



Aerial view of Pastor Manoel Soares Academy.
Photo courtesy of Pastor Manoel Soares Academy Archives.

Pastor Manoel Soares Academy

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The Pastor Manoel Soares Academy (Instituto Educacional Pastor Manoel Soares or IEMS) is an academy that offers early childhood, primary, and secondary education in a boarding and day school system. It is located in the mission field of the South Brazil Union Conference (União Sul-Brasileira or USB) and, although it is not part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) worldwide education network, it seeks to offer integral education in accordance with the values of Adventist education. The academy is located on Vila Longuinópolis at Zip Code 85430-000 in the city of Braganey in the state of Paraná, Brazil.¹

The academy is located in an area of 44 hectares with the central building, classrooms, science laboratory, male and female dormitories, cafeteria, and temple in addition to the sports courts and lots of natural, green area. The residential buildings offer a total of 288 spaces. There are 36 rooms in each building with space for four people in

each room. Nowadays, the school serves a total of 172 students through a team of 28 employees including teachers, deans, monitors, and other staff members.²

Development that Led to the School's Establishment

Evangelist canvassers³ Elwin W. Snyder, C. A. Nowlen, and Albert B. Stauffer were pioneers in preaching the Adventist message in the states of Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, and Paraná in the southern part of Brazil. Around the 1890s, these missionaries traveled throughout this region selling books and preaching the Gospel.⁴ In this context, on January 1896, Stauffer traveled to the capital of Paraná, and there he sold a copy of the book "Vida de Jesus" ["The Story of Jesus"] to Ana and Oscar Otto. After a series of Bible studies were given by the canvasser, Ana and Oscar decided to be baptized, becoming (as far as it is known) the first Adventists in the state of Paraná. This was the beginning of the Adventist history in that part of the country.⁵

In western Paraná, the expansion of the Adventist preaching happened somewhat late compared to other places in the south of Brazil. During the beginning of the 20th century, that territory was sparsely populated and difficult to access. Therefore, the dissemination of the Adventist message in that region happened around the 1940s, when the first missionaries arrived there. Campo Mourão was one of the first municipalities reached. In that place, evangelist canvasser Belarmino Pereira presented the Adventist message to lawyer Luís Losso. After some studies, in 1944, Luís and his wife Maria were baptized by Pastor Arnoldo Rutz.⁶

Later, in the late 1950s, many families arrived in the southwest and west regions of Paraná with the goal of populating those parts of the state. Among these families were the Raspolts, who left the city of Ijuí in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul and settled in Coronel Vivida in Paraná. The Raspolts are considered the first Adventists to live in this city of Paraná. Some time later, other families of the region were reached through the preaching of the Gospel, and the Adventist population of that area grew in a such way that it became important to establish an academy with Christian ideals there.⁷ At that time, the Parana-Santa Catarina Academy (Ginásio Adventista Paranaense [or GAP, presently Parana Adventist College or the Instituto Adventista Paranaense) already existed. However, since GAP was far from the municipalities in the west and southwest of the state, many families did not have the financial means to send their children to this Adventist boarding school.⁸

Around 40 years later, IEMS was created, meeting the demands of Adventist students of that region. The original plans for the establishment of this academy came from Eunice Soares Oehninger, Pastor Manoel Soares' daughter. Soares was an Adventist missionary and was the person the institution was named after.⁹ In 1998, Eunice encouraged her son, Conrado Oehninger, to build a school to prepare future missionaries. Conrado longed for an academy with Christian teachers, affordable tuition, and a system of scholarships.¹⁰

Though he was optimistic about this school project, Conrado still felt that something was missing. One morning, while looking at the books on his bookshelf, Conrado found the title "Testemunhos Seletos, volume 2" ["Testimony Treasures, volume 2"] from Ellen G. White, the Adventist writer believed to be inspired by God and one of the cofounders of Adventism.¹¹ This book helped him to realize what was still missing in the school's project. Conrado studied the chapter "Reforma Industrial" ["Industrial Reform"] that describes how Adventist schools should operate. The book's recommendations talk about simple institutions with vegetarian menus whose produce comes from the school's own vegetable garden. The author of the book also highlighted the importance of counting on teachers converted to God and spoke about the relevance of encouraging students with preparatory activities for professional and spiritual challenges. Conrado decided to put this knowledge into practice.¹²

The School's Founding

The academy's construction plans were initially drawn up by Conrado and Rute Oehninger, and the academy's landscaping project was made by Eunice Oehninger.¹³ On May 21, 1999, the IEMS cornerstone was laid on Fazenda Cascata [Cascata Farm], a 44-hectare property located on Vila Longuinópolis in Braganey.¹⁴ The decision to build the school in that location was made because Conrado was a farmer in that region where he also lived with his family. The construction of the school was funded by the Oehninger family livestock production in addition to donations and "other divine provisions."¹⁵

With a significant amount of land at their disposal, the IEMS founders wanted to apply the principles taught by Ellen G. White in a practical way. According to the author, students can learn to use work tools during the construction of the school buildings due to the fact that this craft is useful and develops awareness about the importance of economy. The author also affirmed that it is important that students learn useful skills for everyday life with the goal of becoming independent and capable citizens.¹⁶ That was the philosophy that the academy founders sought to follow in their efforts to develop the academy.¹⁷

Construction began shortly after the fundamental stone was laid. Later, on December 15 of that same year (1999), the first 50 scholarship students arrived in the academy and were invited to participate in the construction. They helped to build the school buildings and the furniture that would be used in the classrooms.¹⁸ The inauguration of the first buildings happened on March 9, 2000, when the IEMS classes also started.¹⁹ In the beginning of the academy's activities, 157 students from many places in the south region of Brazil were enrolled in the institution, which then offered both elementary and high school education.²⁰

Thinking about the importance of inclusion of students with limited financial means, the academy was established aiming for simplicity and economy. The plan was that students would earn funds that would pay for their studies while they learned. With the goal of self-sustainability, since the academy's inauguration, fruits and vegetables were grown by the students in order to provide food for the academy. While doing this kind of work, IEMS students learned new lessons and useful lessons for life. This system was the first educational workshop incorporated into the IEMS pedagogical curriculum. Since the beginning of this academy's history, its goal has been to inspire students to care about and appreciate what God provides. Its stated mission is: "Through a Christian education, promote the integral development of students, forming useful citizens to the community, the country, and God."²¹

History of the School

In 2000, IEMS had 23 staff members who assisted in the care and education of 140 boarding and 30 day students. During that year, the academy was accredited and obtained official authorization from the government of the State of Paraná for its operation. Also in 2000, the central building was inaugurated with classrooms and offices of the school's administration.²² In the following year, the male and female dormitories and the cafeteria were opened. In 2002, the academy had its authorization renewed to offer Early Childhood Education.²³ A year later (2003), as part of the academy's philosophy that prefers that teachers live near the school, the teachers' residences were inaugurated, and they included houses and apartments.²⁴

In 2004, with just over 250 enrolled students, the academy started the course of "Educação Profissional de Habilitação Técnica em Enfermagem" ["Professional Education in Nursing Technical Qualification"]²⁵ On May 24 of the same year, the construction work of a clinic that would support the technical qualification of students in healthcare was begun. The ceremony of laying the cornerstone of the clinic was attended by about 100 people who included SDA leaders of that region and political leaders from the municipality of Braganey. A Bible was put in the place the cornerstone would normally have been located, representing the principle on which the medical missionary work is anchored. After that, Tercio Emanuel Soares (Pastor Manoel Soares' son) included a list with the signatures of all those present who had made the commitment to pray for the future of that health unit that would work in partnership with IEMS.²⁶ The first graduation of the Technical Nursing Course took place in 2005.²⁷

Another milestone in the IEMS history happened in 2011. During that year, the cornerstone of the academy's Adventist church building was laid. On that occasion, a service was conducted to celebrate the beginning of the construction, an occasion that also included the baptism of two academy students. In harmony with the missionary purpose of the academy and as a result of the evangelistic work carried out there during that year, another 14 students were soon baptized in the academy. Three years later, even without a definitive temple, IEMS became the headquarters of a pastoral district of the West Parana Conference (Associação Oeste Paranaense or AOP)²⁸

Regarding the educational arena, the IEMS Technical Nursing Course was active during 2004 and 2014. While in operation, this course prepared a total of 51 students to work as professionals in the healthcare industry. However, after some changes in the Brazilian educational legislation, IEMS was unable to meet the new requirements, so the Technical Nursing Course was closed, and the academy returned to only offering from early childhood education to high school courses.²⁹ In 2016, the academy was again accredited by the government to continue early childhood, primary, and secondary education.³⁰

In 2018, the campus church was inaugurated. This ceremony took place on September 1 during an event that marked the end of the academy construction. Today, the worship services held on Sabbaths in this church are attended by about 130 members of the community besides the students and staff members of the school.³¹

In harmony with the academy's evangelistic vocation and in cooperation with the continuous purpose of educating missionaries, the IEMS facilities house volunteers from the "Caleb Mission" Project ["Missão Calebe"]³² while the project is underway. Many of the academy's students also actively participate in this program. They work in nearby cities doing such things as cleaning yards, renovating houses and churches and in public schools, and offering recreational activities to students.³³

Since its establishment, IEMS has made its services available to students from all over Brazil. About 75 percent of these students support themselves with full or partial scholarships that are defined according to the financial circumstances of each student and his or her family. By offering such a high number of scholarships, the academy seeks to serve the largest number of students in the best way possible. Besides their commitment to bring students to the knowledge of the Advent message, IEMS also offers a curriculum of quality that is permanently supervised by the Regional Education Centers [Núcleos Regionais de Educação] of the city of Cascavel.³⁴

The history of Pastor Manoel Soares Academy shows that God has led the educational missionary work of this school. Recognizing this, each year, the academy administration holds celebrations on the academy's anniversary date in gratitude to God for the blessings and for the maintenance of its activities. The most recent of these events took place on May 21, 2020, when IEMS completed 21 years of existence.³⁵

The Historical Role of the School

The IEMS administration maintains a good relationship with the community of the city of Braganey where the academy is located. Due to its educational objective and the beneficent way it works, the academy is exempt from

municipal taxes according to a law approved by the City Council in October 2000.³⁶ Having in mind the kind of work done by the academy and the benefits offered to the community, in 2016, the Oehninger Educational Association [Associação de Ensino Oehninger] (the legal entity that maintains IEMS) received the philanthropy certificate from the federal government through Ordinance no. 417 of August 30, 2016 from the Brazil Ministry of Education [Ministério da Educação do Brasil].³⁷

The IEMS administration also maintains a good relationship with the SDA leaders in the region where the academy is located. Since the establishment of the academy, the SDA Church has provided a chaplain to serve in the academy and a pastor to lead the academy's church. The South Brazil Union Conference and the West Parana Conference have always extended invitations to the IEMS staff members to participate in conferences promoted by the Church with a focus on evangelistic integration and training in the educational arena. This initiative has helped the academy teachers to continuously improve themselves in both their personal and professional spheres. In this context, IEMS has sought to carry out its activities in harmony with the educational and management principles of the Adventist Church in Brazil and around the world.³⁸

Regarding the missionary role that the Academy has been playing, many evangelistic activities have been developed, and the outcomes that have been achieved have been outstanding. Students spend part of their free time helping people in neighboring communities. They are led by the academy's chaplain and receive help while they maintain local houses and gardens in addition to carrying out recreational projects in other schools in the municipality of Braganey. The students also conduct activities in a Small Group³⁹ in Vila Longuinópolis. This last project is directed especially to people interested in knowing more about the Adventist message. The academy also participates in the "Hope Impact Project" ["Impacto Esperança"]⁴⁰ that happens every year. Students and staff members get involved in this missionary project by delivering books to people living near the academy. On average, 14 people are baptized each year through the evangelistic work developed at IEMS.⁴¹

What Remains to Be Done to Fulfill the School's Mission

The IEMS primary goal remains to train missionaries to work in the ministry of God. Since its establishment, more than 5,000 young people have passed through the classrooms of this institution. After studying at IEMS, many of these students have continued their studies and later joined the Adventist workforce to serve as pastors or workers, especially in the USB territory. Thus, history shows that the academy has fulfilled its main mission. Since its inauguration, the teaching staff has always consisted of Adventist teachers, another foundational goal that has been maintained and has had a great impact on the education offered by the institution.⁴²

The IEMS administration understands that, in order to continue fulfilling its educational mission, it is necessary to maintain the principles of simplicity and discipline in addition to remaining focused on spirituality.⁴³ To accomplish this same purpose, Academy staff members are aware that God has given them the opportunity to participate in His work and therefore believe that faith and consecration are essential for the work to be done. In this way, the leaders and employees endeavor to follow the same values and principles that motivated the founding of the Academy with its goal that the will of God be done in the permanent formation of missionaries.⁴⁴

Challenges remain in order to continue achieving this goal. One of them is the need for financial resources. Just as in the course of the last few decades Brazil has gone through several economic crises that has affected educational institutions, the future will also bring its own obstacles. Nevertheless, the IEMS' team of employees believes that God has always been present, and even in the midst of difficulties, He is guiding the academy's trajectory. As in the beginning of IEMS history, today, through a differentiated educational proposal, the Academy continues to pursue its purpose and to promote the integral development of its students, helping them to be people committed to serve God, the Church, and society.⁴⁵

Chronology of Directors⁴⁶

General Directors: Roberto Wagner Alves Faustino (1999-2002); Harlei Márcio Cantori (2002-2004); Osmindo Zitikieswisk (2004); Conrado Oehninger (2005-2012); Velmor Battistel (2017-present).

Academy Directors: Everson Vargas (2005-2006); Antonio Carlos (2007); Emerson Brugnerotto (2009); Reginaldo Menezes (2010-2011); Everson Vargas (2012); Magdiel Castilho (2012-present).

Administrative Directors: Conrado Oehninger (1999-2004); Egmar Santos (2005-2007); Velmor Battistel (2008-present).⁴⁷

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NOTES

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5. Renato Gross, *Colégio Internacional de Curitiba: uma história de fé e pioneirismo* [Curitiba School: a history of faith and pioneerism], Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Collins, 1996, 45-51.?
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