



West Chiapas Conference headquarters.

Photo courtesy of Chiapas Mexican Union.

West Chiapas Conference

HIPÓLITO GÓMEZ

Hipólito Gómez Cruz, D.Min. (the Inter-American Adventist Theological Seminary), M.A. in religion (Andrews University's extension program at Montemorelos University), M.A. in administration (Montemorelos University's extension program at Linda Vista University), B.A. in theology (Montemorelos University), has been a district pastor in the Tabasco and Mayab Conferences and a departmental director in the Tabasco and Soconusco Conferences. Gomez has held administrative functions in the Oaxaca, West Chiapas, and Soconusco Conferences, and the Chiapas Mexican Union. Gomez and his wife Wilma Ruth Perez Estrada have two children.

The West Chiapas Conference is part of the Chiapas Mexican Union Conference in the Inter-American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. It covers: the western part of the state of Chiapas, including Arriaga, Berriozabal, Cintalapa, Jiquipilas, Ocozocoautla de Espinosa, Mezcalapa, and Tonalá; plus a portion of the municipalities of Ostuacan, Tecpatán, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Las Choapas Veracruz, and Santa María Chimalapa in

Oaxaca. Its headquarters is in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas, Mexico.¹

Statistics (June 30, 2018): Churches, 189; membership, 26,713; population, 419,590.²

Institutions of the West Chiapas Conference

Independencia School: Located in Mezcalapa, this educational institution began to function in 1978 in the Sabbath School classrooms of the Mezcalapa Central Church. Founded at the initiative of Pastor Casto Maheda, the first teachers were Ilcias de la Cruz and Abel Bouchot.³ The initial enrollment was 30 students, but it grew steadily. Five years later, in 1983, it moved to its current campus in Raudales, Malpaso. The Independencia School, known as “Colinde,” is now a K-12 institution with 103 students in elementary school, 77 in middle school, and 69 in high school. As of March 2019 it had a total enrollment of 249.

Eben-Ezer Campground: The conference campground, Eben-Ezer, is located in Cintalapa. On January 13, 2010, the conference voted (vote no. 364)⁴ to buy 76 hectares (187 acres) for the campsite. As part of its program, a Small Groups Congress unveiled a plaque to inaugurate the campground on June 4, 2011.⁵ It has an auditorium with a capacity for 3,000, a kitchen-dining hall for 600, a soccer field, two basketball courts, two deep wells, bathroom and shower facilities, and two elevated water tanks. The site still has about 50 hectares (123 acres) available for expansion.

Jose Vasconcelos School: The origins of Adventist education in this municipality date back to 1951. Such individuals as Georgina Guzman, Esther Jimenez, Pastor Asuncion Velazquez, and Wulfrano Cruz gave birth to the “El Progreso” School, which later became the Jose Vasconcelos School. In 1997, it purchased a property of 5,176.77 sq. meters (6,191 sq. yards) at the Hizachal ranch (the place where Adventism in Chiapas began) in Tonalá, and in 1998 construction of the school began.⁶ It is currently a K-6 school with 99 students.

Origins of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Territory of the West Chiapas Conference

Thanks to the magazine *Mensajeros de la verdad* (Herald of Truth), edited by George W. Caviness from the “Imprenta de la verdad” (The Truth Printing House) located at 1599 de la Avenida 22, in Tacubaya, Mexico City,⁷ Adventism reached Ixtaltepec, Oaxaca. In an almost miraculous way, the magazine came into the hands of Juan and Aurelio Jimenez. Learning of the Adventist message, they took it to the people of Huizachal and Tonalá, Chiapas.

The Adventist message entered the state of Chiapas through Hizachal, in the municipality of Tonalá. First two young men of Zapotec origin,⁸ Juan and Catarino Jimenez, accepted it. Next, their older brother, Aurelio, joined the church. In 1915 he married Maria Mejia, daughter of the first Adventists in Huizachal, Emiliano and Raymunda Mejia, who were baptized April 3, 1920, by Pastor Salvador Marchisio.

For eight years, Juan visited almost every town on the railroad route from Tierra Blanca, Veracruz, to the Suchiate River in Chiapas,⁹ distributing Adventist publications. In 1925, Aurelio Jimenez returned to those same places, now as an Adventist pastor. The three Jimenez brothers—Aurelio, Juan, and Catarino—developed a healing ministry that greatly advanced the work of the Adventist Church in Chiapas and Oaxaca.¹⁰ By 1950, the territory had 40 baptized members, a meeting place, and a project to establish an Adventist school.¹¹

The Adventist message reached Arriaga through Adventist colporteurs (literature evangelists) and the work of pastors.¹²

In 1952, Jorge Rodriguez Meza was 12 years old, and he clearly remembers Augusto Clemente and his wife Estefana Rodriguez,¹³ with their Bible in hand, visiting the homes in Cintalapa. Those same lay missionaries gave him the book *The Great Controversy*. It eventually led him to accept the Adventist message and be baptized, years later, in 1978, by Eliseo Santos.

In 1947, God led Rodolfo Martinez Aguilar, through a dream, to Tecpatan. After two days, he returned home, and the first thing he did was to gather his family and read together Psalm 91. In 1950, Rodolfo was baptized together with his wife, Isabel Chambe Gutierrez, and their children, Juanita, Julia, Romeo, and Roberto. They were the first Adventists in Ocozocoautla.

The construction of the Peñitas and Nezahualcoyotl dams buried the Numero Uno and some other churches beneath the lakes they created, and those churches relocated to areas such as Laminas 4, Xochitlan, and Nuevo Jalapa. Some families took with them the Adventist message and founded new congregations such as that of Malpaso. Worthy of mention is Xochitlan, where the church has grown thanks to consecrated lay people such as the Velasco siblings—Mateo, Felicita, and Leonardo—and Daniel Lira and Camerino Mancillas. Such men and women gave their lives to the service of Jesus.¹⁴ If we add the people that arrived because of jobs generated by the construction companies, the result was a small group of about 30 Adventists that met in a house near to what is still known today as “la curva del petroleo,” in Malpaso.¹⁵ Pastor Pomposo De la Cruz—the first Adventist pastor in Raudales Malpaso—shepherded this group.¹⁶ Among its members was a very active layman, Boanerges Heredia.¹⁷ Other prominent laypersons were Cesar Salvatierra, Concepcion de Salvatierra, and Wilber and Joaquin Velasco.

Between 1973 and 1974, still as part of the Southern Mission, the first public evangelistic series took place in Malpaso, led for three months by Pastor Eliseo Santos, accompanied by 30 pastors and teachers. Among the people in that group were Ruben Rodriguez, Casto Maeda, and Hector Cifuentes. In total, the meetings resulted in the baptism of approximately 250.¹⁸ In 1976 the Central Church organized.¹⁹

Events that Led to the Organization of the Conference

On April 3, 2000, the Southern Mexican Union convened a special session in Villahermosa, Tabasco, to discuss the possibility of rearranging the territory of the Southern Mexican Union to form two unions. The delegates decided to request the executive committee of the Inter-American Division to readjust the territory of the Southern Mexican Union.²⁰

The Inter-American Division appointed a study committee, which in turn recommended asking the executive committee of the General Conference to authorize the creation of the new union. In the spring of 2001, the General Conference voted to create the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union. Its territory would comprise the states of Guerrero, Morelos, Puebla, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, Veracruz, Oaxaca, part of the Estado de Mexico, and a portion of Tabasco up to the river of Samaria and Mezcalapa.²¹

The territory of the Southern Mexican Union reorganized again in 2012,²² forming now two unions: the Southeast Mexican Union and the new Chiapas Mexican Union Mission comprising only the state of Chiapas. Two years later, in 2014, because of its growth, the latter became a union conference.

The West Chiapas Mission was organized with the authority of votes no. 0176 and no. 0177 at the 2007 mid-year plenary session of the Southern Mexican Union,²³ held on June 5-7, 2007, in Tapachula, Chiapas. Vote no. 0176 approved a readjustment of the Central Chiapas Conference. Seven days later, the conference executive committee took vote no. 3470, approving the transfer of the districts Luis Espinosa, Juan de Grijalva, El Cedro, Berriozabal, Teran, Ocozocoautla, La Cumbre, Jiquipilas, Insurgentes, and Cintalapa, to form the West Chiapas Conference.²⁴ Twelve days later, in Pichucalco, the executive committee of the North Chiapas Conference approved the transfer of the districts of Agua Blanca, CNC, Xochitlan, Raudales I and II, and Santos Degollado through vote no. 3746.²⁵ And the Soconusco Conference (in accordance to vote no. 4850)²⁶ authorized the transfer of the districts Arriaga and Tonalá, to form the new West Chiapas Mission, with headquarters in Teran, Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas.

By June 6, 2013, through vote no. 0332,²⁷ the Chiapas Mexican Union Mission authorized a change of status from union mission to union conference, which took effect at the next quadrennial session, on June 18-19, 2013.²⁸ Since its formation, its headquarters have been located at Calle Barbasco 37, Colonia San Juan Crispin Norte, Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas, Mexico, zip code 29020.

Territory. According to the 2018-2022 Constitution and Statutes of the West Chiapas Conference, voted at the second quadrennial session on July 17, 2018, at the auditorium of the Chiapas Mexican Union in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas, the territory of the conference consists of the municipalities of Arriaga, Berriozabal, Cintalapa, Jiquipilas, Mezcalapa, Ocozocoautla de Espinosa, and Tonalá, as well as part of the municipalities of Ostuacan, Tecpatan, Tuxtla Gutierrez, Las Choapas, Veracruz, and Santa Maria Chimalapa, Oaxaca.²⁹

Mission. The mission of the conference is "To glorify God and, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, to lead every believer to an experience of a personal and transforming relationship with Christ, which will enable them to be disciples to share the everlasting gospel to every person that lives in our territory."

Membership. According to its statistical reports,³⁰ as of March 31, 2008, the conference had 87 churches, 21 pastors, and 23,448 church members. By December 31, 2018, it had grown to 198 churches, 39 pastors, and 26,918 members.

Initial Administration. The first constituency meeting of the West Chiapas Mission took place in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas, on January 6, 2008. It appointed Pastor David Celis Aguilar as president and Victor Cabrera Morales as secretary-treasurer.

Development of the West Chiapas Conference

Territory. The territory of the conference has remained almost unchanged since its establishment in 2008. The conference itself has experienced great structural growth as well as an increase in its ministerial team—it now has 30 districts, even though, in 2016, it gave away the Luis Espinoza district to the Grijalva Conference. However, the West Chiapas Conference has its own challenges to evangelize the municipality and the city of Arriaga.

List of Presidents

David Celis Aguilar (2008-2010); Salomon Garcia Gonzalez (2010-2012); Samuel Castellanos Dominguez (2012-2014); Rene Flores Bello (2014-2016); Omar Armando Rodriguez Lopez (2016); Eloy Perez Garcia (2017-2019); Uriel Castellanos Maza (2019-present).

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NOTES

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