

# Figols, José (1934–1998)

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## JOHN GRAZ

John Graz, Ph.D. (Paris-Sorbonne University, Paris, France), retired in 2015. He began his ministry as a pastor in France and held director positions in the departments of Communication, Youth, and Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, initiating the “Festivals of Religious Freedom.” He was secretary general of the International Religious Liberty Association, organizing four World Congresses, and secretary of the Conference of Secretaries of World Christian Communions. He wrote and coauthored several books.

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José Figols was one of the great leaders of the European Adventist Youth movement, as seen by his dedication, energy, and joy in serving God, the young people, and his church. Born in Barcelona, Spain, on July 9, 1934, during the Civil War, he died August 4, 1998 in Annemasse, France, and was buried in Collonges-sous-Salève on August 10.<sup>2</sup>

## Early Life

Figols did not grow up in an Adventist family. His father was a salesman of building materials. It was his aunt, a member of the Adventist Church in Barcelona, who invited him and his mother to church worship services.

During his teenage years Figols very much enjoyed playing soccer and he was selected for the junior team and had hopes of joining the famous club of Barcelona. He had a promising career ahead of him when he decided to follow Jesus. He was baptized at the age of 18 and after completing his studies in nursing he decided to serve God as a pastor.

For two years he attended theology classes at the Adventist school in Madrid. The country was under the dictatorship of General Franco and only Catholic churches were recognized. There were several prohibitions, such as, it was not allowed to put the name “Adventist Church” at the entrance of a worship hall or school.

## Ministerial Training and Marriage

In 1956 Figols left Spain to continue his study to be a minister at the Adventist Seminary of Saleve, Collonges-sous-Salève, France. A year later he met Ariane Weber<sup>3</sup> from Geneva, who was baptized in 1959 in Geneva, Switzerland. According to the Spanish law, Figols, being a Catholic at birth, could not marry a non-Catholic. He had to officially renounce the faith of his childhood. The marriage took place on June 15, 1961. They were blessed with two children, Sylvie and Jean-Marc, born in 1962 and 1965.

## Ministry

On January 16, 1961, Figols began his ministry in Spain. Then on December 18, 1962, he was called to work for the Swiss Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Suisse Romande. He accepted this position a few months later and was appointed as director of the Youth Department on April 15, 1963. He held this position until September 30, 1978. During this period he instituted a revolutionary method of evangelism designed to meet secular people, called *Idees Debats*, in a cafe in Geneva (1968-1971). Students and young people, believers and nonbelievers, gathered to freely exchange and discuss their views. Very active in the organization of summer camps, rallies, and congresses, Figols joined and supported the youth evangelistic movement in France called *Special jeunes*, which held large gatherings, street evangelism, and concerts on public squares.

On November 1, 1978, he was appointed Youth director of the Franco-Belgian Union. He served this union successfully for 17 years. His ministry then extended to the territory of the Euro-African Division. He became one of its main partners in the organization of camporees, youth congresses, and the training of youth leaders in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe. The Youth director of the division at that time said: "When José is with us everything is possible."

In October 1995, Figols was appointed Youth director of the Euro-African Division. He accomplished his ministry with courage despite an illness he had to battle with for 25 months. His enthusiasm, perseverance, and humility gave such a testimony that the Youth Movement and church administration decided to give his name to a new training center: The José Figols Center. It was inaugurated November 8, 2001, on the French Adventist Campus at Collonges-sous-Saleve. The center serves the two European Divisions and the Adventist Francophone world. It strives to keep and share the spirit of José Figols, an exceptional youth leader who throughout his life illustrated, by his devotion and integrity, the role of a disciple of Christ, whom he served with passion through his youth ministry.

## Contribution

Through his hard work, professionalism, positive spirit, and loyalty to the Church and to his ministry, Figols brought a refreshing dimension to youth ministry. He became a role model for generations of youth leaders in Europe. Having spent 35 years in youth ministry, he was the longest serving youth director in Europe. He brought strength and stability to the youth movement in a period when many Christian youth organizations were facing an identity crisis. He assisted in the development of Pathfinders in Europe by supporting camps and local activities as well as mentoring other youth leaders. He thought that to answer the needs and challenges of youth, leaders had to lead them with enthusiasm in relevant activities and training seminars. Figols' main achievement was to make the Adventist Youth Movement in Europe strong and well organized, and to equip young people to live on a largely secularized continent.

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### SOURCES

Graz, John. "Temoignage aux Funerailles de Jose Figols," Unpublished Manuscript, August 10, 1998. Archives Jose Figols, Campus adventiste du Salve.

Verfaillie, Maurice Jose. "Opinione." *Mensile della Gioventa Avventista*, 9 (October 1998)

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## NOTES

1. This article is based on John Graz, "Temoignage aux Funerailles de Jose Figols," Unpublished Manuscript, August 10, 1998. Archives Jose Figols, Campus adventiste du Salve.
2. Maurice Jose Verfaillie, "Opinione," *Mensile della Gioventa Avventista*, 9 (October 1998):1.
3. Ariane was studying to become nurse at the nursing school "Le Bon secours."

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