

Youth Initiatives in the South Pacific Division

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Youth programs in the South Pacific Division train youth to be mission-minded and to give selfless service and also teach youth valuable life and outdoor skills.

The Beginning

The first youth society in the South Pacific region, consisting of 20 members, was organized in 1892 by A. G. Daniells in Adelaide, South Australia.¹ Ellen White gave her blessing to the ministry in its early days. Given such encouragement, over the next few years, the Missionary Volunteer (MV) societies grew under the auspices of the Sabbath school department.

In 1907 young people were actively carrying forward the mission of the church when the Young People's Department was established. In New South Wales, youth were supporting a missionary teacher in Singapore; Victorian youth supported a missionary in Java; Queensland youth supported a national worker in New Guinea; and in South Australia, the youth were sponsoring a Fijian minister. To raise money to build the mission ship *Melanesia* (launched in 1917), youth everywhere sold the *Morning Watch* daily devotional.

The *Morning Watch* was to become an integral part of the future Pathfinder structure. The youth Reading Course plans for senior and junior youth were first offered in 1908, to be followed by the Junior Society Lessons (1914) and Junior Bible Year (1917).

The 1920s birthed many enduring aspects of youth ministry and activities. But foremost among them was a passion for mission—taking the gospel to the world. Mission and carrying the gospel ever outward were always at the forefront of the Church's thinking.

Youth-related developments of significance at the time included the formal introduction of youth ministry to the outdoors in order to teach independence and self-reliance, teamwork, and leadership. Camping was introduced. It was in Australia that the first Junior Camp was run, in 1925, an idea that migrated to the United States the following year. With the support of the church administration, camping became a practice of the youth departments worldwide.

Consolidation and Growth

Under the sponsorship of the Australasian Union Conference, Missionary Volunteer (MV) societies flourished, and by 1920, there were in excess of 100 in the union. The goal of the societies was to create a mission mind-set and train young people for active mission service, both at home and abroad. It included an accreditation and award system.

In the South Pacific, volunteerism delivered opportunities for independence and selfless service as the most important aspect of youth ministry. Specially resourced MV weeks were scheduled. It was from such programs that



Cover design of the World Changers Bible, Youth department, South Pacific Division.
Photo courtesy of Nick Kross.

the weekly MV reports grew. Youth were asked to report on “persons helped,” “hours of service rendered,” and “number food parcels given away,” which were actually reported in the union-wide paper, the *Australasian Record*, for the whole church to see. This concept is still real among young people. In recent years the South Pacific Division has more youth volunteers, per capita, than any other division worldwide. In addition to the high number of international volunteers, the Youth department operates STORM Co ministry originating in the South Queensland conference in 1992, and now in many of the local conferences. The number of STORM Co teams has grown, and the total number of youths involved in STORM Co is well over 1,000 per year.

During the years between the two world wars, many of the goals and activities of the youth department were established under the MV/JMV (Junior Missionary Volunteer) banner. The Bible reading plan, the JMV classes for juniors, outdoor recreation, summer camps, and the Master Guide personal development program—then known as Master Comrade—were all launched during that time.

The annual Appeal for Missions public fundraiser—Ingathering as it was then known—was one of the few door-to-door charities of the time. It was adopted by the church at large as well as the youth. It was organized on a top-down basis, with conferences assigned dollar goals by their union, which in turn were subdivided among churches and institutions. Workers at the publishing house, the nurses of the Sydney Sanitarium, and students at the Avondale College were also included in the process. It was an integral part of the Missionary Volunteer ethos and at the heart of its activities. ADRA Ingatherers, as they went forth to harvest, even had a theme song with a musical score provided to them via the *Australasian Record*.

The Second World War impacted church activities in several ways. Its greatest impact on the church was to make communication and travel extremely difficult. Visits by international church leaders were curtailed. Many of the church’s young men volunteered or were drafted for service, while the young women took a more active role in society, work, and church. In the postwar years, everything changed with fast, easy, and relatively inexpensive communication and travel. Greater wealth and material attractions resulted in a new level of sophistication. The church had to work harder to retain the youth.

In 1946, the Pathfinder movement began, with the first conference-sponsored Pathfinder Club established in California, United States of America. The movement rapidly grew worldwide. The familiar Pathfinder song, written by Henry Bergh, was introduced and was soon followed by a dedicated Pathfinder flag. It was not until 1975 that the first Inter Union Conference Camporee was held in Australia; an invitation was extended to missions to send delegates. Then the first South Pacific Division Camporee took place in 2007 in Australia.

These were flourishing years for the Church in the South Pacific, with a growing number of children, due to the postwar baby boom who filled Sabbath school and JMV and MV societies as well as the newly formed Pathfinder Clubs. The first Pathfinder Club in the division was at the Preston church in Victoria. It was established in 1953 by Pastor Kevin Silva.

The first Australian Pathfinder Congress was held in Canberra (1970), but it wasn’t until 1996 that the South Pacific Division held its first division-wide congress, in Brisbane.

More Recent Developments

The Youth Ministries department places a high value on taking young people into the outdoors so that they can experience the joy of God’s creation. Through ministries like Adventurers, Pathfinders, and several outdoor activity clubs like QWAC (Queensland Wilderness Adventurer Club), many adolescents have seen God’s handiwork revealed in nature.

Early in the 1990s, the South Pacific Division Youth director, Barry Gane, and a group of Adventist outdoor leaders were made aware of shifts in government policy that could have had a negative impact on the churches’ ability to take groups into many of the most pristine nature parks in Australia and New Zealand.

As a result of these policy changes, a committee was established to develop a training package, which would be recognized by the outdoor industry in Australia and New Zealand. This committee was named NAOATAC (National Adventist Outdoor Activity Training Accreditation Committee), which continued to meet over several years in an attempt to create a government-recognized training package that outdoor leaders could teach in-house.

This process of developing an adequate training package spanned the next decade. The end result was the upgrade of the existing Pathfinder Leadership Award (PLA) into an internationally recognized training scheme that was released in 2009. The new PLA has replaced both the original PLA and the Basic Pathfinder training package. In addition to the PLA, a second level of training, the Pathfinder Specialist Award (PSA), has also been developed and was released in 2010. This new second level of training replaces the original Advanced PLA, which was the early second level of training for outdoor leaders.

The original name NAOATAC was replaced by the name Adventist Outdoors in 2003. This committee’s role is to continue to update and maintain the outdoor training process across Australia and New Zealand to ensure that leaders who take groups into nature will do so in a safe and professional manner.

Due to the lack of access to Bibles across the 17-plus Island nations of the South Pacific, the World Changers Bible Project was initiated in 2011, with a fund-raising effort that raised over one million dollars, resulting in 225,700 World Changer Bible kits being distributed throughout every territory in the South Pacific Division. The Bible kit included a

set of 28 doctrinal bookmark study guides and a discipleship insert at the front of the Bible. This project was very successful in inspiring many Pathfinders, youth, and young adults to share their faith and bring their friends to Christ. A second print run of another 170,000 was printed and was distributed in 2019.

Note

1. This article is written from the personal knowledge of the author, who, at the time of writing, was the Youth director of the South Pacific Division. This knowledge is based on experience as a Youth director at all levels of the Church in the South Pacific Division and from access to the archives of the Youth Department held in the headquarters office of the South Pacific Division, Wahroonga, New South Wales, Australia.?

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