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Digital projection of the West Pará Mission headquarters in 2017.

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## West Pará Mission

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West Para Mission (MOPa) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, located in the territory of the North Brazil Union Mission (UNB).

West Para Mission's headquarters is located at Sérgio Henn Avenue 584, 68020-000, Diamantino, Santarém, Pará, Brazil.<sup>1</sup>

MOPa comprises the western part of the state of Pará including more than thirty cities. As of 2019, the population of this region was 1,469,245, of which 38,710 were Adventists, distributed over 165 congregations. On average there were approximately one Adventist per thirty-eight inhabitants.<sup>2</sup>

As of 2019, *Rádio Princesa* (Princess Radio, 93.1 FM), in the city of Santarém, broadcasted the program “Tempo de Esperança” (Hope Time) each day Monday through Friday. Produced by the MOPa communication department, the program delivered the Adventist message in eleven cities and seven rural communities in western Pará. The communication department also produced a weekly program broadcasted on a television channel in the same city. Together, the radio and television programs had the potential to reach approximately 710,000 inhabitants.<sup>3</sup>

MOPa operated four schools with a total of 1,864 students enrolled in 2019. The Uruará Adventist Academy located in the city of Uruará enrolled 244 students. The Agro-Industrial Adventist Trans-Amazon Academy (IATAI) also located in Uruará enrolled 228 students. The Altamira Elza Gutzeit Adventist Academy (CAA) located in the city of Altamira enrolled 808 students. And the Santarém Adventist Academy in Santarém enrolled 584 students.<sup>4</sup>

To meet the demands of Adventist Education and membership, MOPa has a total of 356 employees, of which seventy-one work in the mission office and 231 in the educational units. In the pastoral area, there are twenty-two ordained and twenty-five licensed ministers. MOPa also has five ordained and two licensed ministerial workers.<sup>5</sup>

## The Origin of the Adventist Church Work in the Mission Territory

Adventism first entered western Pará in 1927 when the SAD organized the Lower Amazonas Mission (MBA, now the North Pará Conference), under the administration of the East Brazil Union Mission (UEB, now the Southeast Brazil Union Conference).<sup>6</sup> The MBA's objective was to direct the Adventist work in the current states of Amazonas, Pará, Ceará, Piauí, Maranhão, Acre, Amapá, Roraima, and Rondônia. Its first headquarters were established in the city of Belém, the capital of Pará, with John L. Brown as the first president. Brown arrived in Belém do Pará in May 1927, along with the canvassers<sup>7</sup> André Gedrath and Hans Mayr as well as Mayr's wife, Johanna.<sup>8</sup> Work immediately spread to the other capitals of the great northern region. André Gedrath went to work in the city of Fortaleza, capital of Ceará, and Hans Mayr was sent to São Luís, capital of Maranhão. The following year, 1928, both returned to Belém to assist in the missionary work that was being carried out in the capital of Pará. Also, in 1928 John L. Brown was transferred to SAD and, in his place, Leo B. Halliwell assumed the presidency of the field. At that time, Leo Halliwell and his wife, Jessie, who was a nurse took an exploratory trip along the Amazon River. During the trip, the couple was touched by the poverty and illnesses that affected the riverside people. Later, the Halliwells sought resources to build a launch to work in the riverside regions.<sup>9</sup>

In 1930, the Halliwells decided to study tropical diseases in the United States and, when they returned, Leo Halliwell hired a man named Afonso, owner of a shipyard in Belém, to building the launch that would be called the *Luzeiro* [Light Bearer]. While Leo Halliwell supervised the construction of the launch, Jessie Halliwell worked in the Lower Amazonas Mission office. Finally, on July 4, 1931, the *Light Bearer Launch* was inaugurated, with the mission of medical, social and spiritual assistance to the population of Northern Brazil.<sup>10</sup> The Halliwells traveled a total of 3.2 thousand kilometers round trip annually from Belém to the city of Manaus, serving the riverside communities in the tributaries of the Amazon River.<sup>11</sup>

By March 1934, a Sabbath School was already operating in the city of Santarém. During a trip to Manaus, Leo Halliwell passed through Santarém and held an open-air meeting there on a Saturday night.<sup>12</sup> It is believed that on this occasion a lady came into contact with Halliwell, saying that she enjoyed the lecture, that her father, Mr. Jennings, was an American, and that she was willing to make her home available for the next evangelistic meetings.<sup>13</sup> Continuing on his journey to Manaus, Halliwell passed through the city of Óbidos and on to the city of Faro on the border with the state of Amazonas where he met a Catholic priest who offered the city church as a venue for an evangelistic meeting.<sup>14</sup> On the return trip to Belém, the Halliwells again landed in Santarém, where they sought Mr. Jennings. He was a pastor of another evangelic denomination, but received the Adventist couple very kindly into his home. Evangelistic meetings were held there—the first one held the same day of the couple's arrival in that city. Years later, the Jennings were one of the first families in Santarém to be baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>15</sup>

In 1937, during another trip of the *Light Bearer* launch to Manaus, Leo Halliwell again passed again through the cities of Santarém and Óbidos. Evangelistic meetings were held in those cities where four people decided to be baptized.<sup>16</sup> The following year, 1938, the canvasser Pedro Linhares was sent to work<sup>17</sup> in the Pará countryside. Passing through Santarém and Óbidos, he managed to sell books such as *O Raiar de Um Novo Dia* (*The Dawn of a New Day*) and the magazine *O Atalaia* (*The Watchman*).<sup>18</sup> That same year, during a return trip to Belém, Leo Halliwell baptized three other people in Óbidos.<sup>19</sup>

In 1939 and 1940, the canvassers Clóvis Viana and Francisco Lopes were sent to work in Santarém. While spreading Adventist literature in the region, the two also conducted Bible studies and made missionary visits to people interested in the Adventist message. As a result of their work, seven people decided to keep the Sabbath and to be baptized.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, in 1945 the Seventh-day Adventist congregation in the city of Santarém was organized,<sup>21</sup> with the Jennings family as one of the pioneers in the region.<sup>22</sup>

In the same decade, canvassers visited the city of Alenquer in Pará. Influenced by the sale of books, Doctor Edgar Bentes Rodrigues, then mayor of Alenquer, was baptized in December 1945, along with his wife, Maria Azevedo Rodrigues. Later, Rodrigues studied theology and, in 1951, founded Pênfigo Mato-Grossense Hospital (now Pênfigo Adventist Hospital) in the city of Campo Grande in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul.<sup>23</sup> In 1952, the Santarém congregation started to build Santarém Adventist Academy. Construction was made possible by the

donation of two thousand bricks from two city merchants.<sup>24</sup>

In 1957, the Lower Amazonas Mission leadership decided to hold a series of meetings in various strategic locations in the field. Among these places was the city of Santarém where the meetings were directed by the workers Odilon Grassi de Lima and Antônio Queiroz.<sup>25</sup> The following year, the Santarém Adventist church was dedicated, during a beautiful ceremony. This church was built in just seventeen days.<sup>26</sup> During 1967, a new series of meetings were promoted in the Pará countryside. In Santarém, evangelism was led by Jorge Burlandy, with the help of pastors José Lessa and Luís Melo, and the Bible worker Joana Carvalho.<sup>27</sup> The efforts made in the city helped the Lower Amazonas Mission to end the year 1967 with 863 baptisms.<sup>28</sup> In 1968, a second congregation was formed as a result of the evangelistic effort. In order to temporarily house the new members, a building was built on land acquired by the mission to build the new church.<sup>29</sup>

By 1971, the city of Santarém church membership totaled about 200 Adventist members.<sup>30</sup> In that same year, Carlos V. Boock assumed the leadership of Santarém district.<sup>31</sup> Regarding physical structures, at the time, the Adventist temple, which had already been built in the city, was completely renovated and, in the following year (1972), a room was rented to start a series of meetings in the city of Altamira, on the banks of the Trans-Amazon highway, which had just been built.<sup>32</sup> As a result of these meetings held in that rented room in Altamira, by 1976 the city had an Adventist congregation with about 200 members, in addition to an elementary school with sixty-nine students and two teachers. At the time, the pastoral district of Altamira covered a large region, with a total of 530 kilometers along the Trans-Amazon highway.<sup>33</sup>

During the 1970s, Seventh-day Adventist social assistance was intensified in the region. In 1973, through an agreement with Funrural,<sup>34</sup> of the federal government, the Lower Amazonas Mission received four rolling clinics for medical assistance. Two clinics were headquartered in the city of Altamira to serve the farming settlements near the Trans-Amazon Highway, and the third had its headquarters in Santarém. The fourth donated clinic was organized in the city of Picos, in the state of Piauí.<sup>35</sup>

The North Brazil Union Mission also took an important step in 1976 to expand Adventist education in the current territory of MOPa. It was in that year that the union asked the Brazil National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (Incra) for about three thousand hectares along the Trans-Amazon highway, between the cities of Altamira and Santarém, at kilometer 150 of the highway. The goal was to build the Agricultural Adventist Trans-Amazon Academy (now the Agro-Industrial Adventist Trans-Amazon Academy or IATAI) in this location. In 1977, the requested area was granted to the Adventist Church. In the same year, construction of the boarding school began, led by the Gutzeit brothers. Moreover, in the same year, Adventists from the cities of Altamira and Santarém held their second camp meeting in the city of Medicilândia.<sup>36</sup>

Beginning in the 1980s, new churches were built in other cities in western Pará. In Itaituba, for example, the city's Adventist church was dedicated in the early 1980s. The group of Adventists in the region started with the families of José Luís da Silva and Eunice Fernandes Sacilott, a total of fourteen members. In May 1980, when the

church was organized and its building dedicated, it had 100 members, the result of a strong evangelistic work carried out in the city.<sup>37</sup> Also, in 1980 the Adventist message officially reached the city of Rurópolis, where the couple Joel and Madalena Taveira started evangelistic work. In November 1981, when the church opened, the Sabbath School membership totaled eighty people. Of these, at least fifty were baptized. In the same month, other churches were dedicated in the cities of Altamira, Santarém, Nova Esperança, and Nova Aliança.<sup>38</sup> In April 1982, a second church was opened in Santarém, built by young people from the Central Adventist church of the city in just thirty-five days. The construction of the church was part of the project "*Quatro Igrejas no Norte* (Four Churches in the North), main objective of which was to build a church in each UNB mission field.<sup>39</sup>

During the 1980s, Adventist education also advanced in the region. The first Adventist school in Santarém was inaugurated in 1980. The Almerinda Jennings Adventist Academy operated at the back of the Santarém Central Adventist church. Offering only elementary school, the structure consisted of three classrooms, an office, board rooms, and a block for physical activities. Eighty students were enrolled in the first year.<sup>40</sup> In addition to IATAI (The Agro-Industrial Adventist Trans-Amazon Academy) and the elementary school in Santarém, western Pará already had educational units in the cities of Altamira and Itaituba. These latter two schools were recognized in 1984 for better performance and growing enrollments.<sup>41</sup> Plans were also underway to build an educational center in Altamira with capacity for 500 students.<sup>42</sup> On the evangelistic front, a new church was inaugurated in Alvorada, in the city of Itaituba. A school was also opened there, which in March 1985 had about thirty students enrolled.<sup>43</sup>

In order to reach even more people with the Adventist message, in 1988, after a contract was signed with Tropical Radio in the city of Santarém, the radio program *A Voz da Profecia* (The Voice of Prophecy)<sup>44</sup> started to be broadcast. According to the signed contract, the broadcaster was to run the program for four years. The program was broadcast on Sundays.

In 1990, a large evangelistic campaign took place in the city of Santarém. MBA and UNB pastors conducted evangelistic series at six preaching points spread across the city. At the end of the year, about 500 people were baptized. The number of congregations in the city also increased from four to seven.<sup>45</sup> By 1992, the city already had eight Adventist churches.<sup>46</sup> In the same year, plans were begun to divide the territory of the Lower Amazonas Mission and to organize a new mission field headquartered in Santarém.<sup>47</sup>

In 1996, Lower Amazonas Mission upgraded to the Lower Amazon Conference (ABA). At the time, the field had 600 congregations across its mission field, grouped in thirty-two pastoral districts.<sup>48</sup> In 2000, ABA reached a total of 627 congregations and more than 96,000 baptized members, which led UNB to create a new administrative unit, the South Pará Mission, headquartered in the city of Marabá. It included the cities of Altamira and Santarém. The new mission, now called, the South Pará Conference (ASPa), started operation in January 2002.<sup>49</sup>

Three years later, in 2005, the number of Adventist members linked to ASPa reached about 105,750 people. The number of organized churches in the territory had already surpassed 210 congregations. Meanwhile, the Lower Amazon Conference was also making significant progress with 117,234 members and 283 churches. Due to the progressive growth of the church in Pará, it was necessary to create a new field, in order to better serve its members.<sup>50</sup>

## Mission Organizational History

In 2007, the number of Adventists in the state of Pará was over 100,000. While ABA had 121,114 members, the South Pará Conference had 113,864 baptized Adventists. Thus, ASPa voted to request that SAD form a survey board in order to study the creation of a new mission field in the state of Pará.<sup>51</sup> The vote was forwarded to UNB, which registered it and forwarded the request to the division.<sup>52</sup> In 2008, after evaluating the survey board's recommendation, SAD authorized the creation of the new field. On November 30, 2008, UNB held the new West Pará Mission's Assembly of Organization and Installation.<sup>53</sup> Roberval Moura Marinho was elected president with Ozéias de Souza Costa, secretary, and Laércio Miotto Mazzo, treasurer.<sup>54</sup> At time of its founding, MOPa had a membership of 23,244 Adventists in 223 congregations distributed over eighteen pastoral districts.<sup>55</sup> The mission headquarters were located at Sérgio Henn Avenue 584, Diamantino, Santarém.<sup>56</sup> The institution's mission was "to spread the message of the Gospel and lead more people to Jesus."<sup>57</sup>

When West Pará Mission was established, it had two Adventist Education units in its mission field: Alltamira Adventist Academy and IATAI. Almerinda Jennings Adventist Academy (in Santarém) was closed in 1999, after about 50 years of operation. However, after determined efforts, in 2014, the construction cornerstone of a new building for that school unit was laid.<sup>58</sup> In early 2015, Adventist Education in western Pará had a 13% increase in enrollment compared to 2014. IATAI alone grew by 17% in relation to the number of live out students.<sup>59</sup> In 2017 the new Santarém Adventist Academy, next to the MOPa headquarters, was finally inaugurated offering from early childhood education to high school.<sup>60</sup>

On June 13, 2016, the new mission building was inaugurated at the same address. The facility provides a reception area and an auditorium for events, conferences and councils in addition to offices.<sup>61</sup> In July 2016, the churches in the mission's territory celebrated an increase in the number of small groups (PGs).<sup>62</sup> In addition, members of each congregation pledged to form missionary partners with the aim of evangelizing the region. At the time, MOPa had 1,084 PGs, a number reached after the completion of the *Multiplificação* (Multiplication) project.<sup>63</sup> Due to its effective performance in the area of social media communication, the MOPa Communication Department received from the North Brazil Union Mission the awards for Best Web Report and Best Press Office in 2016 as well.<sup>64</sup>

One of the mission's highest-impact evangelistic outreach projects occurred in May 2017. Called *Impacto Esperança* (Hope Impact),<sup>65</sup> Adventists in MOPa handed out about 270,000 copies of the book *Em Busca de*

*Esperança* (In Search of Hope) throughout the western region of Pará. Along with the books, they delivered invitations to a health fair held with eight stands, which addressed each of the eight natural remedies.<sup>66</sup> In 2019, MOPa office servers carried out the Hope Impact project, in the city of Belterra.<sup>67</sup>

In August 2019, MOPa celebrated the successes achieved during the project *Missão Calebe* (Caleb Mission)<sup>68</sup> in Santarém, which took place in July. This celebration was attended by project participants, and representatives of UNB and the South American Division.<sup>69</sup> On the 24th of August, Adventist leaders and members of MOPa participated in the project *Quebrando o Silêncio* (Breaking the Silence),<sup>70</sup> holding marches in the region to promote awareness about sexual abuse.<sup>71</sup>

MOPa completed eleven years of operation in 2019. Since its establishment, the institution had shown a steady growth in the number of members and organized churches. In 2013, the mission had a total of 140 churches and 24,767 Adventists.<sup>72</sup> Two years later, in December 2015, the number of members rose to 29,692 in 145 congregations.<sup>73</sup> As of June 2017, MOPa had 37,442 members and 166 congregations.<sup>74</sup> By the end of 2019, it had a total of 38,710 members. Thus, the creation of this administrative unit helped to fulfill the objective of preaching the message of the advent of Christ in western Pará.

MOPa has faced numerous challenges since the beginning of its activities. The initial difficulty was too few workers to minister to a population spread over 1,700 kilometers.<sup>75</sup>

Climatic and geographical characteristics of the Amazon region challenge MOPa. The peculiarity of the territory, covered by rivers for the most part, makes transportation and access to different locations difficult. To cross the Tapajós, Amazonas, and Xingu rivers, for example, it is necessary to travel by boat (since there are no bridges). Highways are always in poor conditions, but especially during the rainy seasons, making it especially hard to reach churches accessible by road. These obstacles affecting not only the service to members, but also creating obstacles to the development of institutions in the region.<sup>76</sup>

Although these challenges are recurrent, MOPa's leadership continues to set goals for future development. In the area of education, the renovation and expansion of facilities is a priority. Investing in new technical courses, strengthening distance learning, and early childhood education is intended to increase enrollment in the mission's schools.<sup>77</sup> Among the goals for evangelism are the planting of churches in all the cities located in western Pará,<sup>78</sup> the acquisition of a missionary launch for the Almeirim pastoral district, the opening of new pastoral districts in the cities of Altamira, Novo Repartimento, Itaituba, and Santarém.<sup>79</sup> Efforts will also be made to make *TV Novo Tempo* (Hope Channel Brazil) available on an open channel in the cities of Alenquer, Oriximiná, Almeirim, Monte Alegre and Óbidos, reaching around 270,000 people in these five cities.

## Chronology of Administrative Leaders<sup>80</sup>

Presidents: Roberval Moura Marinho (2009), Fernando P. de Lima (2009-2010), Nelson Jose da Silva (2011-2012), José Elias Zanotelli (2013), Ozeias de Souza Costa (2014), José Elias Zanotelli (2015), Renato Correa Seixas (2016-).

Secretaries: Ozeias de Souza Costa (2009-2011), Francisco Carlos B. da Silva (2012), Isaac de Almeida (2013), Francisco Carlos B. da Silva (2014), Luiz Carlos Damasceno da Silva (2015), Daniel Carvalho Pereira (2016-).

Treasurers: Laércio Miotto Mazzo (2009), Juliano Marcimiano Almeida (2009-2011), Jairo Ricardo da G. Silva (2012), José Araújo D. Neto (2014), Eliezer dos Santos de Almeida (2015), José Araújo D. Neto (2016-2018), Luís Carlos Ribeiro da Silva (2019-).<sup>81</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook, "West Pará Mission," accessed September 9, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2IEYx6W>.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Roseany Brito, MOPa secretary assistant, email message to Carlos Flavio Teixeira, ESDA's associate editor, September 9, 2019.
6. Rubens Lessa, *Construtores de Esperança: na trilha dos pioneiros adventistas da Amazônia* [Builders of Hope: On the Trail of Adventist Pioneers in the Amazon] (Tatuí, SP: Brazil Publishing House, 2016), 44.
7. An Adventist evangelist canvasser is a 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." "Colportagem" [Canvassing Work], *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil)*, accessed February 4, 2020, <http://bit.ly/2J6tY11>.
8. Rubens Lessa, *Construtores de Esperança: na trilha dos pioneiros adventistas da Amazônia* [Builders of Hope: On the Trail of Adventist pioneers in the Amazon] (Tatuí, SP: Brazil Publishing House, 2016), 31.
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10. Ibid., 60-62.

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