

Central Bolivia Mission

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Central Bolivia Mission (Misión Boliviana Central or MBC) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church established in the territory of Bolivia Union Mission (Unión da Bolivia or UB). It is headquartered at 277 Garcilazo de la Vega Street with the Zip Code 090310 in the Villa Galindo neighborhood of the Zona Hipódromo district in the Adela Zamudio commune of Cochabamba city in the Cercado province of the Cochabamba department in the Multinational State of Bolivia.¹

The MBC offices are in a city known and welcoming for its pleasant climate and temperature that averages 20 degrees Celsius (68°F). In addition, it is 2,570 meters above sea level, and its territory covers the departments of Cochabamba, Chuquisaca, Oruro, and Potosí. In this field, there are 125 organized churches and a membership of 25,791 Adventists among a population of 3,982,325 inhabitants.² That means there is about one Adventist per 154 inhabitants in the MBC.

As the cradle of Adventist Education in Bolivia, nowadays, the MBC continues to offer integral education to children, adolescents, and youth in the Central Region. For this, through the Adventist Educational Association MBC (Asociación Educativa Adventista or ASEA-MBC), it administers eight different educational units: Elena G. White Adventist Academy, located on the corner of 853 C. Soria Galvarro and C. Junín Street in the Central Zone of Oruro; Quillacollo Adventist Academy, located on Mejillones Street in the Estadium Zone of Quillacollo in Cochabamba; Bolivia Adventist University Academy, located a km 1 on Simón I. Patiño Avenue in Licenciada and in Vinto, in Cochabamba; D. Faustino Sarmiento Adventist Academy on 1224 Colombia in San Pedro in Cochabamba; Cochabamba Adventist Academy, located on 1519 Adela Zamudio Street in Cala Cala in Cochabamba; Carreño Ortuño Adventist Academy, located downtown on 46 Francisco de Rivero in Cliza of Cochabamba; Entre Ríos Adventist Academy, located in Francisco Palau on the corner with Trinidad Street in the Litoral province in Entre Ríos of Cochabamba; and finally, Ivirgarzama Adventist Academy, located on Belén Street between Puerto Villarroel Highway in Jericó in Ivirgarzama in Cochabamba.³

In the MBC missionary field, there is a staff of 208 who contribute full time in the spreading of the Gospel, including 46 who are pastors (28 credentialed ministers and 18 licensed ministers), seven missionary-licensed workers, and 155 employees working in many administrative and educational functions.⁴

The Origin of the Adventist Work in the Mission Territory

The present Multinational State of Bolivia was one of the last South American countries in which the Adventist message was established.⁵ The origin of Adventism in the MBC territory is limited to four regions in Bolivia: Chuquisaca, Oruro, Cochabamba, and Potosí. Adventism began chronologically in the department of Chuquisaca in the city of Sucre. The origin of Adventism in Sucre, at that time, was very difficult. The work began almost in parallel between canvassing and radio programs carried out by foreign missionaries. The radio, an innovative means of communication in Bolivia at the time, enabled the progress of this work since through it, reaching households in Sucre with the Gospel became easier.⁶

The canvassing work also played an important role. The first canvassers⁷ distributed the *El Atalaya [The Watchtower]* review to the citizens of Sucre, who were well-educated and interested in reading. In turn, general culture themes or specialized meetings were used to attract their attention. After the 24 meetings on “Pilot” radio were over, another series began on “Chuquisaca” radio, which broadcast simultaneously via short and long wave.⁸ The radio work team in Sucre, at the time, was comprised of: Zacarías Medina from Bolivia, who paid for the transmissions; Daniel E. Luorno, an Argentinian who was the public speaker; Alberto Jara,⁹ a Peruvian who was the speaker; and Emilio Casas, a Peruvian who contributed to the programs by declaiming poetry.¹⁰

In addition to evangelistic efforts through publications and radio, in Sucre, public evangelism was also a means used to communicate the Truth. Thus, the first meeting held in this city was led by the president of Bolivia Mission--Pastor Juan Plenc. During the last day of the effort, after performing the baptismal examination in the presence of interested people and sympathizers, conducted the first baptism of three people. “Of these three converts, two [started] to serve in the work: a young lady, at the Chulumani Hospital Nursing School [church property], and a young man, who after certain arrangements in his work, [joined the] printed page ministries.”¹¹

The evangelization work did not finish there--instead, it had only just started. The first group in Sucre was made up of three baptized people and eight interested Bible students. Some of those interested people were already keeping the Sabbath, and others wanted to work as evangelist canvassers.¹² For this reason, the first Adventists continued to preach the biblical message in Sucre and, in this way, the number in the group of members and interested people was increasing. However, they had to work in the midst of Catholic citizens who were opposed to Adventism, so there was resistance. Still, the bond between the Sucre citizens and the Seventh-day Adventist Church grew. In short, this stage of the establishment of the Church in Sucre was characterized by the constant work of canvassers, personal work, public evangelization, radio, and the Bible correspondence schools.

Another city where Adventism arrived around that time was Oruro. The interest in working in that city goes back to when the canvassers came mainly from Chile. They arrived through the Valparaíso–Antofagasta–Oruro–La Paz Highway. Passenger traffic along this route allowed them to carry out sporadic and circumstantial canvassing work in that city. Thus, the first canvasser was Juan Sebastián Pereira who worked in the city of Oruro. Soon, E. W. Thomann and José L. Escobar also canvassed there.¹³ Also in the 1940s, Cecilio Apaza and Silverio Tancara from Bolivia Training School (now Bolivia Adventist University) were appointed by the MB to canvass in that city.

¹⁴ However, this work, apparently, was not enough. Thus, it was necessary to resort to another strategy to establish an Adventist presence in Oruro.

With that in mind, Bolivia Mission decided it was time to establish an Adventist school in the city. For that reason, it delegated this task to Máximo Paño.¹⁵ However, he was apparently unsuccessful due to the lack of government authorization. Still, the following year (1944), the new promoter of Adventist education, William R. Robinson, managed to complete the process for authorization. In this way, the inauguration of this school was authorized on July 14, 1944.¹⁶ Thus, the first school in Oruro operated in 1945. The classrooms were located in the house of Mariano Ramos, and it began its work with the name “Elena White.” Then, after three years of operation, it had to be closed because it did not have an appropriate location.¹⁷

The third city where Adventists worked simultaneously was the city of Cochabamba. In the 1940s, one of the important figures in the origin of Adventism in Cochabamba was Pedro Triantáfilo.¹⁸ Before his conversion to Adventism, he was fond of gambling, alcohol, and women.¹⁹ However, his life changed after reading the book *Por Sendas Extraviadas [By Lost Paths]*, and it helped to arouse his interest in the Bible. Thus, in due time, he and his family began to carry out some changes in their lifestyle – such as resting on Sabbath.²⁰ Its influence formed the basis of the Adventist Church in the city of Cochabamba. And over time, a group of believers and missionaries began holding meetings on Sabbaths. Javier Triantáfilo, Pedro's brother, was the first director of the Sabbath School.²¹ Thus, the first group of Adventists in the city of Cochabamba was established at the home of this family.

Another city in the MBC field where Adventists initially settled was Potosí. Canvassers were present in that city since the 1940s. According to a Bolivia Mission report, in February 1943, canvasser Julio Chávez Zegarra received permission to investigate the city of Potosí.²² In that same year, Alberto Jara received authorization to work in Potosí with the books *Amanecer [Dawn]* and *Juego Invicto [Undefeated Game]*.²³ Later, in 1944, Francisco Piro, canvassing director of the MB, stated that the city was more than 4,040 meters above sea level and had more than 45,000 inhabitants, and that on that particular day, it snowed heavily. But, in about five hours of work, he managed to sell 54 copies of the book *Consejero Médico del Hogar [Home Medical Officer]* with their respective children's books.²⁴

Due to its strategic geographical location, Cochabamba became a national integrating hub since it had roads that crossed its territory connecting the east with the west of the country. Thus, to take advantage of this privileged position, the Adventist Church decided to move the administrative headquarters of Bolivia Mission (MB) to this city, and it operated there from 1948 to 1956.²⁵ Around 1952, another detail that marked Adventism in the city was the recommendation for the establishment of an elementary school (now Domingo Faustino Sarmiento Adventist Academy).²⁶ This institution began operating in 1956 with 22 students, and the following year, it was transferred to the MB buildings.²⁷

In the same way as in other cities, public evangelization was an important means of establishing a definitive church in Cochabamba. In this context, a group of members became interested in carrying out this campaign. To lead this task, the MB invited Pastor Julio Huayllara to be the speaker and to hold meetings that took place on March 13 or 14, 1962.²⁸ At that time, Jorge Riffel Wiesner reported: "43 people were baptized, as a fruit and result of the cycle of public meetings held in the city of Potosí, in Bolivia [...]. With the presence of Pastor C. L. Christensen, Pastor Bert Elkins, Bolivia Mission president, and the undersigned, a series of meetings began at the historic Omiste Theater, with an attendance of 1,300 people. Although attendance decreased somewhat, there was a need to hold the meetings in two cramped tents." At this stage, the presence and hard work of Bible instructors Yolanda Reduzzi and Irma de Wegner were essential for the development of the work.²⁹

In the mid-1960s, Adventism in Bolivia stopped having only a regional character and began taking a more relevant participation throughout the country. Thus, in constant development, the Adventist Church reached geographically peripheral cities in the country, such as Potosí, Trinidad, Tarija, and Cobija. Among them, the city of Potosí – previously visited frequently by canvassers – was one of the most difficult to reach with the Gospel due to the great influence of the Catholic Church, to the continuous work in the silver mines, and to a kind of carnival atmosphere created by the miners. However, the message was spread in the city of Potosí thanks to the tireless work of canvassers like Alberto Jara, whose role was fundamental for the establishment of Adventism in the region.³⁰

About 19 years after the first MB congress, in 1962, the tenth Biennial Congress of Bolivia Mission took place in the city of Oruro, whose church had, at that time, the largest number of members. This meeting was held for the first time outside the limits of the department of La Paz on January 16-20, and it was a milestone for Adventism since, from those days, the Church advanced into other important cities in Bolivia.³¹ On the other hand, the development of Adventism in the city of Tarija was more gradual, showing only small results at first. However, around 1974, Bolivia Mission asked Inca Union Mission (União Inca or UI, presently the South Peru Union Mission) for authorization to purchase 844 m² land to build the first church in the city of Tarija. This achievement strengthened and confirmed the Adventist presence in the city.³²

At that time, missionary projects for the evangelization of Cobija were also developed. This city was geographically isolated from other Bolivian cities. For this reason--to carry out the evangelizing projects in this city--Bolivia Mission appointed Luis Mita as the first Bolivian missionary to carry out evangelistic work in this large and important city. Although it was still in its infancy, the missionary work was gradually bearing fruit, and around 1975, a group with 16 members was organized.³³

Due to the growth of the MB missionary field, the restructuring process had been scheduled for some time. So, the board of directors undertook a full study on the progress of the Mission, including the number of churches and members. The reasons presented for the reorganization were the large territorial extension, the development of the church's work in the country, and the rapid economic and demographic growth in eastern

Bolivia.³⁴ Nevertheless, the project was interrupted on that occasion and resumed later.³⁵ In fact, many efforts have taken place to accomplish that purpose since then.

Finally, in 1977, the MB territory was reorganized. So, the MB was renamed West Bolivia Mission (Misión Boliviana Occidental or MBO), and the new mission was established under the name East Bolivia Mission (Misión del Oriente Boliviana or MOB), and it was headquartered on Tercer Anillo Externo between Cushing and Alemania avenues in the city of Santa Cruz. At that time, the MOB was responsible for the Departments of Beni, Chuquisaca, Cochabamba, Pando, Santa Cruz, and Tarija. Its missionary field was made up of 11 organized churches and 1,692 members. The first people responsible for managing the work throughout the Eastern Region of Bolivia were Pastor José Justiniano and Jaime Rosero, president and secretary-treasurer respectively.³⁶ This reorganization brought positive results for Adventism in the country and, at a certain time, the number of churches in the MOB grew more than 100 percent. It increased from 17 churches in 1985 to 49 churches in 1995 and the number of members was of 18,549.³⁷

The Mission Organizational History

More than 20 years had passed since the last reconfiguration of the missionary fields in Bolivia, and Adventism was well established in the country with the work of two Missions. However, Bolivia was still a vast territory to be reached. For this reason, at the end of the 20th century, Bolivia Union Mission developed a plan to start a new missionary field as soon as possible, and its headquarters was to be in the city of El Alto in La Paz. The establishment of this new Mission took place after the UB Board of Directors, in 2002, approved the reconfiguration of the work in Bolivian territory with the creation of a new church administrative unit.³⁸

Thus, the new Mission was called Central Bolivia Mission, and as of 2003, it was responsible for 86 organized churches with 37,637 members among a population of 3,207,654 inhabitants. That is, in this field, there was one Adventist per 85 inhabitants at that time. The headquarters was established at 277 Garcilazo de la Vega Street in the city of Cochabamba. From this city, Adventist work – in the Departments of Cochabamba, Chuquisaca, Oruro, Potosí, and in some provinces of the department of La Paz, such as Inquisivi, José Ramón Loayza and Gualberto Villarroel – came to be under the responsibility of pastors Wilfredo Gonzales and Gonzalo Patzo, president and secretary-treasurer, respectively.³⁹

Other important Adventist institutions are in the missionary territory of the MBC, and among them are Bolivia Union Mission, Bolivia Adventist University, New Time Editions, and Bolivia New Time Communication Center. These institutions directly and indirectly contribute to the growth of Adventism in the MBC field. An example of collaboration between these institutions took place in 2014 when they participated in “Hope Impact,” an evangelistic project in which all SAD churches and institutions took part by sharing free Christian literature with the community. On that occasion, nearly 500,000 missionary books were distributed in the UB, and the MCB was responsible for the distribution in the city of Potosí, capital of the province of Tomás Frías.⁴⁰

The MBC has developed missionary activities on several fronts that seek to attract people to Christ. Public Evangelism and Publications stand out. The Pathfinders Clubs also have a strong presence.⁴¹ They are a means of discipleship that seeks to prepare children and adolescents 10 to 15 years of age to have a true relationship with Jesus, the Great Guide. As an incentive to the development carried out by each club in its churches, the MBC held the Sixth Pathfinders Camporee of Central Bolivia Mission from October 31 to November 3, 2014. At that meeting, 989 youth and 36 Pathfinders Clubs participated in many activities that challenged the physical, mental, and spiritual skills they had learned throughout the year. In addition to all these activities, the campers had good moments of reflection on the Word of God, and on Sabbath morning, several young people were baptized in a river near the camp.⁴²

Another missionary front that in recent years has had a strong impact on the MBC communities is the “Caleb Mission.” This program “aims to find young volunteers to dedicate 15 days of their vacation, so that they can hold social activities and carry the message of hope.”⁴³ In addition, the Mission also seeks to motivate women in the church to take part in the care of other women. Thus, every year, “Women's Ministries” promotes the campaign “Breaking the Silence” against domestic violence and sexual abuse of minors. In 2017, the taking of this message to the main streets of the cities took place on August 26. “The church marched against violence by distributing printed materials on how to prevent sexual abuse and what to do if someone is a victim of this situation. [The next day], on Sunday, August 27, health fairs were held in squares and parks where the materials were also distributed.”⁴⁴

As a result of permanent missionary effort, the MBC achieved significant growth in the number of organized churches over the past few years. Counting 83 churches in 2016, the MBC grew to 108 churches, 148 groups, and a total of 27,230 Adventist members in 2017 in the Central Region of Bolivia.⁴⁵

The history of the MBC, although relatively recent, has taught others a lot. Heir to a great Adventist missionary legacy in Bolivian territory, this Mission has maintained its evangelistic work motivated by the same love felt by men like E. W. Thomann, Zacarias Medina, and other pioneers. With this motivation to serve, in 2020 and beyond, the MCB continues aiming at fulfilling the mission given by Jesus Christ to his disciples, and for this, it adopts the “General Plan of the Adventist Church, known as CRM (Communion, Relationship and Mission), focused on the five goals for the church to grow strong and steady.”⁴⁶ In this way, it continues to communicate the hope of the Lord’s return to every family.

Chronology of Administrative Leaders⁴⁷

Presidents: Wilfredo Gonzales (2003-2005); Edmundo Ferrufino Montaña (2006-2007); David Vargas (2007-2008); Efraín Choque Quispe (2009-2011); Antonio Ramos de Brito (2012-2013); Edmundo Ferrufino Montaña (2014-2015); Benjamín Belmonte (2016-2019); Huascar Parada García (2019-Present).

Secretaries: Gonzalo Patzo (2003-2009); Juan Vela (2010-2016); Juan Carlos Márquez (2017-2019); Wilfredo Mamani Vásquez (2019-Present).

Treasurers: Gonzalo Patzo (2003-2009); Henry Mendizabal (2010); Julio Cesar Mena (2011-2016); Rudolph Wunder (2017-2019); Adhemar Condori (2019-Present).

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Bolivia Mission Minutes of the Board of Directors, November 25, 1948, vote no. 48-69.

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NOTES

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2. Ibid.
3. *Seventh-Day Adventist Church (South American Division)* website, "Unidades Educativas Adventistas de Bolivia" ["Adventist Educational Units in Bolivia"], accessed April 1, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3blpAml>.
4. "South American Division," *2019 Annual Statistical Report* (Silver Spring, MD.: Seventh-day Adventists Church, 2019), 42.
5. *Seventh-day Adventist Church (SAD)* website, "Historia de América del Sur" ["South America History"], accessed March 6, 2020, <http://bit.ly/2ScYEEu>.
6. Daniel E. Luorno, "La Voz Cultural del Atalaya" ["The Cultural Voice of the Watchtower"], *Revista Adventista* (October 1942): 16.
7. 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, to transmit to his fellow-men the eternal Gospel that brings salvation and physical and spiritual well-being." *Seventh-day Adventist Church (SAD)* website, "Publicaciones: Sobre Nosotros" ["Publications: about us"], accessed May 7, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3bei95G>.
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9. Alberto Jara Tadeo, interviewed by the author, Sucre, May 29, 2013.
10. Daniel E. Luorno, "La Voz Cultural del Atalaya" ["The Cultural Voice of the Watchtower"], *Revista Adventista* (1943): 6.
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14. Bolivia Mission Minutes of the Board of Directors, August 5, 1948, vote no. 48-36.
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29. Jorge Riffel Wiesner, "Noticias de Potosí, la montaña de plata" ["News from Potosí, the silver mountain"], *Revista Adventista* 62, no. 12 (December 1962): 15.
30. Samuel Antonio Chávez, "Factores Externos e Internos que Intervinieron en la Extensión del Adventismo desde La Paz hacia ocho ciudades de Bolivia en el periodo 1946-1976" ["External and internal factors that intervened in the extension of Adventism from La Paz to eight Bolivian cities in the period of 1946-1976"], Doctoral thesis, Peruvian Union University, 2016, 119-125.
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32. Bolivia Mission Minutes of the Board of Directors, "Tarija - compra terreno" ["Tarija - purchases land"], May 11-12, 1974, vote no. 74-166.
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34. *Ibid.*, 320-324.
35. Bolivia Mission Minutes of the Board of Directors, "Alquiler local Tarija" ["Tarija local rent"], June 6, 1965, vote no. 65-358; Bolivia Mission Minutes of the Board of Directors, "Estudio de división de la Misión Boliviana en dos Misiones" ["Study of the division of the Bolivian Mission into two Missions"], 1975, after the vote no. 75-261; Bolivia Mission Minutes of the Board of Directors, January 7, 1977, vote no. 77-01.
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37. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Statistics*, "East Bolivia Mission - Yearly Statistics (1985-1995)," accessed May 12, 2020, <https://bit.ly/35UFUPu>.
38. Bolivia Union Mission Minutes of the Board of Directors, 2002, vote no. 2002-42.
39. "Central Bolivia Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2003), 231.
40. Dilsiane Arco, "Pastores Adventistas lanzan el libro misionero para 2014" ["Adventist Pastors launch missionary book for 2014"], *Noticias Adventistas [Adventist News]*, February 6, 2014, accessed April 1, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3aAzj4D>.
41. The Pathfinders Club is made up of "boys and girls aged 10 to 15 years old, from different social classes, color, religion. They meet, in general, once a week to learn to develop talents, skills, perceptions and a taste for nature." These adolescents "are thrilled with outdoor activities as camping, hiking, climbing, exploring the woods and caves. [...] It is worth mentioning their knowledge of outdoor survival in places that are not easily accessible. They know how to cook outdoors, light a fire without matches, among others." Besides, they demonstrate "skill with discipline through drill commands and have their creativity awakened by manual arts, and fight the use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs." *Seventh-day Adventist Church (SAD) website*, "¿Quiénes son los Conquistadores?" ["Who are the Pathfinders?"], accessed February 20, 2020, <http://bit.ly/2TpEBBY>.
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43. Bruna Ribeiro, "Más de mil jóvenes se reúnen para lanzamiento del proyecto Misión Caleb en Bolivia" ["More than a thousand young people gather to launch the Caleb Mission project in Bolivia"], *Noticias Adventistas [Adventist News]*, January 16, 2015, accessed May 13, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3br2tfK>.

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 45. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Statistics*, "Central Bolivia Mission - Yearly Statistics (2003-2018)," accessed May 13, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2AhcCyv>.
 46. Adventistas Central Bolivia [Central Bolivia Adventists], Facebook post, September 12, 2019 (10:47 a.m.), accessed May 13, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2Z0MI1K>.
 47. *Seventh-day Adventist Church (SAD)* website, "Líderes Administrativos" ["Administrative leaders"], accessed May 12, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2y0Iffa>; *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Central Bolivia Mission," accessed April 1, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2Z0YoMz>; "Central Bolivia Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2004), 231; "Central Bolivia Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2018), 228. For more details about all presidents, secretaries, and treasurers in the MBC history, see the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks* from 2003 to 2019.
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