



North Mexican Union Conference headquarters.

Photo courtesy of North Mexican Union Conference.

# North Mexican Union Conference

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## OSVALDO ARRIETA

Oswaldo Arrieta, M.A. (Universidad de Montemorelos, Nuevo León, Mexico), is the executive secretary of North Mexican Union Conference. He is an ordained minister and has served for 23 years as a district pastor, department head, and local field administrator. He is married to Rebeca Sánchez Reséndez and has two children.

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North Mexican Union Conference is one of 24 unions that form part of the Inter-American Division and one of the five unions established in Mexico. Due to the vastness of its territory, which covers almost half of the country, it shares borders on the north with the United States; on the south with the states of Puebla, Guerrero, Morelos, Veracruz, Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Querétaro; on the east with the Gulf of Mexico; and on the west with the Pacific Ocean. Geographically, it is composed of the states of Baja California, Baja California Sur,

Chihuahua, Coahuila, Colima, Durango, Jalisco, Nayarit, Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tamaulipas, and Zacatecas. Its population is approximately 42,210,469 inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> Its territory covers about 1,298,184 square kilometers.<sup>2</sup> The official language is Spanish, but there are 68 other native languages corresponding to a wide variety of indigenous groups spread over the union's territory, particularly in the states of Jalisco, Sonora, Chihuahua, Baja California, and Sinaloa.<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of 2018, North Mexican Union Conference had ten local fields of which eight were conferences and two were missions. Its membership is 150,764 among 645 organized churches.<sup>4</sup> North Mexican Union Conference's headquarters is located at kilometer 205 on the National Highway, El Desague, in Montemorelos, Nuevo León, 67500, Mexico.

In the area of education, North Mexican Union Conference administers 39 elementary schools, 11 secondary and higher education level schools, and two universities, which have a combined total of 424 teachers and 5,211 students. In the communications and media area, the union has a radio and television station. In the publications area, it has 19 branches of the publishing house *Gema Editores* and 243 distributors of Adventist literature who devote themselves to the ministry of the printed page. It also has seven strongly established campgrounds.

## Factors Leading to Organize the Union

Shortly after the beginning of the 1980s, on November 15-19, 1982, at the year-end plenary sessions of Mexican Union Conference, which took place in Montemorelos, Nuevo León, the issue of dividing the union into two was raised. The vast Mexican Union Conference covered the entire country and was an extensive territory with a large number of members. It was decided to bring this proposal to the Inter-American Division for its study and consideration.<sup>5</sup> The proposal included a request for the division to nominate a committee to be responsible for making an equitable division of the properties and responsibilities of Mexican Union Conference.<sup>6</sup>

Before 1982, Mexican Union Conference had 3,260 Sabbath Schools with 220,000 members and 495 organized churches with 161,819 church members. It had nine local fields distributed into seven conferences (Central, Inter-Oceanic, Isthmus, North, Northwest, South, and Southeast), and two missions (West and the experimental Soconusco).<sup>7</sup>

The last year in which there was only one Mexican union for the entire country of Mexico was 1984. This was because of the request presented to the Inter-American Division to divide the field. Although there is no formal date for the study and approval of the request, it is accepted that this occurred in 1984; at that time, the requirements to form a new administrative unit were carried out.<sup>8</sup> The request showed the advantages of having two unions in Mexico to give better service to the church. Until then, there were 517 churches with 176,026 members, and, given the vastness of the territory, the nine fields could not be given adequate attention and care.<sup>9</sup> Mexican Union Conference also had three institutions under its care: Linda Vista College in the state

of Chiapas, the College of the Pacific in the state of Sonora, and the Hospital of the Southeast in the state of Tabasco.

The recommendation was to have two unions for the north and south. These would be formed in the following manner: The North Mexican union would cover 19 states and the Mexico City Federal District, consist of three conferences (Central Mexican Conference, North Mexican Conference, and Northwest Mexican Conference), and administer the College of the Pacific, while the South Mexican union would cover 12 states, four conferences, and one mission and administer Linda Vista College.<sup>10</sup>

## Official Organization of North Mexican Union Conference

The year 1985 will forever be highlighted in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mexico. Ninety-five years after Mexico received the light of the Adventist gospel by means of Salvador Marchisio, the great Mexican Union Conference, which covered the entire country, was divided into two unions.

A special congress of the Mexican Union was held in Tacubaya Church, Mexico City, in January 6-9, 1985, and 226 of the 234 delegates from the entire Republic of Mexico met to vote on the new plan for the church in Mexico. On January 7, the constitution of the North Mexican Union was established, giving it the name "North Mexican Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists." Its territory would cover the states of Aguascalientes, Baja California North, Baja California South, Coahuila, Colima, Chihuahua, the Federal District, Durango, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Mexico, Michoacán, Nayarit, Nuevo León, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tamaulipas, and Zacatecas. The union would be divided into Central Mexican Conference, North Mexican Conference, Northeast Mexican Conference, and West Mexican Mission. The union's headquarters would be in Montemorelos, Nuevo León.<sup>11</sup>

North Mexican Union Conference started with 189 churches and 46,811 members, and its administration was composed of three pastors, President Neftalí Quintero, Secretary Jaime Cruz, and Treasurer Saúl Barceló.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of North Mexican Union Conference from its very beginning was "to preach the eternal Gospel of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."<sup>13</sup>

## Development of North Mexican Union Conference

The Seventh-day Adventist Church grew in the territory of North Mexican Union Conference as a whole in membership and financially, which resulted in the rise of new conferences. Only two years after the division of the Mexican territory into two unions, the new North Mexican Union Conference, which had started with only three conferences, found a need to reorganize the territory of North Mexican Conference and Northwest Mexican Conference. Following the necessary procedures, Northwest Mexican Conference was divided into two fields: Northwest Mexican Conference, which included the states of Sonora and Sinaloa; and Baja California

Conference, which included the states of Baja California and Baja California Sur.<sup>14</sup> North Mexican Conference was also divided into two independent fields. The first was Northeast Mexican Conference, which had its headquarters located in Monterrey and included the states of Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas, and Coahuila east of the 102<sup>nd</sup> meridian. The second was North Mexican Mission, which had its headquarters located in Chihuahua, Chihuahua, and included the states of Chihuahua, Durango, and Coahuila west of the 102<sup>nd</sup> meridian.

North Mexican Union Conference's primary objective to expand the Adventist territory into new places and give the message to each person and family was fulfilled in 1989. By October, 7,830 people had been baptized, marking 114% of the yearly goal.<sup>15</sup>

A quinquennial congress was held in Montemorelos, Nuevo León, in August 15-18, 1990, marking the fifth anniversary of the work of North Mexican Union Conference. A vote of gratitude to God was taken for the union that covered 10 states and the Mexico City Federal District. By this time, the territory proved a real challenge with its population of 63,073,600 inhabitants. Nevertheless, in that period, 32,104 members were added to the church. At this congress, a plan was presented for the next quinquennial period and was called Global Strategy.

<sup>16</sup> In 1992, a center for producing materials for North Mexican Union Conference was created with the purposes to create printed and audiovisual material and to function as a printing press. Pastor Ismael Ramírez was named its director.

In January 2002, Gulf Mexican Mission changed its status to Gulf Mexican Conference. In 2005, it was voted to approve the new quinquennial plan named GROWTH, the emphasis of which was on five strategic points: fellowship, retention of members, evangelization, growth, and education. The reorganization of Metropolitan Mexican Conference was also approved, and it was divided into two fields, Metropolitan Mexican Conference and the new Azteca Mexican Mission. In October 2006, a vote was taken to separate the region of Baja California Sur from Baja California Conference as an experimental field.

In November 2007, in the presence of Pastor Abner de los Santos Mena, president of North Mexican Union Conference, the administrators of Gulf Mexican Conference took a vote to create a new experimental project north of Tamaulipas. The new territory of that association would be formed by the municipalities of Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Guerrero, Valle Hermoso, Matamoros, Méndez, San Fernando, Burgos, Cruillas, Abasolo, Soto La Marina, San Nicolás, and Jiménez, all in the state of Tamaulipas.

Because of the need to give better care to the membership, on August 25, 2009, North Mexican Union Conference held a collaborative conference to create a new region, proposing that the west section cede the state of Zacatecas and North Mexican Mission cede the states of Durango and Coahuila west of the 102<sup>nd</sup> meridian. On September 1, 2009, the work was begun to form a Northwest Region with the districts of Torreón, Central Durango, Gómez Palacio, Fresnillo, Río Grande, Tierra Blanca, and Nieves Monte Escobedo. The official

beginning of the new field was in January 2010 with provisional offices installed at the Juan Escutia School in the city of Torreón, Coahuila. On May 9, 2016, by vote, the region officially became Northwest Mexican Mission and began operations in July 2016. Also on May 9, 2016, the reorganization of the territory of Baja California Conference was approved, creating South Baja California Mission with central offices in the city of La Paz to care for the entire state of Baja California Sur. The mission held its opening session on October 22, 2016. Also in 2016, the restructuring of Northeast Conference was voted, and the new Mountain Region Mission was formed. On July 17, 2017, Northeast Mexican Conference officially ceded to the new mission 20 pastors, 20 districts, 51 churches, 33 organized groups, 10 branches, and 13,200 members.

## Plans to Complete its Mission

North Mexican Union Conference has set six challenges starting in 2018, for the next few years:

The evangelization of three zones: the city of Guadalajara, Jalisco, the second largest city in Mexico; Durango, the capital of the state of Durango; and the state of Baja California Sur. As part of the strategy for evangelization, there is an emphasis on establishing centers of influence. These community centers' purposes are to care for the needs of local persons in Durango, establish clinics in La Paz and Loreto, Baja California Sur, and provide restaurants that serve healthy food in Guadalajara.

The promoting of the project, "Lucas," in the entire union territory as a strategy to reach people. This project consists of establishing health clubs directed by lay members who have been trained as promoters of good health through the completion of a special curriculum program with this purpose.

The three emphases that define this strategic plan: "Total Member Involved," an initiative of the world church; "A Faithful and Missionary Generation" with emphasis in all of the departments of the church in the formation of children as missionaries and faithful members, visualizing a future generation committed to the church; and "Loving and Compassionate Churches" with emphasis in the transformation of churches into warm and compassionate agents in the community and the world.

The establishment of a solid educational system formed into a corporation that will include all of the schools in our territory. It will include creating a corporate image, an administrative structure for the Adventist system of education in the territory, an education model sustainably based on the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, and a robust financial model that will contribute to the strengthening of education and elevate the quality of the institutions and the quality of life of the workers in the educational arena.

The training of new members of the faith as missionaries. It is strongly expected that 100 percent of the newly baptized members learn to work for Christ using the talents that God has given them.

The evangelization through technology by maintaining the site, <https://quierovivirsano.org>, as a strategy (besides the radio) to reach the community through the Internet as a tool for evangelism and by forming a team who will care for the clients of both programs.

## List of Executive Administrators

Presidents: Nefthalí Quintero (1985-1988); Donato Ramírez (1989-1995); Armando Miranda (1995-2000); Sergio Balboa (2000-2005); Abner de los Santos (2005-2010); Luis Arturo King (2010- ).

Secretaries: Jaime Cruz (1985-1988); Armando Miranda (1989-1995); Sergio Balboa (1995-2000); Pedro Farfán (2000-2003); Abner de los Santos (2003-2005); Luis Arturo King (2005-2010); Osvaldo Arrieta (2010- ).

Treasurers: Saúl Barceló (1985-1988); Samuel Meza (1989-2000); Mario Villareal (2000-2007); Arturo Salazar (2007-2010); Martín E. Arámburo (2010-2017); Carlos Arturo Flores (2018- ).

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## NOTES

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