

South American Division

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The South American Division (SAD) is one of the 13 administrative divisions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that comprise and at the same time represent this denomination in the world.

The South American Division covers eight South American countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. According to the Secretariat of the continental headquarters, 2,466,497 members congregate in 13,736 churches and 14,117 groups. There is one Seventh-day Adventist per 266 people living in this region. The ecclesiastical organization chart in the region includes: 16 Unions, 52 Conferences, and 32 Missions; 21,470 teachers who work at 17 universities and higher education institutions, and 965 elementary and high schools; two publishing houses and two food industries; 193 radio and television broadcasters; as well as seven hospitals and nine clinics. There are 2,508 workers and 4,826 pastors working at these institutions.¹

Organizational History

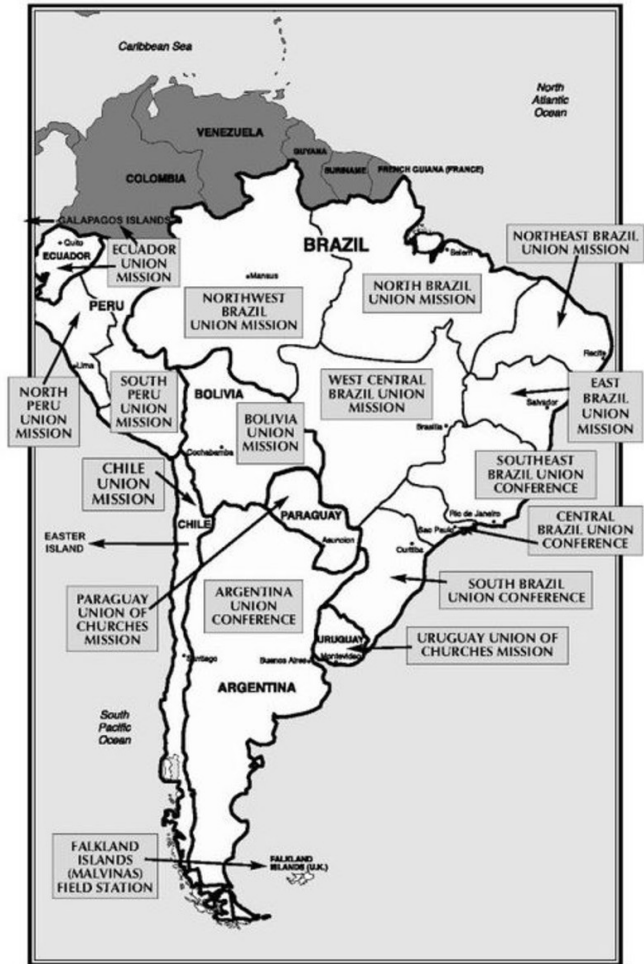
From 1916 to 1975, the South American Division was led by nine North Americans of British and Scandinavian descent, and for the last three administrations, it has continued under the presidency of descendants of German immigrants.

These pastors were born in Brazil like Enoch de Oliveira (1975-1980), the first pastor born in the continent to assume the direction of the Church after almost six decades under the tutelage by people from outside the continent. His expressions and catchphrases such as “Ouço os passos de um Deus que se aproxima” [“I hear the footsteps of a God who is coming”] highlighted the quality of unforgettable sermons, during which he was given the epithet, “Príncipe dos oradores adventistas” [“Prince of Adventist speakers”] to describe him. As he said, “the fervor of Africans, the zeal of Adventists from the Inter-American (Division), and the dedication of Korean Adventists” demanded his attention. In South America, he was impressed by the uniform identity of Adventists even in the face of varied cultures.²

The profile of the eight South American countries – Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay – that comprise this Church administrative unit is configured by four peculiarities: balanced conservatism, training and exportation of leaders, missionary vision and engagement, integration, and unity of action and purpose. Although many people bear in mind the concept that the South American Adventist Church is conservative, it is actually much more than that. It is a region where the denomination seeks to be guided by the balance on its position in the face of more complex decisions and through the way it perceives and interprets the facts and their repercussion and effects on society.

Regional leaders have shaped a style that caters to everyone--not just adults but also young and elders. Despite risking in new formats, technologies, and methodologies, their biblical vision remains well grounded considering the effective communication with members and society.

The influence of globalization of methods and processes, the ease of travel to other continents, the speed of information and the learning of new languages not only boosted local society, but also the South American Church. As a result, many members and workers sought self-improvement and new knowledge in other countries which expanded their worldviews, preparing a generation of leaders willing to face local and cross-border challenges.



Map of South American Division.
Photo courtesy of 2020 Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook.

The search for South American leaders by other Divisions is no longer a novelty as they have balanced attitudes, dynamism, and commitment to immediate and permanent goals. Equipped with modern institutions and, to a certain extent, renowned in the regions in which they are located, the Church has a very clear focus on its missionary vision. Such variants in the different panoramas draw the attention of external leaders who are willing to follow and know what is being built in South America. This whole set of ideas and initiatives contributes to the mission and positively impacts the world Church.

Throughout the centenary of South American Division, the churches in each country shaped institutions that positively positioned themselves in visible scenarios before society. In the second decade of the 20th century, the continent's headquarters was located in Buenos Aires, whose nation was considered a model of education and the world's breadbasket. In each city in the Argentine countryside, there was at least one library. In 1938, a food industry of the Adventist Church, Granix, emerged from a small food factory that was organized in 1936 at the former River Plate Junior College, presently River Plate Adventist University (Universidad Adventista del Plata or UAP). It is the most important institution of its kind in the Argentine territory. In 2014, the Argentine Ministry of Health declared UAP as the "first healthy university in the Argentine Republic." From then on, the Church assumed the role of protagonist in the healthcare arena, including sending medical missionaries and nurses to different continents.

Just over a century after the establishment of the South American headquarters, another nation emerged on the Latin American economic scenario. Chile became a benchmark for other countries in the region. By investing in education, the Church also knew how to take advantage of the country's booming growth. Similarly to what happened in Argentina, Chile Adventist University (Universidad Adventista de Chile or UnACh) gained space by reaching the second national place in teaching quality among universities with teacher training courses, an award whose recognition was nominated by *El Mercurio*, the most important Chilean newspaper.

In Brazil, especially in the 1960s and 1980s, the highlights of evangelism were the medical missionary launches that crossed the most isolated and poorest corners of the country, such as the riverside regions in the Legal Amazon, Northeast, Midwest, and portions of the coastlines of the states of Paraná in the South and São Paulo in the Southeast. In addition, these health services received support from Grupo Hospitalar Adventista do Brasil [Brazil Adventist Hospital Group], clinics, as well as outpatient and dental mobile units. This effort enabled the project to request authorization to open their Nursing course in 1969 in the city of São Paulo. Today, courses in the biological and health areas are concentrated in three states: Bahia, Paraná, and São Paulo regions that received strong influence from the first missionary services offered by the Church.

Since the days of missionaries Ana and Fernando Stahl, the Peruvian and Bolivian churches have been recognized for their evangelism, supported by efforts in education and health. Each country has a university, but the one that stands out is the Peruvian Union University (Universidad Peruana Unión or UPeU), which has three campuses and a medical course located in the capital. In Ecuador, Paraguay, and Uruguay, progress was slower. Later, Ecuador and Paraguay also established higher educational institutions (Instituto Tecnológico Superior Adventista del Ecuador or ITSAE and Universidad Adventista del Paraguay or UNAPY) while Uruguay began to invest in elementary education.

Leaders

If there was a leader who set the stage for the organization of the South American headquarters, this leader was a North American of German descent named Pastor Joseph W. Westphal. Pastor Westphal landed at the main Argentine harbor at that time, in La Plata, on August 18, 1895. He became "the first pastor sent to South America by the Foreign Missions Committee."³ In 1901, the General Conference Congress decided to reorganize the Church. For this, Union-Conferences and Union-Missions were created following the model of the Australasian Union Conference that was established in 1894. At this same congress, SDA departments and the relations they should have with the Conferences were established, granting order and agility to missionary work.⁴

Upon assuming the South American leadership in La Plata, American Pastor Oliver Montgomery (1916-1922) established the first headquarters in a Florida neighborhood in Buenos Aires. "And it was there, in the premises of the building belonging to the Napolitano Circle, located on Diagonal 74, that South American Division was organized, in 1916,"⁵ where it operated until 1950. The headquarters would move to the Uruguayan capital of Montevideo with Pastor Reuben Richard Figuhr (1941-1950) during whose presidency evangelism prospered with the participation of Pastor Walter Schubert.

During this period, "La Voz de la Esperanza" ["The Voice of Hope"] was created in Argentina in 1942 with Spanish Pastor Braulio Pérez Marcio, and "A Voz da Profecia" ["The Voice of Prophecy"] in Brazil in 1943 with Pastor Roberto Mendes Rabello. Hospitals and clinics were also established, the first in Belém, State of Pará, Northern Brazil. Montgomery organized the administration and finances in addition to meeting local needs by preparing future native leadership through the establishment of educational institutions in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru. Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, the largest cities in the Division's territory at the time, was the site of the first evangelistic series.

The South American headquarters conquered financial stability very quickly during the administration of Carlyle Boynton Haynes (1926-1931) just over a decade after its establishment. Haynes continued investing in urban evangelism, inviting Pastor Schubert to assume the role of speaker at those meetings. By reinforcing financial and human resources self-support, the president remodeled the administration, fostering canvassing work, and supporting the initial milestone of medical work in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

The concept of self-supporting was tested to its utmost during the management of Nels P. Neilsen (1931-1941) who was appointed president two years after the New York Stock Exchange crash (1929) and the consequent depressive wave, culminating in the beginning of the World War II (1939). Neilsen foresaw the need for a food industry in Argentina and another medical clinic, this time in São Paulo, the embryo of a future hospital. Despite the economic crisis that forced him to cut jobs and wages as well as postpone projects, Neilsen did not set aside education. After selecting the most promising young people, the Church sent them to study in North American schools for four years.

Figuhr (1941-1950) observed the potential of the members and prepared them for evangelism, encouraging them by the new methods employed by Schubert with the support of the radio stations and canvassing work. At the time, the creation of "La Voz de la Esperanza" ["The Voice of Prophecy"] in Argentina in 1942 with Spanish Pastor Braulio Pérez Marcio, and "A Voz da Profecia" ["The Voice of Prophecy"] in Brazil in 1943 with Pastor Roberto Mendes Rabello was encouraged. Furthermore, hospitals and clinics were set up. The first clinic was established in Belém in the state of Pará in Northern Brazil. In addition, another project began to be developed. With the relocation of the headquarters to the Uruguayan capital and the more frequent use of the Spanish language in South American administrative meetings, the period of training new leaders and preparing natives of the continent to assume increasingly global responsibilities had begun.

Walter Murray (1950-1958) stood out for his democratic leadership in conferring tasks to other colleagues. For him, consensus was reached through dialogue. Predicting the consequences for the post-war world, Murray called the Church to spiritual revival based on evangelism with small groups and the improvement of lay evangelism. The Sabbath School became the center of support, training, and encouragement for carrying the Gospel to large cities. As a result, young people got involved, and their initial experiences prompted the organization of the First South American Congress of Adventist Youth in 1956 in the Brazilian city of Petrópolis in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

The experience lived by President James J. Aitken in the reconstruction of post-war Europe gave him, from 1958 to 1966, the opportunity to put into practice many ideas germinated in the "Old World." Aitken was the first to bring the project of missionary planes to the Amazon, the largest biome on the planet, with 5.5 million square kilometers whose forest extends to Guyana, Venezuela, Colombia, and countries served by the South American Division: Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and, mainly, Brazil, where it occupies 49.29% of the territory. The knowledge acquired in the face of humanitarian tragedies provided Aitken with sufficient support to deal with the catastrophic results of the earthquake followed by the tsunami that shook Chile in 1960 and the devastating floods in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru. By providing immediate aid to the victims, the Church's assistance work became obvious, opening doors for the spread of the Gospel.

As a result of terror threats emerging in the Uruguayan territory, Pastor Roger Anderson Wilcox (1966-1975) changed the headquarters relocation. Thus, from 1976 the work continued in Brasília, the capital of Brazil, the largest country on the continent that fills more than half of the region's territory. Until that period, the minutes of the commissions and administrative meetings were written in English. Wilcox determined that the minutes should also be prepared in Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese. A trainer of new talents, Wilcox proved to be an authentic headhunter. During his administration, the world headquarters chose the first South American to compose the body of vice presidents of the General Conference--Brazilian Pastor Moisés Nigri.

In all, thirteen presidents have managed, led, and driven the growth of South American Division to the present: nine North Americans and four Brazilians. Loved and respected by everyone, Enoch de Oliveira led the Church from 1975 to 1980. He started his ministry in Curitiba, his hometown, as an accountant at the former Paraná-Santa Catarina Conference-Mission. Step by step, he held the main positions of each Church body until he presided over South American Division and arrived at the world headquarters as vice president. When he was still in Brasília, Pastor Enoch encouraged members of the continent to experience personal evangelism. He also continued to strengthen the Adventist hospital network and established the Latin American Adventist Theological Seminary.

João Wolff (1980-1995) stood out for promoting the emergence of universities in Spanish-speaking countries in addition to evangelism and media by contacting Adventist professionals who worked in journalistic media and advertising agencies. Among these, Elon da Silva Garcia stands out, a journalist, publicist and public relations professional who congregated at Curitiba Central Church and became the first lay member to be part of the administrative committee of the South American headquarters. Garcia was of vital importance to the formation of projects that would be shaped over the following years under the responsibility of other pastors and hired professionals. This later resulted in the structuring of Sistema Adventista de Comunicação [Adventist Media Center - Brazil], the precursor of Rede Novo Tempo de Comunicação (in English, it continued to be called the Adventist Media Center - Brazil). The management of Ruy H. Nagel (1995-2006) was important for this achievement as he consolidated the quality and expansion of higher education and the media, mainly radio and television, which showed his concern with the fulfillment of the church's mission.

At the forefront of the South American leadership since October 2006 when he replaced Pastor Nagel, Pastor Erton Carlos Köhler had the same missionary concern as his predecessor and stated the motto "united, we are stronger, we go further and we go faster,"⁶ as an expression of the integration and unity experienced by the South American Division. Improvements took place in the administrative headquarters, congregations, colleges, universities, schools, food factories, book and magazine publishing houses, radio and television broadcasters, online media, legal offices, insurance companies, clinics and hospitals exchange experiences, work and collaboration with each other, enhancing the evangelistic management led by the headquarters, in Brasília.

At the same time that the South American Church developed traditional initiatives, it presented more daring projects,

venturing into innovative actions guided by the responsibility that the missionary enterprise requires. This can be seen in the launching of missionary books that have been delivered personally, in each house, company, and public institution, replacing the outdated newspaper serials. From 2006 to 2020, the South American Church organized 17 versions of the project, distributing around 200 million books and more than 37 million missionary magazines. The Brazilian Publishing House and the South American Spanish Publishing House produced these and other evangelistic support materials that were delivered by Church members during successive missionary campaigns. This impact of this can also be seen in the schedule of Adventist Media Center - Brazil in content broadcast on its radio and television stations. Another unprecedented initiative emerged with the Adventist Technology Institute (Instituto Adventista de Tecnologia or IATEC), a technology center that aims to provide advice, offer technical support, infrastructure, development and maintenance of systems exclusively for all sectors of the Adventist Church both in the South American region and to other Church administrative headquarters around the globe.

In order to integrate the multicultural reality of the Church in the territory and to enhance ministerial and evangelistic activities in this context, the South American Division coordinates the pastoral exchange project among the regional headquarters (Unions). The purpose of this initiative is to influence and prepare new leaders, open opportunities, and encourage congregations for the mission while integrating, enabling, and guiding the members to grow in unity among diversity. This integration and expansion involves increasing the print run and circulation of the products of Brazilian and Argentine publishers as well as modernizing digital media platforms and the methods of approach and techniques for Bible studies and baptisms in addition to building temples, schools, and higher institutions despite the economic problems faced by all countries in the region over the decades.

Education, Publication and Communication

In the SAD history, the role played by the education, publishing and communication fronts in directing evangelistic purposes or in providing personnel support, ideas, strategies, logistics and resources stands out regarding its success. Early on, Seventh-day Adventists began their search for an integral and quality education with the purpose of providing their children with academic training in accordance with Christian principles. On June 3, 1872, Adventist Education began with the inauguration of Battle Creek School in the state of Michigan, built to serve children in elementary school.⁷

In South America, the process took place simultaneously with the first missionary projects in this region. "As in most of the lands where missionaries worked, South American members used schools as a means of reaching the public." After the Craig couple settled in Buenos Aires in 1893, they founded in their own home a school that, after some time, started to operate in the residence of Pastor Frank Westphal, also a missionary.⁸

In the relentless dynamism of the mission carried out by Adventist pioneers on the continent, in 1896, the Westphal family had to close the school in Buenos Aires to continue the mission elsewhere. But instead of killing the dream, this was just the beginning. The seed of Adventist education had already been planted in the hearts of those workers, and they were not willing to take a step back.

With this focus, the Adventist school in Curitiba in the state of Paraná was established in the same year (1896), and it offered an elementary school education. Guilherme Stein and his wife Maria were responsible for offering classes. "Classes at the end of the 19th century, as determined by public bodies, were taught from Monday to Saturday, that is, they taught six times a week. Consequently, it would not be compatible with the Adventist model."⁹ To solve this problem, the Steins devoted Saturday entirely to religion classes, and students invited their parents to participate with them. Saturday's schedule was actually a worship service. After fourteen months working at the school in Curitiba, the Steins left for a new mission in Gaspar Alto in the city of Brusque in Santa Catarina, where they inaugurated a new school.¹⁰

Since its genesis, the South American Church adopted the Protestant school administrative model in which parish schools with multi-grade classes were organized and established, many of them with German as a second language. There were mainly in southern Brazil in the Argentine region of Entre Rios and in southern Chile. The pioneers wanted to teach their children the biblical values they believed were essential to forming Adventist Christians to be God's servants and good citizens.

The final years of the 1920s, until the 1940s, were marked by movements aimed at the organization of education. "In that period, there was no organized system of public education in Brazil, thus giving rise to independent movements, mostly formed by religious orders that administered private confessional education." In this context, Adventist education focused on two fronts: the first was concerned with the training of leaders for the denomination; and the second with the establishment of parish schools affiliated with the churches in addition to communities of new Adventist converts.¹¹

After World War II, primary education expanded throughout South America. According to the 1950 reports, "the SAD had 431 elementary schools with 17,217 students. Thirty years later, the numbers changed to 581 schools and 72,281 students." In Brazil, the jump was even greater compared to the other countries in the Division. "The number of Brazilian primary schools rose from 165, in 1950, to 372, in 1980." The number of students also grew significantly, increasing the average from 35 to 146 students per school.¹²

The adopted system proved to be ideal. Since its beginning, Adventist education has followed the initial steps taken by its pioneers with four grades. In schools with fewer resources, only one room was sufficient for the operation of the four grades. In the 1950s and 60s, there was more than one school per congregation in Brazil-- that is, there were

more schools than churches. Considering the parish schools in the United States that aimed to keep children in the Church's protective circle, the evangelistic potential of education in Brazil was also realized. Children absorbed the content of Religious Education classes and shared it at home with their parents or guardians. This strategy often aroused the family's interest in the biblical message, resulting in baptisms. The Gospel was preached through the school.¹³

With Brazilian educational reform implemented in 1971, schools should not have four grades anymore, but eight. At the time, despite the presence of Adventist boarding schools in several Brazilian states that also offered high school, only three day schools offered the eight grades of elementary school: Dr. Carlos de Carvalho Adventist Academy, which operated in the basement of Curitiba Central Church; Pará Day Academy, in Belém; and Caxias Day Academy in Duque de Caxias, Rio de Janeiro. Thereafter, the South American Church outlined a strategy to invest in elementary education, multiplying the amount of schools with eight grades and requesting authorization to open the Pedagogy course at Brazil College (Instituto Adventista de Educação or IAE), now called Brazil Adventist University (Universitário Adventista de São Paulo or UNASP), São Paulo campus, in 1973. The SDA Church was a pioneer in organizing elementary education given that it did not happen in relation to other Protestant denominations, whose goal was turned to higher education and the establishment of universities.

As the time went by, there were also significant changes in educational legislation in other South American countries and, as a result, parish schools became structurally archaic and obsolete, and their teachers would no longer be paid by the government for working with small classes. Then, the impossibility of these school models was discovered due to their high cost. The Church also detected the problem, and then education was adapted in Argentina and Chile just as other educational institutions had already done. In the Adventist context, education prospered in both countries, converting them into educational powers. The range of courses met the need to offer multiple career possibilities for Adventist youth.¹⁴

Thus, elementary school started to strengthen, and high school was consolidated in order to encourage students to enter Adventist higher institutions. One goal stood out: to prepare new leaders in the most diverse areas of knowledge whether to serve the Adventist organization and improve the quality of its thousands of congregations and millions of members or to serve society and evangelize non-Adventists through hundreds of educational institutions.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church world headquarters recommended that each continental office (Division) support the authorization to open a medical course of study. The South American Division has the privilege of offering two courses just as the North American Division does. This was due to the demand, the quality of education in the region, and even the will of public authorities who recognized the Adventist potential in the health and education fields. Thus, medicine is present at UAP and UPeU through teaching hospitals, even serving the less privileged classes and preparing doctors to be missionary agents.

However, what started small in the homes of volunteers or attached to Adventist churches has since grown to become today's huge educational network. For this reason, looking at the past and the different aspects of Adventist education helps to understand that it is not a simple educational network. Currently, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South America has more than 965 educational institutions with approximately 230 thousand students distributed in elementary, high school, and higher education with about 140,000 students in Brazil and 90,000 in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. About 15,000 teachers, a battalion, are responsible for the training of these individuals who are often attracted by the banner of integral education that focuses on the person as a whole – physical, mental, and spiritual.¹⁵

Another pillar associated with education is its publications. This is an outstanding part of the SAD history--the fact that the Adventist message reached Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay through publications distributed by canvasser Albert Stauffer in 1892 and 1893 in the German and Swiss immigrant colonies. Recognizing the importance of this area, South American Adventist publishers have played an important role amid the broad spectrum of missionary actions carried out in the SAD territory by leading and supporting relevant initiatives. One of them is the canvassing work, a project linked to publishing houses that provide the conditions for students to work, especially during vacation periods, within the community, selling literature in the form of books and magazines. This integration, shared and supervised by specialist pastors in the area, provides students with the funds necessary to continue their studies.

Alongside with the education and publications, communication is a rapidly expanding area in the SAD. This is a result of the visionary perspective of managers and evangelists regarding the missionary opportunities of their time. Prone to new ideas, Pastor Wolff easily captured this information and forwarded it to those who understood the subject in order to transform it into a useful tool for Church evangelism. From the results of surveys carried out with public opinion, it was understood that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was not as well known as first believed. From the 1980s, South American Division began to think of communication as a way to collect information and, through the interpretation of this data, to build and shape strategies for advancing ecclesiastical work by focusing on places where there was no Adventist presence yet. The Church's Global Mission plan itself, which was consolidated from the first half of the 1990s, resulted from projects developed in South American territory such as the *Folhetão* [Big Leaflet] – two decades earlier – the first laboratory of experiences in mass evangelism.

The church in Brazil systematized and expanded communication with better quality. However, this tool first started to be used in Chile by the Swiss journalist Eduardo Thomann. Ordained to the ministry, Pastor Eduardo established a printing shop in Valparaíso in 1900 and launched the first printed products to disseminate the evangelistic mission. Then, the *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review] in Spanish was born. His brother, Victor Thomann, guided educational growth.

A volunteer missionary, Guilherme Stein Jr., the first Adventist baptized in Brazil, invested in education and communication. In 1896, Stein Jr. inaugurated the first Adventist school in the city of Curitiba in the state of Paraná in southern Brazil. In 1900 in Rio de Janeiro, he launched the periodical *Arauto da Verdade* [*Herald of Truth*], the precursor of the Brazilian *Revista Adventista* [*Adventist Review*]. Such actions, added to so many others of historical importance, set the stage for the establishment of a continental headquarters. The base was solidified with support in the educational, communicational, and publications areas.

Communication has greater weight in the Brazilian sphere where conditions have leveraged projects in which other countries begin to feel the effects. Pastor Schubert conceived a new format for evangelism. Previously, evangelistic meetings used to attack other religions took a very aggressive stance, which caused few people to be attracted to Adventism. First, Schubert addressed health issues and called attention to family problems, leaving biblical doctrines for the last lectures. Thus, the auditoriums were full, and baptisms happened naturally. When Pastor Roberto Rodrigues de Azevedo realized the positive results of Schubert's strategies, he created and disseminated a new Adventist profile.

In this context, the history of communication in the South American context can be divided into two phases: before and after Azevedo's death in 1980. The technique employed by Azevedo, in order to open space to disseminate the Church in the media, used information of public interest. He would take his camcorder and camera, and travel through the interior of the continent, recording images that could be presented to members and published by secular newspapers, magazines, and television stations. There were people who considered these actions a waste of time and resources. However, the South American headquarters leadership understood that it was creating positive results even if in some aspects this was happening very slowly.

After photographing and filming, Azevedo would write the texts or give it to another companion, Pastor Arthur Valle. Then he delivered the finished reports to the newspapers, showing poverty, the need for development, the work of the medical missionary launches, native cultures, and other stories of public interest. In São Paulo, he used to write and Pastor Kiyotaka Shirai used to take care of the technical aspects including recording the images. Opportunities arose with the authorities, and Azevedo took indigenous representatives to the governors and mayors, introducing them to customs, rituals, nutrition, and handicrafts. Then fairs were organized so that the public also had access to the culture of the natives of the continent.

Parallel to Azevedo's work that began on December 22, 1942 when he had an article published by the newspaper *Rio Grande* [Big River] – in the city with the same name in the state of Rio Grande do Sul –, a ministry was born through radio waves with the program "A Voz da Profecia" ["The Voice of Prophecy"], hosted by Pastor Roberto Rabello. The novelty of the "talking box" led thousands to baptism. In the most remote rural regions in the country or among those with scarce resources, families gathered friends and neighbors to listen to the program narrated by Rabello in the early evening that was enriched with musical performances by North American singers. Only 19 years later, in 1962, the *Arautos do Rei* [The King's Heralds] quartet emerged. The efforts of the leaders to innovate through communication received reactions and criticisms that did not leave them alone. Some claimed it was absurd to broadcast the religious program through stations that also broadcast radio soap operas. Decades later, acid criticism was also directed at the use of television broadcasters, considered to be expensive and "schools of immorality."

Despite this resistance, Azevedo and the small team of supporters were able to publish in secular newspapers news containing text and photos of baptisms, ordination of pastors, and weeks of prayer. Nonetheless, some congregations forbade him to film or even photograph the ceremonies of the pastoral agenda. The atmosphere was one of disbelief in the power and effectiveness of communication. There was resistance on the part of people who did not consider media actions to be adequate to the point of preventing advertising of boarding schools during youth (volunteer missionaries) services on Sabbath afternoons. The restriction on novelties in the communication universe took decades to be removed until the importance of properly expanding communication in each sector was realized.

When pastor and journalist Arthur de Souza Valle replaced Azevedo in the Communication Department of the South American headquarters, he invested in training pastors who worked in this sector at other national and regional offices. However, management and projects were interrupted due to a car accident that claimed Valle's life. Then, another pastor with a background in Communication (Publicity and Advertising, Public Relations and Journalism) took over the department. A Ph.D. from Andrews University, Pastor Assad Bechara⁶ carried out advertising campaigns using television spaces and billboards, with which he established about 900 points in the continent. From that moment on, communication came to be perceived as a powerful activity involving young people, families, evangelism, and the institutional image. Thus, institutional campaigns were born discussing Mothers Day, the Day of the Dead, Ingathering, a series of meetings by Pastor Alejandro Bullón, the courses offered by "A Voz da Profecia" ["The Voice of Prophecy"] and "La Voz de la Esperanza" ["The Voice of Hope"], and blood donations for hospitals and blood centers. At this point, the Division's administrative body noted the value of communication as a way in which the face of the Church became more evident.

From 1995, the SAD Communication Department, led by pastor and journalist Siloé de Almeida,¹⁷ produced reports for the secular press, planned media strategies, idealized the creation of the Adventist South American News Agency (ASN), systematized the radio station formats, and visited the press and public authorities. The ASN provided information to both the Church and the secular media itself, becoming respected as a reliable news source and serving as a model for the implementation of the Adventist News Network (ANN) at the Church's world headquarters in the United States. Contacts with editorial offices, law firms, and public administrations were aimed not only at acts of courtesy, but at the opportunity to publicize Church events in all countries in the region, to honor personalities, and to pray for these people. On one of these occasions, the Church secured public favor of the Brazilian authorities by

collaborating in the drafting of a bill determining that the election day should take place only on Sundays. Within the scope of these initiatives, there was also incentive and cooperation for the opening of courses in the communication area at UAP, UNASP and UPeU. The results transformed the Church in the first two decades of the 21st century, inserting it in the digital world and in the radio and television waves with a renewed graphic planning of the printed material, shortening distances through the Internet, and projecting the new challenging scenario for the South American Church.

The South American Adventism that originated and expanded through education, publications, and communication initiatives, is currently marked by an extensive and complex set of missionary actions. In a recent balance sheet, the SAD leadership reported the benefits perceived as a Divine concession to the Church in this region of the world. In 2019, “more than eight hundred new temples [were established], a number that has been repeated in recent years and represents one third of all new Adventist churches planted worldwide.” Until November, there was an increase of 9.48 percent in the amount of baptisms in relation to 2018--that is, 226,674 people were reached. In the spring (September), there was the biggest baptism in the Adventist history at the SAD when 47,705 people committed their lives to Jesus. As stated, “they are not just numbers, they are people who have been reached, taught, transformed and baptized. They also represent a multitude of members involved in the mission.” In this context, real net growth increased from 1.06 percent to 3.16 percent (closed until the third quarter) “which indicates a strong decrease in the loss of members compared to 2018. This is very positive information, although we still have great challenges in this area.”¹⁸

This result stems from Divine assistance and much missionary effort. The Holy Week evangelism held in 2019 involved 94,309 preaching points and reached 472,160 visitors who attended the meetings, resulting in 49,418 baptized people. This represented a 56 percent growth compared to 2018. During the year through the Impacto Esperança [Hope Impact] project, more than 22 million missionary books were distributed which, added to those already delivered in the last decade. These works are like “seeds” spread across the continent, and many of them have already resulted in conversions and will continue to lead even more people to the knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus. Still in the evangelistic sphere, in 2019, around 1,100 young volunteers mobilized and participated in the Um Ano em Missão [One Year in Mission] project. Almost 200,000 were involved in the Missão Calebe [Caleb Mission] project “with young people dedicating their vacation to do evangelism, develop mission projects, plant new temples and serve the community.”¹⁹

In the SAD territory, three countries already have a Pathfinders Club in operation for each organized church: Brazil, Ecuador, and Paraguay. There are 333,650 Pathfinders in 12,173 clubs and 168,468 adventurers in 7,662 clubs spread across the territory. In support of all missionary fronts, TV Novo Tempo [Hope Channel Brazil] inaugurated the Escola Bíblica Digital [Digital Bible School], an innovative tool that created possibilities for those interested in studying the Bible dynamically and at the speed of the internet. “The numbers are impressive, with 8,500 Bible study lessons sent per day and a total of thirteen thousand complete courses per month.” It is also understood that financial resources have multiplied thanks to the Divine presence in decisions and actions since “tithes in Brazil, the country with the largest financial participation in South American Division, grew 1.5%, despite the economic challenges faced during the year.”²⁰

Over the past 15 years, Pastor Köhler's administration has shaped the profile of the South American Church, emphasizing primarily the need for evangelism to adjust to different possibilities, value young people, and encourage spontaneous service and missionary and social commitment. In face of these aspects, evangelism changed and became integrated, with emphasis on “communion, relationship and mission,” as there is no way to reach people without maintaining a connection with Jesus Christ in order to approach the Other and fulfill the commission registered in Matthew 28. Concerned with the evolution of new communication technologies and the consequences of this impact especially through social networks, the Church also pays attention to the new generations, mainly the Y or millennial generation. This set of actions was complemented with the encouragement of volunteering in the countries of the South American territory and in other places on the planet. The fact is that a South American Adventist can be found in many Divisions providing voluntary services and witnessing to the Gospel.

The blessings received are the result of Divine miracles amid the challenges faced. South America is a melting pot of peoples, languages, conflicts, joys, natural beauties, and people who fight for life in search of a promising and better future and who need Jesus Christ. Over the course of more than a century, South American Division noticed the differences, showed sensitivity to needs, and sought to take advantage of the possibilities, managing to plan the path where Seventh-day Adventists should tread. For them, “hope” cannot be just a simple term. Its meaning cannot be belittled or distorted. It includes perseverance in loyalty to biblical principles and belief in the real meaning of the mission entrusted to all members. In this sense, South America remains the continent of hope, a place where the people of advent, grateful to God for having been reached by the Eternal Gospel, march resolutely in order to witness this “hope” to the ends of the earth.

Chronology of Administrative Leaders²¹

Presidents: Oliver Montgomery (1916-1922); Charles Thompson (1922-1923); Peter E. Brodersen (1924-1926); Carlyle Boynton Haynes (1926-1931); Nels P. Neilsen (1931-1941); Reuben Richard Figuhr (1941-1950); Walter E. Murray (1950-1958); James J. Aitken (1958-1966); Roger Anderson Wilcox (1966-1975); Enoch de Oliveira (1975-1980); João Wolff (1980-1995); Ruy H. Nagel (1995-2006); Erton Carlos Köhler (2006-Present).

Secretaries: W. H. Williams (1916-1928); C. L. Bauer (1928-1934); Roger Altman (1935-1938); H. O. Olson (1938-

1946); O. A. Blake (1946-1950); L. H. Olson (1952-1962); Moisés Nigri (1962-1970); Enoch de Oliveira (1970-1975); Elbio Pereyra (1976-1978); Daniel Nestares (1978-1985); Mario Veloso Osses (1985-1990); Edwin Mayer (1990-1995); Roberto Gullón Canedo (1995-2000); Raúl Gómez Méjico (2000-2006); Melchior Ferreyra Castillo (2006-2007); Bolívar Alaña Poseck (2007-2009); Magdiel Pérez Schulz (2010-2015); Edward Heidinger Zevallos (2015-Present).

Treasurers: W. H. Williams (1916-1928); C. L. Bauer (1928-1934); Roger Altman (1935-1938); F. L. Harrison (1938-1946); O. A. Blake (1946-1955); K. H. Emmerson (1955-1959); F. E. Osborn (1959-1962); J. I. Hartman (1962-1969); L. D. Wood (1970-1974); Clarence M. Laue (1975-1977); Roy E. Brooks (1978-1980); R. H. Nagel (1980-1995); Alipio B. da Rosa (1995-2000); Marino F. de Oliveira (2000-2010); Marlon de Souza Lopes (2010-Present)²²

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NOTES

1. Data provided by the SAD Secretariat to the author, July 9, 2018.?
2. Enoch de Oliveira (former GC vice-president), interview granted to the author, published in "O Novo Comunicador" ["The New Communicator"] in July 1991.?
3. Roberto Gullón Canedo, *Uma semente de esperança: história da estrutura denominacional* [A seed of hope: history of denominational structure], Tatuí, SP: Brazil Publishing House, 2015, 133.?
4. Matusalém Ferreira Santana, "Divisão Sul-Americana" ["South American Division"], Monograph, Brazil College, 1986, 15.?
5. Roberto Gullón Canedo, *Uma semente de esperança: história da estrutura denominacional* [A seed of hope: history of denominational structure], Tatuí, SP: Brazil Publishing House, 2015, 133.?
6. Erton Carlos Köhler (SAD president), interviewed by the author by WhatsApp, November 24, 2017.?
7. Douglas Menslin, *Educação Adventista 120 anos: das escolas paroquiais a uma rede de ensino. Permanências e rupturas de um ideário educacional* [Adventist Education 120 years: from parish schools to a teaching network. Continuities and ruptures of an educational idea] (São Paulo, SP: Brazilian Book Chamber, 2015), 24.?
8. Roberto Gullón Canedo, *Uma semente de esperança: história da estrutura denominacional* [A seed of hope: history of denominational structure], Tatuí, SP: Brazil Publishing House, 2015, 56.?
9. Menslin, *Educação Adventista 120 anos: das escolas paroquiais a uma rede de ensino. Permanências e rupturas de um ideário educacional* [Adventist Education 120 years: from parish schools to a teaching network. Continuities and ruptures of an educational idea], 60.?
10. Canedo, *Uma semente de esperança: história da estrutura denominacional* [A seed of hope: history of denominational structure], 57.?
11. Menslin, *Educação Adventista 120 anos: das escolas paroquiais a uma rede de ensino. Permanências e rupturas de um ideário educacional* [Adventist Education 120 years: from parish schools to a teaching network. Continuities and ruptures of an educational idea], 70.?
12. Canedo, *Uma semente de esperança: história da estrutura denominacional* [A seed of hope: history of denominational structure], 559.?
13. Roberto César de Azevedo (Former SAD Education Department leader), interviewed by the author, January 18, 2018.?
14. Nevil Gorski (Former SAD Education Department Leader), interviewed by the author, May 2, 2018.?

15. *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) website*, "História da Educação Adventista" ["History of Adventist Education"], accessed January 20, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3e6Dn7d>?
16. Assad Bechara (retired pastor), e-mail message to the author, May 29, 2018.?
17. Siloé de Almeida (Former SAD Communication Department leader), interviewed by the author, June 11, 2018.?
18. Erton Carlos Köhler, "A Última Página: Um balanço dos desafios e vitórias da Igreja Adventista na América do Sul no ano de 2019" ["The Last Page: an overview of the Adventist Church's challenges and victories in South America in 2019"], Notícias Adventistas [Adventist News], December 27, 2019, accessed March 2, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2VPqCaA>?
19. Ibid.?
20. Ibid.?
21. "South American Division Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1916), 150; "South American Division Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2018), 223. For a more detailed check at all South American Division administrative leaders, see the *SDA Yearbooks* from 1916 to 2018.?
22. More information about the South American Division can be found on the following website: <https://adventistas.org/>?

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

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