



Volunteers during the construction of a temple in 2018.
Photo courtesy of Adventist Volunteer Service Archives.

Adventist Volunteer Service in the South American Division

CAIKY XAVIER ALMEIDA, AND RENATO FERREIRA SILVA

Caiky Xavier Almeida

Renato Ferreira Silva

The Adventist Volunteer Service (AVS) is a program fostered by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, originated in the General Conference (GC), to mobilize people to volunteer for the mission. In South America, this program is under the administrative responsibility of the South American Division (SAD), which performs this function along with the 15 Unions operating in its missionary field. Now, the AVS administrative office is located at the SAD headquarters, on L3 South avenue, Setor de Grandes Áreas Sul (SGAS), block 611, set D, part C, Asa Sul, Zip Code 70200-710, in the city of Brasília, capital of the Federal District, Brazil.¹

The program is designed to provide temporary volunteer service opportunities for Adventists in an organized manner. Through AVS, young people, adults, students, and professionals, can voluntarily assist in needy regions around the world, supporting the Church in proclaiming the Gospel. The South American Division is responsible for creating and coordinating service projects that support this program, as well as promoting means for the training of volunteers, aiming at cultural adaptation and the fulfillment of the mission.²

Organization

The origins of the Adventist Volunteer Service date back to the 1950s and 1960s, in the United States. In 1959, the Missionary Volunteer Society³ of the Sligo Adventist Church, in the city of Takoma Park, in the state of Maryland, initiated a program to send students to various places where they served as missionaries for a year. The first volunteer was Marlin Mathiesen, who went to Mexico that same year. The following years, other young people did the same. In 1960, Dick Ruhling was sent to Colombia and Venezuela. The following year, Lester Mohr went to the Netherlands Antilles. And in 1962, Marie Moletta went to Nigeria.⁴

The initiative of the Sligo congregation soon influenced people from other parts of the world, causing the flow of young student missionaries to grow rapidly. Realizing this growth and the evangelistic spirit of young people, in 1969, the Adventist leadership held the First World Youth Congress, which took place in the city of Zurich, Switzerland, and brought together about 13 thousand people. On the occasion, popular programs for student missionaries were expanded and the Adventist Volunteer Service Corps was created.⁵

In that same year (1969), at the Autumn Council of the General Conference, it was voted to ask the ecclesiastical leadership to facilitate opportunities for evangelistic work for young people. This would allow them to work more effectively in the local denominational work, as church officials and committee members. At that same council, the participation of young people in advisory committees of both unions and conferences was also recommended. These decisions show how the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church understood that youth should be active in missionary work.⁶

The first official international allocation of volunteers took place in 1970, with about 43 people representing all the SDA divisions that existed at that time. There are also records of movements like that in the subsequent decades, within the 1970s and 1990s. In September 1996, the General Conference remodeled and restructured the existing program and redefined responsibilities, in addition to nominating an associate secretary to organize volunteer records. Ronald Watts was the first director of that department. The following year, on November 1, 1997, Pastor Vernon B. Parmenter was appointed Director of Volunteers. That same year, the program received a new name: Adventist Volunteer Service. At that time, the GC office that coordinated the project came to be known as the Adventist Volunteer Center (AVC).⁷

Initially, the program was coordinated by the Youth Ministry of the General Conference. The project consisted of the participation and contribution of any young Adventist, between the ages of 18 and 30, in the several levels of the Church. Collaborators could perform activities in the local city, in the surrounding area, in their own country, in other nations of the Division in question and even on other continents. The periods determined for this duty could be between 9 and 12 months and could reach 2 years of volunteering in the area of the person's specialty.⁸ In 1998, the AVS started to have its own sector in the structure of the General Conference, with no ties to the Youth Ministry. One of the first achievements in this new period was the creation of a website with information on the Adventist voluntary projects and the possibility of registering interested parties.⁹

In 1999, the SAD participated for the first time in the Adventist Volunteer Service. At the time, 16 volunteers were sent to 13 countries. These missionary activities were configured as it follows: three pastors, two evangelists and two deans were sent to Portugal; a chaplain and a nurse were taken to Guyana; a dean went to Cape Verde; a history teacher to Micronesia; a dean and a director of Physical Education went to Spain; an accountant went to Senegal; a secretary to Burkina Faso; and an audiovisual producer was sent to Italy.¹⁰ In 2000, there were 516 volunteers from all over the world prepared for the work, and those volunteers had already been nominated by the General Conference committee.¹¹

In 2007, the AVS was definitely organized in the South American Division, operating directly linked to the SAD executive secretariat. During this period, in order to stimulate the work developed through the Volunteer Service, the SAD attributed to the unions the responsibility of meeting the program's initiatives in their respective missionary fields. Another aspect of this new provision involved university campuses in the SAD territory, whose leaders participated in the AVS committees in order to encourage and coordinate volunteer projects among students, reporting directly to the unions.¹²

History

With its organization in the South American Division missionary field, the Adventist Volunteer Service was structured around three major objectives: (1) stimulate, advise and capacitate volunteers to participate in the worldwide program; (2) coordinate, train and assist in the implementation of structures used to receive volunteers from other divisions; and (3) streamline the organization of projects and the dissemination of the volunteer program.¹³ In this way, the AVS has served several missionary areas. Since 2009, this SAD body has sent young people to more than 70 countries, about 34.1% of whom worked directly with evangelism, another 27.3% helped in the educational area, 13% worked in social assistance, 10% worked in the communication segment, 8.6% developed activities in the health area, 4.1% helped administratively and 2.9% participated in other activities.¹⁴

Another program developed by the Church and very popular in the SAD region, is the project "One Year in Mission,"¹⁵ which, in 2018, was attended by more than 1,200 young volunteers, of whom more than 580 were also registered in the Adventist Volunteer Service. Within January and August 2018, the AVS recorded the work of 263 volunteers from

SAD in 49 countries. During the same period, about 160 young people were serving in the territory comprised by the eight countries that make up the administrative extension of the South American Division itself!¹⁶

Since the beginning of the program, the AVS leadership objective in the Division has been to arouse increasingly the interest of Adventist university students in volunteering. This would only be possible by combining the fulfillment of the curricular and extracurricular requirements of the Higher Education, with the exercise of volunteer activities!¹⁷ This became a reality from August 23, 2018, when the Brazilian Ministry of Education issued an ordinance that allows Higher Education students to count hours of volunteer service in academic curricula. Since then, that date has been celebrated annually as Volunteering Day in Brazil!¹⁸

Role and Position in the Country/Region

The AVS existence is based on the Great Commission made by Christ in Matthew 28:18-20. Obeying this determination, since its organization in 2007, the SAD Adventist Volunteer Service has sent young Adventists to serve God and preach the Gospel around the world. During the past decade, approximately 2,180 volunteers participated in this program, serving both in the SAD territorial extension and in other parts of the planet!¹⁹ About 72 countries in all continents have already received volunteers from the South American Division. By the end of 2019, of the 169 volunteers who were performing missionary service through the SAD-AVS, 40 were serving in South America territory and 129 in other divisions in the world.²⁰

The Adventist Volunteer Service has faced many challenges since its founding, and two of them are still to be overcome. The first one is the need for greater missionary awareness in the Adventist context, and the second one is the low amount of young people and adults in the SAD missionary field who speak English, which is essential for cross-cultural work. Seeking to overcome these challenges, the Church has been working on creating approaches that help members understand the need for preparation, engagement and commitment to the mission of preaching the Gospel to the whole world.²¹

For this purpose, the SAD-AVS leadership established three objectives for its future. The first one is the dissemination of the project, that is, make it better known to Adventists in the SAD territory. The second one is to try to have in each field and in each SDA Higher Educational Institution, a Transcultural Missionary School, in order to adequately prepare the volunteers. In these schools, missionaries will be able to learn more about the needs of countries and opportunities for missionary service around the world. Finally, the third objective is to strengthen short-term missionary trips. The Adventist Volunteer Service leadership believes that these small opportunities transform the vision and hearts of those who participate in them, as well as being a great opportunity and motivation for future missionaries.²²

Chronology of Directors²³

Marli Timm (2007-2011); Débora Siqueira (2012-2015); Elbert Kuhn (2016-2018); Joni Roger Oliveira (2019-Present).²⁴

SOURCES

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NOTES

- Serviço Voluntário Adventista* [Adventist Volunteer Service], "Home," accessed on April 23, 2020, [https://bit.ly/2VxvQbj.?](https://bit.ly/2VxvQbj.)
2. *Serviço Voluntário Adventista* [Adventist Volunteer Service], "History," accessed on November 28, 2019, [https://bit.ly/39FucJA.?](https://bit.ly/39FucJA.)
 3. "The definitive organization of a youth department [...] took place only at the General Conference Council [...] in 1907. [...] In the summer of the same year, about 200 workers gathered [...] for a youth convention in order to choose a name for the department [...]. The name finally chosen for the department was 'Young People's Missionary Volunteer Department.'" *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) website*, "História" [History], accessed on February 4, 2020, [https://bit.ly/2K1fnW5.?](https://bit.ly/2K1fnW5.)
 4. "Sligo MV Society Announces Student Missionary for '62," *Columbia Union Visitor*, May 17, 1962, 1.?
 5. "Relatório do presidente da Associação Geral" [Report of the General Conference president], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], October 1970, 6.?
 6. *Ibid.*?
 7. *Serviço Voluntário Adventista* [Adventist Volunteer Service], "História" [History], accessed on November 28, 2019, [https://bit.ly/3cLQnja.?](https://bit.ly/3cLQnja.)
 8. "Ministérios nas Universidades" [Ministries in Universities], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], September 1983, 7.?
 9. *Serviço Voluntário Adventista* [Adventist Volunteer Service], "História" [History], accessed on November 28, 2019, [https://bit.ly/3cLQnja.?](https://bit.ly/3cLQnja.)
 10. Joni Oliveira (SAD Adventist Volunteer Service director), email message to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associate editor), October 20, 2019.?
 11. *Serviço Voluntário Adventista* [Adventist Volunteer Service], "História" [History], accessed on November 28, 2019, [https://bit.ly/3cLQnja.?](https://bit.ly/3cLQnja.)
 12. Marly L. Timm, "Fazendo a diferença ao redor do mundo" [Making the difference around the world], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], no. 1213, year 104 (June 2009): 14.?
 13. *Ibid.*?
 14. Joni Oliveira (SAD Adventist Volunteer Service director), email message to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associate editor), October 20, 2019.?
 15. "The project One Year in Mission promotes the participation of young Adventists in the mission to evangelize urban centers in eight countries in South America, uniting their talents, resources and professional knowledge with the needs of the community." *Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brazil) website*, "Um Ano Em Missão" [One Year in Mission], accessed on February 4, 2020, [https://bit.ly/2sCFyNL.?](https://bit.ly/2sCFyNL.)
 16. Da Redação [Website editors], "Voluntariado adventista ganha impulso com resolução do governo" [Adventist volunteering gets a boost with government resolution], *Notícias Adventistas* [Adventist News], September 3, 2018, accessed on November 28, 2019, [https://bit.ly/2sF8TqT.?](https://bit.ly/2sF8TqT.)
 17. *Idem.*?
 18. Social Communication Advisory, "Escolas e universidades poderão contar horas de trabalho voluntário" [Schools and universities may count hours of volunteer work], Portal do Ministério da Educação [Brazilian Ministry of Education website], August 28, 2018, accessed on November 28, 2019, [https://bit.ly/2Q1Zd2u.?](https://bit.ly/2Q1Zd2u.)
 19. Joni Oliveira (SAD Adventist Volunteer Service director), email message to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associate editor), October 20, 2019.?
 20. *Ibid.*?
 21. *Ibid.*?
 22. *Ibid.*?
 23. *Ibid.*?
 24. For more information about the Adventist Volunteer Service, access the website: <https://sva.adventistas.org/pt/>, or the social media – Facebook: @dsavsas, Twitter: @VoluntariosDSA and Instagram: @SVA-Oficial.?