



Construction of Varzea Grande Adventist Academy.
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West Mato Grosso Mission

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The West Mato Grosso Mission (MisOM) is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church located in the territory of the West Central Brazil Union Mission (UCOB).

The West Mato Grosso Mission's temporary headquarters are based at Rua da Bondade, 182, Jardim Gloria II, 78140-770 Varzea Grande, MT, Brazil.

MisOM's territory includes the municipalities of Nova Monte Verde, Colíder, Alta Floresta, Colniza, Aripuanã, Juína, Juara, Tangará da Serra, Barra do Bugres, Curvelândia, Cáceres, Poconé, Pontes e Lacerda, Guarantã do Norte, Matupá, Peixoto de Azevedo, and Sinop e Várzea Grande. The field has 18,853 members divided into 107 organized churches, 119 groups, and thirty pastoral districts.¹ With a total population of 1,373,083 inhabitants in the region,² the average is one Adventist per seventy-two inhabitants.

The West Mato Grosso Mission manages three schools, which at the time of writing enrolled 2,618 students. The Varzea Grande Adventist Academy in the city of Várzea Grande enrolled 923 students, the Cáceres Adventist Academy in Cáceres enrolled 751 students, and the Sinop Adventist Academy in Sinop enrolled 944 students. The

Hope Channel Brazil broadcasts on channel 3, an open channel, in the city of Colíder with a potential reach of 33,438 people.³

MisOM employs a staff of forty-one people, twenty of whom are support personnel, seven are credentialed workers, and fourteen are licensed workers. The field employs thirty-five pastors, twenty-one of which are ordained and fourteen licensed.

The Origin of the Adventist Work in the Mission Territory

Adventist work began in Mato Grosso around 1920 when the territory was combined with Mato Grosso do Sul to form a single state. Canvassers Antônio Souza and Egídio Machado initially arrived in the southern region of the state. In November 1920, Max Rohde accompanied by Antônio Souza visited the city of Entre Rios where he organized the first Sabbath School with ten members.⁴ Rohde also met a group of Sabbath keepers at a place “in the middle of a huge virgin bush” in the region, and organized another Sabbath School class with twenty members.⁵

In 1921, Rohde visited the city of Ponta Porã on the border with Paraguay in the current territory of Mato Grosso do Sul. There he met the couple, Israel and Castorina do Amaral, who had known the Adventist Church while living in Argentina. Rohde held Bible study meetings in Ponta Porã and, on May 29, 1921, performed one of the first recorded baptisms in the territory.⁶ In the same year, the Mato Grosso Mission was established with Rohde as president and the only licensed minister. The mission headquarters were located in the city of Campo Grande.⁷ Rohde's tireless work for the Adventist mission ended up damaging his health, requiring him to retire in 1927. He remained as superintendent of the Mato Grosso Mission until 1929.⁸ During 1930, the mission remained without a director⁹ until Elmer H. Wilcox, then president of the South Brazil Union Conference, took over in 1931.¹⁰

Amid administrative changes, evangelistic work did not stop in Mato Grosso. In the early 1930s, Longino Niz arrived in Cuiabá to do canvassing work.¹¹ In May 1933, he had sold more than “ten *contos de réis*¹² in literature” (about US \$ 3,250.00) in materials.¹³ At that time, Niz served a population of about 18,000 inhabitants in Cuiabá and nearby cities, such as Poconé.¹⁴ In July 1934, thanks to the canvasser's work, Cuiabá already had four Sabbath School classes organized and ten people ready to be baptized.¹⁵

In 1934, the South Brazil Union Conference sent Alfredo Méier to work in the Mato Grosso Mission.¹⁶ In 1936, Méier assumed the presidency of the mission, still based in Campo Grande.¹⁷ The Mato Grosso Mission held its first general conference from July 18 to 22, 1934. Pastor E. H. Wilcox baptized three people in Cuiabá days before the conference and five others in the city of Poconé.¹⁸

The advancement of the work and conferences held in 1938 and 1939 enabled the inauguration of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Cuiabá at the beginning of the year 1941.¹⁹ That same year, José R. dos Passos accepted the leadership of the Mato Grosso Mission and started to concentrate efforts on evangelizing the northern region of the state. Until then, the mission only had four organized churches, seven groups, and 174 baptized members.²⁰ In 1943, the number of Adventists across the state of Mato Grosso rose to 225.²¹

There is no record of when the Adventist message officially arrived in the city of Várzea Grande. However, in September 1942 *Revista Adventista* (Adventist Review) reported that there was a group of forty-five to sixty regular attendees at Saturday and Thursday services in the city.²² In February 1943, the Oscar dos Reis reported that there were fifty-six people enrolled in the Sabbath School, and nine people had been baptized.²³

The Church in this region was very concerned about education. The mission provided a teacher for Várzea Grande who taught the primary admission course.²⁴ It was the beginning of the city's Adventist school, which became the Várzea Grande Adventist Academy, as it is known today. The classes at the new school started on March 15, 1943, under the direction of Rubens Ségre Ferreira, offering the four primary school grades and the admission course to enter secondary school. In August 1943, the school had forty-five students enrolled in both courses.²⁵

With the founding of the Várzea Grande Adventist Academy, considered the first Adventist school in the territory, Adventist work in Mato Grosso started to grow. In 1945, the state had 260 members;²⁶ in 1950, the number of members had reached 299.²⁷ Facing a population of about 520,000 inhabitants, the number of Adventists in the state achieved 529 in 1955.²⁸ Evangelistic work also advanced in the city of Cuiabá, which registered fifty-nine baptisms in March 1958 after a large series of evangelistic meetings started in April 1957.²⁹ Due to these efforts, by 1960 the Adventist Church in the territory had 1,272 members.³⁰

In the 1960s, the Adventist message reached more distant municipalities in Cuiabá and Campo Grande, such as Barra do Bugres. In 1966, the Adventist families of Antônio Ambrósio Filho and Luciano Pereira da Silva moved from the city of Pereira Barreto, in the state of São Paulo, to Barra do Bugres, Mato Grosso, settling on the Córrego Vermelhinho ranch. The following year, other Adventist families arrived and strengthened the small company of Adventists in the city who received assistance from Pastor Enéas Simon.³¹

Between 1969 and 1975, the group in Barra do Bugres met in the garage of Tiburtino Pereira's house, and little by little the number of members grew resulting in baptisms. The space became too small and, in 1975, the Barra do Bugres City Hall donated land in the urban area for the construction of a church. However, the land was sold and with the money the group acquired an even larger property in another location. In the same year, the company of Adventists was officially organized into a church during a special service attended by Elias Lombardi, president of the Mato Grosso Mission.³²

In the city of Tangará da Serra, the Adventist message arrived through a man named José Joaquim Nascimento in November 1969. At the time, a Sabbath School class was active in his house whose first members were migrants from the cities of Paranavaí and Tamboara in the state of Parana. In 1977, this class had 253 members.³³ A year earlier, the city had hosted an education and stewardship congress, where the need to build a Christian school was addressed. Tangara da Serra Adventist Academy, however, was not inaugurated until February 19, 2019, enrolling only kindergarten and first grade students.³⁴

In the late 1970s, an important political event contributed to the expansion of the Adventist Church in the territory. In 1977, the president of Brazil, Ernesto Geisel, signed Complementary Law No. 31 of October 11, 1977, which divided the large state into Mato Grosso, with the capital in Cuiabá, and Mato Grosso do Sul, with the capital in Campo Grande.³⁵ At the time, the headquarters of the Mato Grosso Mission were still in Campo Grande, which made it difficult to manage the vast territory that covered the both states.³⁶ Consequently, in 1979 the mission's administration requested that the South Brazil Union Conference (now the Central Brazil Union Conference) divide the Mato Grosso Mission.³⁷

The official division of the field took place at the sixteenth biennial assembly of the Mato Grosso Mission, between November 2 and 4, 1979, in Cuiabá. The new Mato Grosso Mission's territory included the entire state of Mato Grosso with headquarters in Cuiabá, while the South Mato Grosso Mission (now the South Mato Grosso Conference) retained the territory of Mato Grosso do Sul with headquarters in Campo Grande. For president of the new mission, the USB directive committee chose Antenor Cruz da Costa. Jairo de Oliveira was the secretary-treasurer.³⁸ In January 1980, the field had seven pastoral districts (Barra do Garças, Cáceres, Cuiabá Central, Cuiabá Porto, Rondonópolis, Sinop, and Várzea Grande)³⁹ with fourteen churches and 5,139 members.⁴⁰

In the years that followed, the field continued to grow. The first church of the new Mato Grosso Mission, Pedra Preta, was dedicated in the municipality of Rondonópolis in 1980.⁴¹ In July 1982 at the second triennial assembly of the mission, it was reported that between 1980 and 1981, 1,377 new members were baptized bringing the total membership to 6,352 Adventists in the state of Mato Grosso at the end of 1981.⁴² At the end of the following year, the Mato Grosso Mission had a total of 6,414 members, divided into twenty churches in the districts of Sinop, Porto, Central de Cuiabá, Várzea Grande, Rondonópolis, Barra do Garças, Mirassol D'Oeste, Barra do Bugres, and Cáceres.⁴³

In November 1983, the new headquarters of the Mato Grosso Mission was inaugurated in Cuiabá, at Rua São Sebastião 3682, in the Santa Helena neighborhood.⁴⁴ The new office had modern facilities, such as a store for the Adventist Book Center (Sels) and apartments for workers. The inauguration of the new structure was a reflection of the constant growth of the church, which in 1983 had twenty-one organized churches and 7,114 members.⁴⁵

The mission expansion also included the educational work. In April 1985, the eight schools in the territory of the Mato Grosso Mission had around 1,300 students enrolled,⁴⁶ while the mission had a total of twenty-seven churches with 8,936 members.⁴⁷ In 1987, the number of pastoral districts increased from fifteen to nineteen in cities such as Nova Xavantina, Alta Floresta, and Peixoto de Azevedo.⁴⁸ In the same year, the Mato Grosso Mission acquired land in Cuiabá where the *Clínica Adventista de Saúde* (Health Adventist Clinic) would operate.⁴⁹ Construction of the health unit began on February 21, 1988,⁵⁰ with inauguration scheduled for 1993.⁵¹

The 1990s represented new opportunities for growth for the Adventist Church in Mato Grosso. The Mato Grosso field started this period with forty churches and 12,453 members,⁵² and Adventist work expanded to other cities in the west. In Tangará da Serra, for example, although a group had been meeting since 1977, the construction of the city's church finally started in August 1991 with the laying of its foundation stone. That same month in the city of Barra do Bugres, the Adventist Welfare Center (CASA) became active offering courses in knitting, crocheting, painting, sewing, and other domestic activities. Three people had already been baptized through CASA's work.⁵³

In November 1994, data presented at the third triennial assembly of the field showed that the state of Mato Grosso had 16,000 Adventists distributed in a total of 200 congregations. Proportionately, there was one Adventist per 130 inhabitants.⁵⁴ A year later, the mission laid the foundation stone for the Mato Grosso Adventist Academy (Iamat), a boarding school located on the MT-140 highway in the city of Campo Verde. The property chosen for the construction of the school had "excellent weather, abundant springs, paved roads, being able to receive students from other regions of the country." The mission chose the teacher Osvaldo Leão to lead this new boarding school.⁵⁵

It was also in the 1990s that the first means of communication emerged under IASD's direction in Mato Grosso. In 1996, with the production and presentation of Wilson Pereira, the radio program *Comunicando Jesus* (Communicating Jesus) was broadcast in the cities of Cuiabá and Várzea Grande. The social, cultural, and spiritual character of the program was well-received by the population. In August 1996, it was the audience leader among the religious programs broadcast in Cuiabá. Besides radio broadcasts, the program had a team that visited listeners in their homes.⁵⁶

All of the evangelistic initiatives in the 1990s contributed to a number of baptisms that exceeded 2,000 people. Thus, the state of Mato Grosso began the year 2000 with 105 organized churches and 23,481 Adventists, compared to a total population of 2,191,081 people.⁵⁷ By the end of 2003, the number of Adventists rose to 26,816.⁵⁸ Growth in the entire region led the South American Division to create the West Central Brazil Union Mission in May 2004, which covers the states of Goiás, Tocantins, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, and Federal District. The new union started operating in January 2005.⁵⁹

In the 2000s, the local press highlighted an important work done by Adventist education in the state. In 2004, at Sinop

Adventist Academy, a program was implemented to include students who were deaf. The program included the *Coral de Libras* (Libras Choir) and the teaching of the Brazilian Sign Language to non-deaf students. TV *Centro América* (Central America TV) presented the project on one of its newscasts, including interviewing one of the deaf students at the school.⁶⁰ While projects in the social area were highlighted, the evangelistic front advanced with the expansion of Adventist work to municipalities that, until then, had no presence of the Adventist Church. As of December 2007, the state had 117 churches organized with 23,484 members⁶¹ in 122 churches. By December 2008, there were 24,184.⁶²

As Adventist membership grew in the state of Mato Grosso, representatives of all Adventists in the region met in Cuiabá between November 23 and 25, 2008, for the seventh quadrennial assembly of the Mato Grosso Mission, where the field became the Mato Grosso Conference (AMT).⁶³ In 2009, its first official year as a conference, the AMT ended December with 133 organized churches and 24,992 members.⁶⁴ In the following years, the Adventist Church in Mato Grosso experienced considerable growth. As of December 2013, there were 164 churches with 27,501 members⁶⁵ in 176 churches. By the end of 2015, there were 28,877 members,⁶⁶ and by the end of 2016 there were 187 churches with 29,956 members.⁶⁷

Mission Organizational History

With the growth of Adventist work in the state of Mato Grosso, in 2019 the South American Division approved the reorganization of the Mato Grosso Conference in two new fields: the West Mato Grosso Mission and the Eastern Mato Grosso Conference.⁶⁸ The SAD vote was registered by the directive committee of the West Central Brazil Union Mission on June 9, 2019.⁶⁹

The justification presented for the division of the Mato Grosso field included the extensive size of the territory, the large number of members, and the low demographic density. In addition, the growth of the church's evangelistic, educational, and missionary sectors require the constant presence of the leadership. The territory's size and rapid growth did not allow. Thus, with the creation of the new administrative unit, the Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that the gospel can be preached more efficiently in the state of Mato Grosso.⁷⁰ The SAD vote also predicted that by its second ordinary assembly, MisOM will change its status to conference, becoming the West Mato Grosso Conference (AOM).⁷¹

The field began its activities with 18,853 Adventists organized into 226 congregations and thirty pastoral districts. To lead the new mission, which is also part of the West Central Brazil Union Mission (UCoB), Evaldo Oliveira was appointed president.⁷² Abdoval Cavalcanti, executive secretary,⁷³ and Paulo Fabrício Dias Júnior, treasurer. In December 2019, MisOM held its first ordinary general assembly during which department leaders were elected: Edimar Sena Oliveira Júnior (education and religious liberty); Krysthyann Zeferino (youth ministry, Pathfinders, Adventurers, music, and Adventist university ministries); Marcos Roberto Pereira Nunes (ministerial association, small groups, and home and family); Reversion Silva Almeida (Sabbath School, evangelism, and personal ministry); Tiago Lima (Spirit of Prophecy and the ministries of publication and health); and Yasna Liz Cardenas Seguel Oliveira (women's, children's, and adolescents' ministries).⁷⁴

The West Mato Grosso Mission field presents some challenges for the proper fulfillment of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Besides the great distance between the municipalities and the low population density, there is a need for sustainable growth, especially in the area of stewardship, Christian fidelity, and discipleship. Despite these challenges, MisOM's leadership has bold plans for the coming years. The first of them is the planting of thirty-one new congregations across the field in the year 2020. The mission aims to achieve 10% growth in tithes and offerings; the inauguration of an Adventist Academy in Jardim América neighborhood, in the city of Várzea Grande; the training of twelve new canvassers in 2020; the consolidation and expansion of the Tangara da Serra Adventist Academy; and the construction of new headquarters.⁷⁵

The mission of the West Mato Grosso Mission empowers lay members, workers, and pastors to evangelize, preaching the gospel in unity of spirit and dependence on God. Based on these pillars, the leaders and members of this mission will go forward with tireless efforts in the pursuit of fulfilling the missionary purposes for which the institution was founded and confident that, by the grace of God, many people will be led to Christ.⁷⁶

List of Administrative Officers

Presidents: Evaldo Oliveira (2019-)

Secretaries: Francisco Abdoval da Silva Cavalcanti (2019-)

Treasurers: Paulo Fabrício Dias Júnior (2019-)

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