



Southeast Brazil Union Conference headquarters facade
Photo courtesy of Southeast Brazil Union Conference Archives.

?Southeast Brazil Union Conference

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The Southeast Brazil Union Conference is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South American Division. Its headquarters is located at 13,810 União e Indústria Rd., Zip Code 25740-365, in the commercial center of Itaipava, in the city of Petrópolis, state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The South East Brazil Union Conference (USeB) covers the states of Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and Espírito Santo. It comprises a total of 1,023 municipalities, with an estimated population of 42,328,723¹ The union has 344 pastoral districts, 2,439 congregations, and 216,967 baptized members² with an average of one Adventist per 195 people. Of its 76 staff members, 34 are employees, two are interns, and 40 are workers, including 16 accredited pastors who belong to the administration team.³

The Adventist Church in this region is served by 10 administrative units. In the state of Rio de Janeiro are Rio de Janeiro Conference, established in 1902, located in the city of Rio de Janeiro, with 17,232 members; South Rio Conference, established in 1999, in the city of Campo Grande, 28,288; and Rio Fluminense Conference, established in 2003, in the city of Itaboraí, 21,007. In the state of Minas Gerais are Central Minas Conference, established in 1955, based in the city of Belo Horizonte, 32,964; South Minas Conference, established in 1983, in the city of Juiz de Fora, 25,068; East Minas Conference, established in 2001, in the city of Governador Valadares, 20,456; North Minas

Mission, established in 2013, in the city of Montes Claros, 15,552; and West Minas Mission, established in 2019, in the city of Uberlândia, 12,248. In the state of Espírito Santo are the Espírito Santo Conference, established in 1920, in the city of Vitória, 27,897; and the South Espírito Santo Conference, established in 2009, in the city of Cariacica, 28,503 Adventists.⁴

In this territory are 36 church schools, serving 20,563 students with about 2,000 teachers and professors, from kindergarten to college.⁵ It is home to three Adventist boarding high schools segment: Minas Gerais Adventist College, in Lavras, in the state of Minas Gerais, with 897 students;⁶ Petrópolis Adventist Academy, which is located in the city of Petrópolis, in the state of Rio de Janeiro and has 447 students; the Espírito Santo Academy (EDESSA), which is based in the city of Colatina, in the state of Espírito Santo and has 309 students.⁷ Also under the administration of this Union is the Silvestre Health Network, composed of two hospitals: Silvestre Adventist Hospital, located in the city of Rio de Janeiro; and Silvestre Adventist Hospital - Itaboraí, located in the city of Itaboraí. The hospitals have altogether 162 beds, 1,263 employees, and nine modern, well-equipped operating rooms.⁸

Adventist Development & Relief Agency works through three centers: ADRA Minas Gerais, located at 21 Portugal Av., in the Santa Amélia neighborhood, in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais; ADRA Espírito Santo, located 249 on Color St., in the Conrado neighborhood, in Cariacica, Espírito Santo; and ADRA Rio de Janeiro, located on 37 Matoso St., Praça da Bandeira [Bandeira Square], Rio de Janeiro.⁹

Conference Organizational History

Adventism arrived in Brazil through publications printed in the 1880s. A flyer written in German, titled *Stimme der Wahrheit* (Voice of Truth), was sent from Germany and arrived in Itajaí, a port city in the state of Santa Catarina, in the southern region of the country. The message spread during that decade and Adventists achieved a relevant growth, leading to the inauguration of Brazil's first Adventist church in June 1895, in the city of Gaspar Alto, Santa Catarina. In that same month occurred the first Adventist baptism on Brazilian soil, officiated by the first ordained Adventist pastor to work in South America, Frank Westphal. Still in 1895, another ordained pastor arrived in Brazilian territory, Huldreich Graf. He founded a church in the city of Rio de Janeiro that October 27, and another one in a neighboring state, Espírito Santo, that December 14. On October 20, 1896, Frederick Spies inaugurated the first church in Minas Gerais and the fifth in Brazil, in the city of Teófilo Otoni.¹⁰

Until 1901, there were no union conferences in the Adventist church structure, only conferences and missions. The 1901 General Conference Session in Battle Creek, Michigan, established union conferences to act as an intermediary between local fields and the General Conference. In 1902 the Church established the Brazilian Conference (present Rio de Janeiro Conference), based in the city of Rio de Janeiro, the country's capital at that time. In 1911 the Church established the Brazil Union Conference, the first in Brazilian territory.¹¹

Membership growth in Brazil necessitated an administrative reorganization in the Brazil Union Conference. Until then, it administrated the Adventist work throughout the country. This decision was made at a general meeting held in the city of La Plata, Argentina, on February 17, 1916, when the South American Division was made official.¹² In the same meeting it was decided to establish the North Brazil Union Conference, which started operating in 1918. Its headquarters was located in the city of Caruaru, state of Pernambuco. With the establishment of the North Brazil Union Conference, the Brazil Union Conference had its name changed to South Brazil Union Conference (present Central Brazil Union Conference), headquartered in Moema neighborhood, in the city of São Paulo.¹³

At its organization in 1918, the North Brazil Union Conference was responsible for the Adventist work in a great part of the national territory, from the western Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, and Espírito Santo, to the states of the Northeast and North of Brazil. At that time the union had 916 registered Adventist members spread over the region's large territory. In the Northeast region there were only three adventists in the state of Maranhão and 25 in the state of Alagoas.¹⁴ That union went through some changes in status and territory since its organization, starting with its name being changed in 1921 to the East Brazil Union Conference, and its headquarters transferred to the city of Rio de Janeiro. Its first president was Pastor Henry J. Meyer, alongside Pastor W. A. Ernenputsch as secretary and treasurer. In 1923, it obtained its first headquarters in the city of Rio de Janeiro, at 46 Mário Lacerda St., in the Estácio neighborhood. Up to that moment, the office operated at Henry Meyer's home, at 67 Piauhy St., in the Engenho de Dentro neighborhood, in Rio de Janeiro.¹⁵

At that time, the union field was divided into missions: the Espírito Santo Mission, headquartered in Rio de Janeiro, comprised the states of Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo, with John Boehm as president; the East Minas Mission, based in the city of Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais, which assisted the southwest of the state and had Clarence Emerson Rentfro as president; the Pernambuco Mission, headquartered in the city of Recife, Pernambuco, responsible for the states of Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, Ceará, Piauí, Maranhão, and all northern states, from Pará to Amazonas, with Ricardo José Wilfart as president; and the East Brazilian Mission, headquartered in the city of Salvador, capital of Bahia, which oversaw the states of Bahia, Sergipe and Alagoas. Its president was Pastor Leo Halliwell.¹⁶

In 1925 membership in the union rose to 1,886, and in 1930, 2,688 Adventists. In the Amazon region, Leo Halliwell started work in the health field, together with his wife Jessie. After finding out that there was no efficient means of land transportation in the region, the couple established a clinic that sailed the Amazon River, the so-called Rolling Clinics. The first launch became ready in 1931 and was named *Luzeiro*. The Halliwells treated ailments such as malaria, hookworm, yaws, leprosy, and tropical ulcers. In addition to that, they saved the population from attacks by many wild animals, such as alligators and poisonous snakes.¹⁷

In 1935, head offices were moved to a more central location, in the region of Praça da Bandeira [Bandeira Square], in the city of Rio de Janeiro.¹⁸ 1,274 people were baptized in a five-year period, and union's member count reached the mark of 3,962 people. In 1936, the North Brazil Union Conference was organized, responsible for the Adventist work in the current states of Pará, Amazonas, Acre, Amapá, Rondônia and Roraima, in northern Brazil, and also for three states in the Northeast: Ceará, Piauí, and Maranhão.¹⁹ The East Brazil Union became responsible for the states of Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, and Espírito Santo, in addition to the northeastern states of Bahia, Sergipe, Alagoas, Pernambuco, Paraíba, and Rio Grande do Norte.

The Church in the region started to consider education as one of its fronts for evangelistic work. In 1939 Petrópolis Adventist Academy was established, located in the region of Petrópolis, state of Rio de Janeiro. Pastor John D. Hardt was appointed the first president of the academy (1939 to 1940). Meanwhile, missionary work continued in local churches. In 1940, the East Brazil Union started the decade with 4,980 members in its area of activity, an increase of 1,018.²⁰

A movement grew to build a health institution to meet the demands of large centers. On November 22, 1942, East Brazil Union leaders inaugurated the second Adventist medical facility on Brazilian soil, the Clínica de Repouso White [White Rest Clinic], now known as Hospital Adventista Silvestre [Silvestre Adventist Hospital]. At first, the institution was based in a nineteenth century three-story building, which had 14 rooms and was located in the Santa Teresa neighborhood, in Rio de Janeiro. Years later, this clinic was transferred to another address in the Cosme Velho neighborhood, Rio de Janeiro, where it remains today. Other important institutions were established in the 1940s, including, in 1943, Northeast Brazil Academy, located close to a city named Belém de Maria, in the state of Pernambuco.²¹ In 1945 "Voz da Profecia" [Voice of Prophecy]²² began in the city of Niterói.²³

In 1945 the East Brazil Union had 7,119 members, and in 1949, 8,707 members. The growing demand led the administration of the union to relocate the office. In 1952, the headquarters moved to a house located on 84 Lopes Trovão St., in Niterói, about 10 kilometers away from the city of Rio de Janeiro. The office remained in that location for about 22 years.²⁴ In 1955 union membership reached 13,018 members.

In the 1960s, Adventist missionary fronts kept expanding. In 1962 Espírito Santo Academy was established.²⁵ In June 1963 the academy submitted all the necessary documentation to the Sectional Secretary of Vitória, and in October, the academy was inspected and granted the official operating license, valid for two years. The school started providing elementary education in 1964, serving 143 students,²⁶ fulfilling a long-held dream.²⁷ In 1965, membership reached 28,964. By 1970 that number had almost doubled, reaching 50,460.

The following decade was marked by changes and more missionary advances. In 1974, the union headquarters moved to 69 Sete de Setembro Av., in the Icaraí neighborhood, also in Niterói.²⁸ In 1975, as a result of the missionary work done throughout the territory, membership reached 65,272.²⁹

In 1978 a congress was held to encourage and train lay members how to approach believers from other denominations and creeds. About 1,000 delegates from churches and groups from the union field attended the event, where several pastors participated, including Samuel Monnier from the General Conference.³⁰ In 1979, Northeast Brazil Adventist College (now Bahia Adventist College) was established, located in the city of Cachoeira, 128 kilometers from the state's capital, Salvador. The school started by providing an equivalence program in which 25 students, all scholarship holders, took part. On October 14, 1979, the cornerstone of the college was laid before a crowd of over 600 people.³¹

The 1980s saw an expansion in the educational field. In 1980, in the outskirts of the city of Lavras, in the state of Minas Gerais, Minas Gerais Adventist Academy (today, Minas Gerais Adventist College – Fadminas) was established. In 1981 approximately 40 students helped with the construction of the first buildings. Since its beginning, the institution's declared mission has been to lead people to the kingdom of heaven.³² The expansion on all evangelistic fronts caused union membership to reach 94,520 in the same year. This led to the establishment, in 1983, of a new administrative unit, the South Minas Mission (present South Minas Conference), headquartered in the city of Juiz de Fora, in Minas Gerais. This institution arose from the reorganization of the Central Minas Mission (present-day Central Minas Conference), which had been active for over 30 years.

New institutions continued to emerge. In 1985 union membership reached 121,791, and in 1990, 169,001.³³ In 1989, Hope Channel Brazil Radio started broadcasting in a city named Afonso Cláudio, in Espírito Santo. The purpose was to reach people in their homes, where preachers were unable to enter and the gospel could not otherwise be taught. Thousands began to tune their radios to Adventist frequencies. The Adventist Media Center-Brazil was established in 1995 as Sistema Adventista de Comunicação [Adventist Media Center-Brazil]. Initially, it was established in a city named Nova Friburgo, in the state of Rio de Janeiro.³⁴

In 1996 the Northeast Brazil Union Mission was established, responsible for the Adventist work in the states of Pernambuco, Rio Grande do Norte, Ceará, Piauí, Alagoas, Paraíba, Bahia, and Sergipe. Now the East Brazil Union Conference became responsible for churches in the states of Rio de Janeiro, Espírito Santo, and Minas Gerais. Due

to this change, the East Brazil Union Conference now had 117,017 members. The fast growth of the number of Adventists in the state of Rio de Janeiro, the great amount of organized churches and groups, and the large dimensions of the assisted area led to the emergence of the South Rio Conference in 1999.³⁵ By the end of 2000, there were 128,084 Adventists in the East Brazil Union Conference.³⁶

On January 1, 2001, the East Minas Conference began operation, in the city of Governador Valadares, Minas Gerais. The institution assisted 13,044 members. In 2003, the Rio Fluminense Conference was formed., with 14,461 members. In 2005, membership in the East Brazil Union reached 149,035.³⁷

Across the union there are large cities where preaching the Gospel continues to be challenging. The difficulties range from secularization to the violence that prevails in some regions. In 2005 the union held a series of events, in accordance with the urban evangelism plan proposed by the 2005 General Conference Session, titled "Go to the World." In June and July 2007, a group of voluntary musicians and pastors toured northern Minas Gerais and the state's capital, Belo Horizonte. Hundreds of people were baptized during the eight day of the long series.³⁸

In 2007 the South American Division created the project "Hope Impact."³⁹ The goal was to spread the Adventist message to 20 million people in just one day, through literature.⁴⁰ Since the project started, the Southeast Brazil Union has actively participated, distributing thousands of books every year. As a complement to this project in the states of Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo, an outreach action took place, as missionary pairs went out to the streets to pray with people. In the metropolitan region of Vitória, in Espírito Santo alone, over 3,000 people participated. Participants invited people to the nearest Adventist Church. In 2008, there were 11,000 missionary pairs and 69,000 people involved in this activity, which spread across the entire union. Since then, Adventists in the East Brazil Union have been actively involved in the "Hope Impact" project.⁴¹

In 2008 an evangelistic program titled "Esperança no Ar" [Hope broadcast] started broadcasting on Sundays in Vitória's metropolitan region, with a potential audience of 1.5 million. After eight editions, the program has brought hundreds of people to study the Bible. The intention of the leaders involved was to give visibility to the word "Hope," emphasizing the Adventist Church's largest missionary campaign in South America, the "Hope Impact." In the East Brazil Union Conference's territory 156,000 people distributed 2 million magazines and 100,000 bumper stickers, and distributed 990 posters during the months of August and September.⁴² As a result of these missionary initiatives, more people joined the church and the organization continued to adapt to serve them. In 2009 the South Espírito Santo Conference, responsible for the southern region of Espírito Santo, was established. At that time, there were 38,919 Adventists across the state, and 18,576 members in its area of activity. The conference's headquarters is located in the city of Cariacica, close to Vitória, the state's capital.

In 2010 East Brazil Union Conference membership reached 158,049.⁴³ In 2012, the East Brazil Union Mission was established to assist the states of Bahia and Sergipe. The East Brazil Union Conference was renamed Southeast Brazil Union Conference. In 2013 the North Minas Mission was established with 11,273 members, headquartered in the city of Montes Claros, northern Minas Gerais.⁴⁴

In 2015, with a view to expanding and improving working conditions, the Southeast Brazil Union headquarters was transferred to the city of Petrópolis, at União e Indústria Rd., in the Itaipava neighborhood.⁴⁵ That year membership reached 187,120. As of this writing, membership is 215,385.⁴⁶ In 2019 the West Minas Gerais Mission was established with 12,248 members, headquartered in the city of Uberlândia, in the far west of the state of Minas Gerais.

The Southeast Brazil Union Conference focuses on the three goals of communion, relationship, and mission. Special care is paid to fellowship among members. Therefore, some of the Union goals are: (1) to strengthen the Sabbath School and the family altar by encouraging study of the Sabbath School Bible Study Guide; (2) to encourage family worship and the 40 Madrugadas [40 Early Mornings project];⁴⁷ and (3) to use media to approach and reach young people. As for relationships, it is understood that the Adventist Church needs a relational focus, both inside and outside the community, with "people taking care of people."⁴⁸ Union leadership works to ensure that local churches are welcoming, and carries out ongoing discipleship training, and in the development of strategies to reach and preserve new generations.⁴⁹

The Southeast Brazil Union strives continuously to engage members in fulfilling the mission. It seeks to train leaders through simple, clear and self-explanatory programs that integrate the various missionary fronts, such as Sabbath School and Small Groups.⁵⁰ The union has worked with ADRA to bring relief and personal and social development to people in need. In Minas Gerais, for example, there are several projects focused on serving those at risk or socially vulnerable. Over 35 projects have been developed in municipalities in Minas Gerais, with more than 8,000 people assisted every month and more than 600 employees, volunteers, and partners who assist children, teenagers, young people, adults and the elderly.⁵¹ One of the oldest ADRA facilities in Brazil is the one from the state of Espírito Santo, providing basic and social protection. Approximately 900 employees work with dozens of volunteers to shelter around 5,000 people every month.⁵² In Rio de Janeiro, ADRA has been operating for 16 years. Today it has five ongoing projects, assisting 2,000 people per month.⁵³

Through the expansion of all these missionary fronts, the Southeast Brazil Union hopes, by the grace of God, to face the challenges that still exist in its territory. One is that, there are 457 municipalities where the Adventist Church is not present. Another concern is to increase the number of members in each congregation actively engaged in missionary work. On another front, statistics show that 34 percent of the 216,967 church members have been baptized in the past 9 years. This indicates the need to foster the spiritual maturity of the new generation of members.⁵⁴ In response to such challenges, the union set a goal for 2020 that each church must study the Bible with at least 100 people. Members are also being encouraged to spend more time in prayer and Bible study to grow in Christ.⁵⁵ Through such

programs as Small Groups and Sabbath School, together with personal devotions and Bible study, the union expects that more people will participate in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ to all people.⁵⁶

Even amid so many difficulties, the missionary expansion continues. For over 100 years, the Southeast Brazil Union Conference has been a blessing in the life of the community. The Adventist testimony given in this territory has corroborated the truth that has been taught and directing the eyes of many to Christ. Union leaders, employees, and members know that the more they give themselves up and trust in the divine guidance, the more successful will be the preaching of the Gospel. So, by adopting the motto “looking back, we move forward,”⁵⁷ members know the God who was present in the past is the same God who controls the rudder towards the future.

Chronology of Administrative Executives⁵⁸

Presidents: Henry J. Meyer (1919-1922); Frederico W. Spies (1923-1927); Elmer Harry Wilcox (1928-1931); H. B. Westcott (1932-1936); Henrique G. Stoehr (1937-1940); John Lewis Brown (1941-1943); Cecil Eugene Lambeth (1944-1949); Roger Anderson Wilcox (1950-1958); Rodolpho Belz (1959-1968); Walter Jonathan Streithorst (1969-1972); Darcy Mendes Borba (1973-1980); Floriano Xavier dos Santos (1981-1986); José Orlando Correia (1987-1998); Wandyr Mendes de Oliveira (1999-2007); Maurício Pinto Lima (2008-2019); Hiram Rafael S. Kalbermatter (2019-present).

Secretaries: W. A. Ernenputsch (1919-1922); Ricardo J. Wilfart (1923-1926); Ulrich Wissner (1927-1939); J. F. Cummins (1940-1941); Ricardo J. Wilfart (1942-1943); Jorge Pereira Lobo (1944-1960); Wilbur Olson (1961-1963); Harry Emílio Bergold (1964-1970); Ivo Souza (1971-1972); Ruy Nagel (1973-1974); Carlos M. Borda (1975-1983); José Orlando Correia (1984-1986); Arôvel Oliveira Moura (1987-2007); Leonidas Verneque Guedes (2008-present).

Treasurers: W. A. Ernenputsch (1919-1922); F. C. Varney (1923-1926); Ulrich Wissner (1927-1936); John D. Hardt (1937-1939); J. F. Cummins (1940-1941); Walton John Brow (1942-1942); Frederico Vegele (1943-1947); Jacob Wagner (1948-1956); John David Woodin (1957-1960); Wilbur Olson (1961-1967); Harry Emílio Bergold (1968-1970); Ivo Souza (1971-1972); Ruy Nagel (1973-1974); Carlos M. Borda (1975-1982); Geraldo Bokenkamp (1983); Vilson Francisco Oliveira (1984-2007); Antônio Oliveira Tostes (2008-2009); Volnei da Rosa Porto (2010-2018); Jabson Magalhães da Silva (2019-present).⁵⁹

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