Not long after its foundation, that church became the main place of worship in the pastoral district despite being on the school grounds.

In 1985, the IAGP surpassed the mark of 1,700 enrolled students, offering two course options at the high school level: Teaching and Science. Besides this achievement, each subsequent year marked the school’s history with important events and celebrations. The following year (1986), the IAGP celebrated its 25th anniversary with a program that included a thanksgiving service, cultural performances, and moments of recreation. Over the years, the institution grew to the point that it housed more than 2,800 students in an expansion that made it the largest day secondary school among Adventist schools in the mission field of the South American Division. In 1994, the first baptism of IAGP teachers took place. This story began when a man named Ronaldo, still a Biology student, sought out the school director in order to fill a job vacancy. He was given the opportunity to apply, and the director of the college at the time encouraged him to learn about the Adventist lifestyle. Gradually, Ronaldo learned more about the Bible and about Adventists. Sometime later, after attending a baptism ceremony, that man decided that he, too, would like to be baptized. It became a reality on September 30, 1994, when Ronaldo, together with some of his family members and his colleague teacher Antônio Carlos Lima among 21 other students, were baptized in the Adventist Church.

New advances and celebrations followed. From May 9 to 11, 1997, during the academy’s 36th anniversary, the institution held a series of festivities that included the presence of its former directors and UNB leaders. At the time, the institution had approximately 2,200 students in its elementary and high school levels as well as 120 staff. In celebration of the academy’s anniversary, the Municipality of Belém held a solemn session in tribute to the institution, commemorating the educational, humanitarian, and social work carried out in the region. This recognition was the result of IAGP mission since its foundation: to offer quality education with sound Christian principles.
The 21st Century also brought important occasions to be celebrated in the history of IAGP. In 2002, UNB leadership implemented its first Theology Studies Program for leaders and employees of SDA institutions. In partnership with the Union, the academy served as one of the educational centers that would assist students as they received this coursework. In 2008, the IAGP was visited by some leaders of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. During that visit, school employees were encouraged to continue the work they were doing. The General Conference leaders recognized that investing in education is a way to reach students, their parents and families. And it was in this educational and missionary effort that IAGP celebrated, in 2011, its 50th year that was marked by a solemn thanksgiving service. The following year (2012), the IAGP Choir released its album “O Amor é Jesus” [“Love is Jesus”].

On October 10, 2019, already living up to its missionary vocation as an Adventist institution, the IAGP opened a Hope Center of Influence, a study room to receive people who learned about Seventh-day Adventists through the Adventist Media Center. This was the second Hope Center of Influence (of the five existing) to be opened in the metropolitan region of Belém. The expectation of North Pará Conference (Associação Norte-Paranaense or ANPa) leadership that manages the school is that this space at IAGP directly serve the families of non-Adventist students.

**Historical Role of the School**

Since its beginning, the institution has been recognized for its contribution to society because it trains good citizens and qualified professionals. This is done in the context of a good relationship between the school and the surrounding community. The leaders and students of Grão Pará Adventist Academy participate in various civic activities in the city of Belém such as parades during special dates like the Independence of Brazil, Proclamation of the Republic, and the city’s anniversary celebration, among others. These are some of the activities carried out by the institution that has made it known and relevant among other educational institutions in the capital of Pará. Academy students also participate in sports competitions and high school games organized by MEC Inspection and Education Secretariat for Physical Education.

In the religious sphere, the IAGP has contributed tremendously in terms of educational concepts and methods for elementary and high school Adventist day schools throughout the state of Pará. As a result of the efforts of many, the school came to be recognized for its standard of excellence due to the quality of education and the values it shares. Through teaching that is committed to the holistic formation of each person and a Bible-based education, the academy has been able to present the Adventist message to those who do not know it in addition to contributing to the consolidation of the Adventist faith in its students. In this context, besides the relationship with the community, the IAGP has also provided support to Church members and their families. In all these ways, the academy has sought to contribute to the Adventist work in every way possible, and it testifies to the significant value of a Seventh-day Adventist Christian education.

**What Remains to Be Done to Fulfill the School’s Mission**

Since its opening, Grão Pará Adventist Academy staff has not spared any efforts to offer a quality education to their students. However, there are still plans to be made and projects to be accomplished to further advance the school’s mission. One of these objectives is to expand the Academy so it can offer classes of higher education and become a college, which will enable it to reach an even larger number of students. Nevertheless, while this dream of expanding the IAGP curriculum to Higher Education has not yet become a reality, instead they have formed a partnership with UNASP Distance Education center, which offers several undergraduate and graduate courses.

A retrospective look shows that divine blessings can be perceived throughout Grão Pará Adventist Academy’s journey. From its humble beginnings, with 1st to 4th grade classes, to the present where complete elementary and high school levels are offered, God has guided the institution. Aware and grateful for God’s loving care, IAGP’s administration and employees continue to work confidently, striving to offer educational excellence. They do that with the assurance that the same God who worked in the past will continue to guide His people in the future. And so, they proceed in their mission of educating for eternity.

**Chronology of Directors**


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NOTES

1. Information received from the ANPa education department, June 2019.


4. An 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, with the objective of transmitting to their fellow men the eternal Gospel that brings salvation, physical and spiritual well-being.” Seventh-day Adventist Church Brazil Website, “Colportagem” [“Canvassing”], accessed February 4, 2020, http://bit.ly/2J6Y11.


10. Minutes of the North Brazil Union Mission, no. 317, December 29, 1959, vote no. 59-344.

11. Ibid.

12. Walter Streithorst Filho, interviewed by the authors, n.d.


15. Ibid.


17. Process of high school implementation at Grão Pará Adventist Academy, 1977.


19. Ibid.

20. A precarious title is a public service permit: “the delegation, on a precarious title, through public bidding, of the provision of public services, made by the granting authority to the individual or legal entity that demonstrates the capacity for its performance, on its own account and risk.” Jusbrasil, “Lei de Concessões - Lei Federal nº 8.987, de 13 de fevereiro de 1995” [Concessions Law - Federal Law no. 8,987, of February 13, 1995], accessed November 4, 2019, https://bit.ly/2CfkLkT.


22.


25. Jesualdo Antônio de Sousa Monteiro, “Instituto Adventista Transamazônico Agro-industrial” ["Agro-Industrial Adventist Trans-Amazon Academy"] (Monography, Brazil College, n/d), 4, 5.


27. Ibid.


30. “Novas Instalações para o Instituto Grão-Pará” ["New Facilities to the Grão Pará Adventist Academy"], Revista Adventista 74, no. 6 (June 1979): 20.


32. “Progressos na Educação” ["Progress in Education"], Revista Adventista 80, no. 6 (June 1985): 29.

33. “Missão Baixo Amazonas” ["Lower Amazonas Mission"], Revista Adventista 82, no. 6 (June 1986) 35.

34. “MBA avança em todas as áreas” ["MBA advances in all areas"], Revista Adventista 84, no. 12 (December 1988): 29.


37. “UNB oferece 1º programa de estudos em Teologia” ["UNB offers 1st program of Theology studies"], Revista Adventista 98, no. 9 (September 2002): 32.


40. Hope Center of Influence is an environment where fully elaborated programs take place “to serve those who come into contact with the denomination through the broadcast channels.” Márcio Basso, “Espaço Novo Tempo é inaugurado nos Estados Unidos” [Hope Center of Influence opens in the United States], Adventist News, August 5, 2019, accessed June 8, 2020, https://bit.ly/2MC5zDE.


42. Josafá da Silva Oliveira (Director of the Ellen G. White Study Center of FAAMA), email message to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associate editor), August 23, 2019.

43. “MBA avança em todas as áreas” ["MBA advances in all areas"], Revista Adventista 84, no. 12 (December 1988): 29.

44. Josafá da Silva Oliveira (Director of the Ellen G. White Study Center of FAAMA), email message to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associate editor), August 23, 2019.

45. Ibid.


47. More information about the IAGP can be found on their website at [https://graopara.eduacaeoventista.org.br/](https://graopara.eduacaeoventista.org.br/) or on their social network pages on Facebook: @oiagp and Instagram: @colegioiapg.

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