



South Rio Conference facade.
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South Rio Conference

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The South Rio Conference (Associação Rio Sul or ARS) is an administrative unit from the Seventh-day Adventist Church operating in the territory of the Southeast Brazil Union Conference (União Sudeste Brasileira or USB).

The South Rio Conference's headquarters are located at Sacramento Blake St., no. 325, in zip code 23052-160 in the Campo Grande district in the city of Rio de Janeiro in the Rio de Janeiro state, Brazil. The ARS missionary area covers part of the metropolitan territory from Rio de Janeiro, Grande Rio, Baixada Fluminense, and Região Litorânea. There are 31 municipalities with an Adventist presence in all of them. The estimated population is 6,974,213 inhabitants. The ARS has 45 pastoral districts and 313 organized congregations with 28,300 baptized members. The rate is one Adventist per 246 inhabitants.¹

In this territory, there are eight school units in operation. In Rio de Janeiro city is located: the Adventist Music Academy (Escola Adventista Música or EAM), with 94 students; the Jacarepagua Adventist Academy (Colégio Adventista de Jacarepagua or CAJ), with 1,212 students; the Campo Grande Adventist Academy, with 1,094

students; and the Padre Miguel Adventist Academy (Colégio Adventista de Padre Miguel or CAPAM), with 738 students. In the city of Nova Iguaçu are the Nova Iguaçu Adventist School (Escola Adventista de Nova Iguaçu or EANIG) with 375 students and the Nova Iguaçu Secondary School (Colégio Adventista de Nova Iguaçu or COANIG), with 664 students. In the city of São João de Meriti is located the Jardim Metr pole Adventist School (Escola Adventista de Jardim Metr pole or EAJAM) with 519 students. Finally, in Itagua  municipality operates the Itagua  Adventist Academy (Col gio Adventista de Itabora  or CAIT) with 370 students. Altogether, there are 5,066 students²

All activities and projects from the ARS are performed by 633 employees and 78 workers, including 48 credentialed pastors, 14 licensed pastors, 11 certified Bible instructors, and five licensed Bible instructors. The others participate in the school network and in other support activities.³

The Origin of the Adventist Work in the Conference's Territory

Rio de Janeiro had an important participation in the expansion of the Adventism in Brazil. The Advent message arrived in the country in the early 1890's. In 1894, William Henry Thurston and his family arrived from the United States, and they were accompanied by Frank H. Westphal, the first Adventist pastor on Brazilian soil⁴ Another important mark in the Adventism history in Rio city was the organization of the second Adventist Church in the country. On October 27, 1895, Pastor Huldreich Graf organized the first Adventist Church in Rio de Janeiro state, the Meier Church.⁵

In January 1911, canvassers⁶ Germano Conrad and Emilio Froemming were commissioned to work in Minas Gerais state. Although they would leave the South Region of Brazil towards Minas, they made a stop for some days at Rio de Janeiro city in order to get together with the Brethren there. From there, they started the canvassing work in the countryside towns of Rio state and among those cities there was the municipality of Barra do Pirai⁷. It's not known for sure what was the result of this work in the city, but in 1917, there had already been the first reports of canvassers who had worked in a nearby town called Barra Mansa.⁸ The work in this town obtained good results for the spreading of the Adventist message.

In the middle of 1917, canvasser Josu  Ribeiro sent to church administrators the address of some people who demonstrated a desire to receive more biblical knowledge. Soon after, the Church sent to Barra Mansa two missionaries--Gustavo Storch and Manoel Pereira. The work done by these missionaries developed in a such way that the Church requested the presence of an ordained minister to that place. To meet this request, Pastor F. W. Spies was sent on March 28, 1918.⁹

After June 1918, R. M. Carter reported having visited that region and found "all brethren encouraged."¹⁰ In the middle of 1919, a report was published for the first time in which Barra Mansa Adventist Church was registered. Even with little information, the report carried the important registration of ten members in the congregation.¹¹ In the following year, Manoel Pereira's missionary work had already resulted in 13 baptisms in that town and its surroundings.¹² Fifty years later, the Barra Mansa church reached a total of 100 baptized members.¹³

At the beginning of 1920, the missionary work in the city of Resende started.¹⁴ There, the work was carried out by Jo o Alves Martins Cunha and his wife, already experts on spreading the Gospel in Rio's capital.¹⁵ Combined with the efforts of canvasser Raul Cordeiro Ara jo, in 1921, 11 people were baptized by Pastor Ricardo Jos  Wilfart, who also conducted a Lord's Supper. ¹⁶ Around four years later, Pastor Wilfart went back to that region and found a congregation of 26 worshipers in a place known at the time as "Martins Helper."¹⁷ At the beginning of 1929, in this same congregation, there was a Sabbath School with perhaps 50 members.¹⁸

In the capital at the beginning of 1929, records of the work led by the Pastor Ricardo Wilfart were found in Madureira. The work started with public conferences and meetings carried out on Sunday nights.¹⁹ A few months later, Pastor Wilfart started Sabbath School meetings and, in March from the same year, this School had 70 members, some of them deriving from the Meier church. The missionary progress in the suburbs of the Rio de Janeiro region made the church leaders dream of a new congregation in that location, a dream fulfilled some years later.²⁰

As of 1930, missionary efforts, especially from youth societies and canvassing, reached other districts near Rio de Janeiro such as Ilha do Governador, Col gio, Vila Isabel, Padre Miguel, Jardim da Prata, Ricardo de Albuquerque e Pavuna, and Nil polis city.²¹ In 1932, Angra dos Reis city started a Sabbath School that organized the distribution of literature and Bible studies.²² This double emphasis in publishing and youth training continued for the next decade.

In 1940, Rio de Janeiro canvassers (which was, until then, the capital) could testify their faith even to the national authorities.²³ In February 1947, the Madureira's group was the headquarters of a society of Mission rios Volunt rios (Missionary Volunteers).²⁴ In the following year, 52 young people got together in Itatiaia on one of the first camp-retreats held in the region.²⁵ Also in 1948, Pastor Nelson Schwantes carried out a pioneer evangelism in the Piedade district and Petr polis city using a truck equipped with speakers, a movie, and a projection machine.²⁶ More than 1,500 people watched the series of conferences, and 300 gave their addresses so they could receive Bible studies²⁷

In 1950, the group that started in 1929 was finally registered as the Madureira Adventist Church²⁸ Four years later, the Botafogo Adventist Church was built, and it was dedicated to assisting the city's south zone, nowadays the territory of Rio de Janeiro Conference (RJC).²⁹ Canvassing continued in preeminence for the next few years, influencing 23% of the baptisms in the Rio de Janeiro field in 1958³⁰ and experiencing a rise of 412% in the number of canvassers recruited by the Conference in 1961 (the highest percentual in the South American Division at the time)³¹

In 1962, Pastor Gileno de Oliveira and worker Perc lia T rres conducted a pioneer work in Guadalupe region,

organizing a Sabbath School with 104 members.³² In the following year, evangelistic series' of harvesting were carried out in the churches around Olaria, Madureira, Nova Iguaçu, Campo Grande, Santa Cruz, Pavuna, Meier, Central, Botafogo, Nilópolis, Rio Bonito, Braçanã, Petrópolis, Caxias, Colégio, Padre Miguel, Pântano, Cataguazes, Muzambinho, and Cabo Verde.³³ There are also records about the church organization plans in Itaguaí and the beginning of construction of Adventist churches in the cities of Volta Redonda and Barra Mansa in 1964;³⁴ inaugurated in the same year as the Vargem Grande and Venda das Pedras churches.³⁵

Considerable evangelistic efforts were made by lay Brethren in 1967. In this year, Brother C. Barra had preached alone to a crowd of almost 500 people in a soccer field in the Engenheiro Pedreira district in Japeri and the Ciro Raton municipality. In the Araruama municipality, he preached to more than 750 people, resulting in 30 baptisms at the end of the program. In Nilópolis city, there was a class with 50 people interested in the Adventist message and another 40 people in the Barros Filho district in Rio de Janeiro city. In the Itaguaí municipality, 10 people waited for baptism and 14 more had been baptized in Colégio.³⁶ In 1970, new conferences were organized in the Guadalupe district, with quite often a number of 600 families indicating interest in knowing more about the Church.³⁷

Another mark in the advancement of the message was the training of voluntary preachers. In 1974, the Rio-Minas Conference (presently the Rio de Janeiro Conference) promoted a "120 de hoje" ["Today's 120"] Congress³⁸ edition, gathering 235 voluntary preachers in Satulina in the Penedo's region of the Itatiaia municipality, where there is an Adventist Training Center.³⁹ In 1977, land was bought for the construction of Vila Kennedy Church, and it was inaugurated Magalhães Bastos and Padre Miguel churches.⁴⁰ The end of the decade was marked by a campaign whose goal was to conduct 78 conferences in 1978, the result of which reached the Japeri municipality and the neighborhoods of Anchieta and Irajá.⁴¹

On August 22, 1981, the Adventist Church of Resende was finally organized. There are reports of persecution and even pioneers' deaths soon after the work had begun at the beginning of the 20th century, preventing the work until 1959. This inaugurated church was the result of the insistent efforts of Brothers Sebastião Brito, José Albertino, and canvasser Francisco Oliveira, who bought a meeting place around 1971.⁴² And in 1986, the evangelism in Seropédica municipality, with "more than 200 people attending regularly the bible class," resulted in the inauguration of a church exactly one year later.⁴³ Belford Roxo city also got a new church on March 12, 1989.⁴⁴

In the Spring Baptism⁴⁵ of 1991, about 60 young people and children were baptized in Bangu district in Rio de Janeiro city.⁴⁶ In the following year, the evangelistic campaign Projeto SOL (Semana de Oração e Louvor) [Sun Project (Week of Prayer and Praise)] was held in Rio city at the Maracanãzinho stadium. This project was "a mix of personal and public evangelism"⁴⁷ in which Adventist youth were invited to bring friends whom they had already worked with to conduct a musical program with moments of prayer and baptism decisions. The program had a maximum attendance of 30,000 people, and 1,068 of them responded to the appeals.⁴⁸ In 1994, the Jacarepaguá Adventist Academy was inaugurated.⁴⁹

Organizational History of the Conference

With the growing number of members and congregations in Rio de Janeiro state and the wide geography to be covered, it was necessary to create an administrative unit in the south of the state. So, between November 29 and December 1, 1998, an Extraordinary Assembly of Rio de Janeiro Conference was organized to create the South Rio de Janeiro Conference and nominate its leaders. Then, by deliberation and registration in the Minutes of the Administrative Table of the East Brazil Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, territorial and administrative splitting of the area was decided.⁵⁰

This is how, on March 23, 1999, the area in the Rio de Janeiro Conference was rearranged to create the South Rio de Janeiro Conference (Associação Rio de Janeiro Sul or ARJSul), headquartered in the Campo Grande district in the west zone of the town.⁵¹ With the mission to assist the Adventist work in the state's south region, the new unit started its job with 23 districts, 100 churches, and 70 organized groups with a total of 17,672 members.⁵²

As of its creation, the ARJSul started many evangelistic actions. In 2001, the Annual Missionary Caravan of the Adventist youth of the ARJSul provided several services to the population of the town of Miguel de Pereira between June 12 and 15. On June 16, about 3,000 young people coming from the hundreds of churches in the Conference united in the city's pavilion for a worship program. After the event, they left like an army to march in the streets of the town, carrying banners and fliers warning the population about the use of drugs, cigarettes, and alcoholic beverages. The work became so relevant that "in recognition to the youth's dedication, the Municipal Chamber granted a motion of applause for the initiative."⁵³ Despite these efforts, until 2006, the cities of Miguel Pereira and Quatis were the only in the Conference's territory without the official presence of an Adventist Church.⁵⁴

The educational area was also reinforced by the ARJSul during the 2000s, mainly in 2006, when a new Adventist school was established on February 13. Projected to welcome 60 students, the school was built in the Jardim Metrôpole district in the São João de Meriti municipality. The big surprise was the number of 190 enrolled students in its first year of operation, three times more than its administrators had envisioned at the school's start.⁵⁵

Another important fact in the area of education in 2006 was the reformation of the Padre Miguel Adventist Academy located in Rio's capital. Upon 42 years of operation, this school "gained an additional floor, a science laboratory, computer science, a toy library, changing rooms, a library, a patio, rooms for early childhood education, plus eight new, modern and colorful classrooms." The school's reinauguration took place on May 7 next to the inauguration of the "first registered Ellen G. White Research Center in Rio" and it was open to the community.⁵⁶ In January 2010,

there was a change in the Conference's identification. The name "South Rio De Janeiro Conference" changed to the South Rio Conference (Associação Rio Sul or ARS). Taking into account that in Rio de Janeiro state there are three administrative units of the Church, the change in the name made its identification much easier for their members.

Rio de Janeiro is a city known for its natural beauty and pleasant weather most of the year.⁵⁷ Taking advantage of the benefits provided by the city during the summer season, the youth of the ARS started a unique evangelistic action. In the program known as "J.A. de Verão" ["Summer Adventist Youth"], young people took advantage of Saturdays in January to gather and carry out different solidarity and evangelistic actions.⁵⁸ Initially, youth of Rio das Pedras, Freguesia, Gardênia Azul, Cidade de Deus, and Curicica churches were the ones mainly responsible for the program's organization. The project expanded, and it has been about ten years since the South Rio Conference youth have carried out this project on the Barra da Tijuca beach in the west zone of Rio. At the beginning of the program, the number of participants was around 600 to 800 people.⁵⁹ Over time, young people from other regions of the ARS joined this lively method of evangelism, taking caravans that numbered more than 1,000 participants.⁶⁰

Similar actions have helped the Adventist Church gain greater visibility among the citizens of Rio. Knowing the importance of presenting itself in a pleasant way to the public that sought to get to know the Adventist Church, the South Rio Conference started, in 2014, a project entitled "Church of Excellence." The project's idea is to restructure the physical environment of the temples, such as the facades and children's rooms, to promote a more favorable environment for worship "in addition to standardizing the identification of the Adventist Church as the church of TV Novo Tempo [Hope Channel Brazil]."⁶¹ On April 26, 2014, the first church utilizing this project was inaugurated. On that occasion, the Jardim Água Branca Church, located in the Bangu district in the west zone of Rio, was greeted by an attendance of 150 people. Among them, there were the families of church pioneers and the leaders of the South Rio Conference.⁶²

As mentioned, the ARS has carried out many projects for its youth. The Pathfinders Club⁶³ and the Adventurers Club⁶⁴ are some of the ministries that promote the predominant participation of children and adolescents. Together, there is a total of 3,426 Pathfinders, in 167 clubs, and 1,497 Adventurers in 100 clubs.⁶⁵ These organizations participate in most of the missionary actions promoted by the Conference, including Breaking the Silence⁶⁶ and Impacto Esperança [Impact Hope].⁶⁷ One example of the reach of these projects in society was the institution of the Municipal Pathfinders Day by the Nova Iguaçu City Council in the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro on September 12, 2017. The partnership between the Pathfinders and this city has been "maintained through the work of citizenship and several social activities that the club carries out in the region through its 24 clubs."⁶⁸

Through all these missionary fronts, the ARS seeks to expand the Adventist work in its territory. There were 35 temples inaugurated within 2015 and 2018, an average of eight new temples each year. Eight new Centers of Influence were also created.⁶⁹ The construction, expansion, and renovation of schools and the Centro de Treinamento Penedo [Penedo Training Center] were promoted; in addition, two new schools were opened.⁷⁰ Family pitches, Impacto Rio 2015 [Rio Impact 2015], leadership training,⁷¹ OYIM (One Year In Mission),⁷² and health fairs were all carried out.⁷³ In the last four years, 110 health fairs were held, and in the educational area, the new buildings of the Colégio Adventista de Música [Adventist Music Academy], Colégio Adventista de Itaguaí [Itaguaí Adventist Academy] and Colégio Adventista de Nova Iguaçu [Nova Iguaçu Adventist Academy] were inaugurated. Together, these institutions have the capacity to serve approximately 1,739 students.⁷⁴

An important project promoted annually within the churches of the ARS is the Mutirão de Natal [Christmas task force]. This program, which has been in existence for more than 25 years, has received participation from the entire Church in the South American Division. The project consists of collecting food, clothing, and other materials to meet the needs of families living in their community. All these items are donated around Christmas. In the 2018 edition, 18 tons of food had been collected in only the neighborhood of Jardim Paulista. With such a gathering, it was possible to make 1,320 basic food baskets in addition to the collection of 1,216 pairs of shoes, 4,574 pieces of clothing, 1,165 toys, and 1,150 personal hygiene items.⁷⁵

After 18 years of existence, the South Rio Conference had its headquarters renovated and reinaugurated. The ceremony held on May 12, 2017, was attended by the USEB leaders and staff members as well as political representatives, totaling around 400 people. Nowadays, there are 45 rooms in the headquarters, an auditorium with a capacity for 140 people, a natural products store, and a restaurant that can serve up to 104 people. The new building also has a rainwater reuse system, making its contribution to the environment through the use of a sustainable system.⁷⁶

It was going through great challenges and receiving great victories from God that the South Rio Conference reached the present number of 313 congregations with 28,300 members. As in the past, work in this field continues to be carried out by people with missionary purposes aligned with the efforts of Adventist pioneers. Men and women open their homes to preach the message, offer to buy lands and temples, and act on the front lines of the missionary activities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁷⁷

The mission of South Rio Conference is to have "people saved for the kingdom of God."⁷⁸ This need to announce salvation is seen in the dedication and engagement of leaders and members who strive to continue the legacy left by the pioneers. However, there are particular challenges in a large metropolis, such as mobility, high cost of living, and secularism. These factors and the increase in violence make it difficult to spread the Gospel in some places, which has also been aggravated by the recent economic crisis the country is going through.

Despite these challenges, the ARS plan is to continue the mission through actions such as (1) Expansion of the educational network; (2) Reform of the physical structures of the churches; (3) Training in evangelism in order to plant

new churches; (4) Investment in the Training Center (Centro Adventista de Treinamento e Recreação or CATRE); (5) Training of lay church leadership; (6) Investment in new Centers of Influence; (7) and Training in Integrated Evangelism in order to strengthen the missionary fronts (Youth engaged in the “One Year in Mission” project, Women's Ministries, Sabbath School, Pathfinders, Adventurers, Small Groups)⁷⁹

Throughout its history, many strategies have been employed in the field of South Rio Conference to fulfill the mission. Proportional to the many campaigns carried out are the lessons learned from the processes and their different results, and they serve as a guide for making decisions about the future. One of these lessons concerns divine direction. In spite of all the difficulties and crises, God has the power and resources to do whatever is necessary so the preaching of the gospel continues to advance in Rio de Janeiro until Jesus returns.⁸⁰

Chronology of Administrative Managers⁸¹

Presidents: Nelson de Oliveira Duarte (1998-2006); Mauricio Pinto Lima (2006-2007); Eurípedes Vieira Carvalho (2008-2010); Luís Mário de Souza Pinto (2010-2013); Itamar Lelis Rodrigues (2013-2019); Luís Gustavo Cava de Sá (2019-present).

Secretaries: Jean Oliveira Dourado (1998-2006); Izaír de Souza Costa (2006-2014); Luiznei Gambarelli (2014-present).

Treasurer: Hermes Demarch (1998-2002); João da Silva Custódio (2002-2008); Flávio André Nunes dos Santos (2008-2012); Alexandre da Silva Lopes (2012-2019); Marco Antônio Celestino (2019-present)⁸²

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