

Kanada, Tossaku

(1912–1978)

THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP

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Tossaku Kanada with his wife Helena and daughter Ivone.

Photo courtesy of Brazilian White Center - UNASP.

Born in Japan, Tossaku Kanada was a pastor, evangelist, and teacher in South America.

Tossaku Kanada was born on March 17, 1912, in the province of Okayama, west region of Japan.¹ His parents were Jiro and Kama Kanada,² and his family professed Buddhism. In 1931 at the age of 19, he immigrated to Brazil right after finishing high school due to financial difficulties.³ Tossaku Kanada came to Brazil during the Japanese second phase of immigration, between 1924 and 1941, along with a colonization project that guided Japanese to the northwestern region of the state of São Paulo and to the north region of the state of Paraná. Many of the Japanese arrived through migration projects of Protestant Christian organizations such as Nipon Rikkokai and Shinano Kaigai Kyokai. Tossaku Kanada was a member of Rikkokai.⁴

In 1932, shortly after arriving in São Paulo, he entered Brazil College (now Central Adventist University of Sao Paulo) with the aim of learning Portuguese. The college was well respected by Japanese immigrants in the region.⁵ At school, Kanada had contact with the Adventist message. At first, he was a strong opponent, but soon after, he was converted, being baptized on September 10, 1932. After his conversion he began studying theology and graduated three years later on September 21, 1935.⁶

He first received a call from Pastor Albert Hagen, president of the São Paulo Conference. A letter was addressed to him asking him to work in the city of Santos in the coastal area of São Paulo State. His job was to assist the team composed of Pastors Ricardo Willfart and João Linhares and his wife, along with Iracema Zorub and Ilka Reis in a series of meetings in Santos. In October of the same year, he was called to work as an office assistant for the São Paulo Conference treasurer, Pastor Ebinger, where he remained until April 1936.⁷ Still in the same year, São Paulo Conference sent pastor Kanada to carry out a series of meetings at Vila Matilde Church, in the city of São Paulo.⁸

He married Helena Krüger on February 11, 1937, with whom he had three children: Ivone, Silas Osmar, and Paulo. Afterwards, he was appointed district Pastor in the rural region of Presidente Prudente, state of São Paulo. There he was responsible for all the churches in the area from the city of Assis to the city of Porto Epitácio.⁹ In the same year, in Paraguaçu Paulista, he organized a Sabbath School with the aim of drawing church sympathizers.¹⁰ He also conducted public meetings during Easter week in Água Bonita, São Paulo. In this event, besides the daily preaching, he visited the new interests in the afternoon, and at night he directed prayer meetings in Boa Vista.¹¹

On March 27, 1938, the church of Presidente Prudente was inaugurated. Soon after this event, Tossaku Kanada was transferred to the city of Marília, which, due to the lack of workers, he was assigned two districts.¹² In Marília, there was a small group of Adventists with about 20 people enrolled in Sabbath School. Because there was no official church, worships and other meetings met in a wooden house. In June 1939, Tossaku started a series of evangelistic meetings in the city and on October 23, construction of a new church was scheduled to begin. A few months later, on May 16, 1940, the Marília Church was officially inaugurated.¹³

On January 18, 1941, at Brazil College, Kanada was ordained to the ministry along with six other pastors.¹⁴ In the first half of the following year, he carried out a series of public meetings in the city of Tupã, São Paulo, and shortly after he was transferred to the district of Lins, located in the midwestern region of the state of São Paulo.¹⁵

In August 1942, during the unfolding of Second World War events, Brazil declared war on the Axis alliance. Hence, not only the Germans and Italians underwent restrictions, repression, and persecution from *Estado Novo*¹⁶ (*New State*), but the Japanese community experienced the same, especially in São Paulo. This affected the lives of members and the service of the Japanese workers of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Brazil.

In this context, a young Adventist man from the Presidente Prudente Church was recruited for military service in the state of Mato Grosso but he refused to work on Sabbaths. After being denounced for disobeying his superiors' orders, the authorities wondered who had taught him this religious doctrine. The young man told them that he had learned about it from a Japanese pastor called Tossaku Kanada. Pastor Kanada was then summoned and arrested by the State Security Court.¹⁷

Because it was forbidden to speak or write in Japanese in prison, Pastor Kanada helped other inmates write and translate letters for those who didn't master the Portuguese language. After Kanada had been imprisoned for about a month, Noburo Nishide (1913-2003), a merchant from the city of Piracicaba, São Paulo, came to Kanada's cell. Nishide was arrested for stockpiling a great amount of kerosene at his establishment. In the same part of the prison, there were other Christian Japanese that, with the jailer's authorization, could speak Japanese in the mornings only if they were using the Bible.

Nishide received a copy of the New Testament, which he read in a few days. He did not understand the book of Revelation. He asked a Christian pastor who was there, but he didn't know much about the topic. However, he led him to Pastor Tossaku Kanada to explain the content to him. In December 1942, after 100 days of imprisonment at the São Paulo House of Detention, Nishide and Pastor Kanada were released on the same day. Shortly after, Nishide was baptized and joined the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Later, he was invited to work at Brazil College where he remained until his retirement.¹⁸

After a time, working conditions became a little more satisfactory and, though the war was still on, Pastor Tossaku Kanada went to work as a Brazil food factory cashier. After the war, in 1947, he was called to teach at East Brazil Academy (now Petropolis Adventist Academy). He remained there until 1951, He taught math, science, and religious education there until 1951.¹⁹ In 1951, he was sent with thirty other Brazilian pastors to Progresso, Uruguay, to participate in an Emmanuel Missionary College (now Andrews University), two month extension course. Upon his return, he received a call to work in Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais, where he remained until 1955. In this district, he was involved in the construction of churches in Muriaé and Cataguazes.²⁰

In 1955, he was called to be a pastor in a church in Santos. He later accepted Pastor Carlos Tavares' invitation from the São Paulo Conference to be a Bible teacher at Sao Paulo Academy, (now a part of the Central Adventist University of Sao Paulo family of schools). Kanada accepted the call and remained there for nine years (1955-1964).²¹ At the end of 1959, Pastor Kiyotaka Shirai (1820-1987), along with pastor Tossaku Kanada, began working to evangelize the Japanese and their descendants. For that to happen, a radio program called "Voice of Prophecy Brazil" was broadcast in Japanese in the city of São Paulo. The program was aired until the beginning of 1964.²²

On March 9, 1964, Kanada left from Santos Harbor with his wife and son, headed to Japan. There he participated in theology and evangelism courses for workers and laymen. The purpose of this training was to learn the working methods of Japanese evangelists. In December of the same year, he returned to Brazil. In February

1965, he organized the first Brazil Japanese Company, which gathered on Sabbaths in the youth hall of the São Paulo Central Church, and was attended by 16 members.²³ Over the years, the restrictions on the use of the Japanese language were eliminated enabling the printing of flyers in Japanese. A series of Bible studies were also translated to Japanese, such as “A Bíblia Fala” [The Bible Speaks] and the “Curso do Lar” [Home Course]. As a result of this work, in 1970, a church was organized with 60 members.²⁴

Tossaku Kanada worked in the Japanese Adventist community until his retirement in 1974.²⁵ He had Parkinson’s Disease, which weakened his body over the years. Suffering from pneumonia, he died on February 4, 1978, in the São Paulo Adventist Hospital. On the following day, he was buried in the Congonhas Cemetery, Santo Amaro District, São Paulo.²⁶

Pastor Kanada made an important contribution to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Brazil. He served in three states of the Brazil southeast region, he was a teacher and pastor who pioneered evangelistic campaigns to spread the gospel in some of the cities of São Paulo State. Along with other Japanese pastors, he started the evangelism program in the Japanese-Brazilian community that resulted into the first Japanese Adventist church in Brazil. He left a great legacy of hard work, commitment, and dedication to the development of the SDA Church in Brazil.

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3. Ildete Souza, "Entrevista com o Pastor Tossaku Kanada," *Revista Adventista*, April 1975, 30; Takatohi, 27.
4. Elder Hosokawa and Haller E. S. Schuneman, "A Conversão de Imigrantes Japoneses no Brasil à Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia," *Revista de Estudos da Religião*, (September 2008): 108, 110.
5. Souza, 30; Takatohi, 27; Hosokawa and Schuneman, 112-114.
6. Takatohi, 27; Souza, 30.
7. Souza, 30; Takatohi, 27.
8. Souza, 30.
9. Ibid.
10. "Novos Grupos," *Revista Adventista*, June 1937, 14.
11. "A Semana de Oração em Água Bonita," *Revista Adventista*, July 1937, 15.
12. Rodolfo Belz, "Boas Novas de S. Paulo," *Revista Adventista*, May 1938, 10, 11.
13. Tossaku Kanada, "História do Movimento Adventista em Marília," *Revista Adventista*, June 1940, 13, 14; Souza, 30.
14. Rodolfo Belz, "Ecos da União Sul-Brasileira." *Revista Adventista*, April 1941, 12.
15. Souza, 30.
16. A nomenclature traditionally used in Brazilian historiography for referring to the dictatorial period of Getúlio Vargas government (1882-1954). It began with a coup d'état on November 10, 1937, which went on until Vargas' deposition, on October 29, 1945.
17. Takatohi, 27; R. M. Scheffel, "Na Prisão, Nishide conheceu o Evangelho," *Revista Adventista*, March 1978, 27, 28; Hosokawa and Schuneman, 116, 117.

18. Ibid.
19. Souza, 30; "East Brazil Academy," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 240; "East Brazil Academy," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1952), 235.
20. Souza, 30.
21. Ibid.
22. Hosokawa and Schuneman, 118.
23. Souza, 30; Michelson Borges, "A Toda tribo, língua e povo," *Revista Adventista*, June 2006, 8, 9.
24. Souza, 30; "A Mensagem aos Japoneses," *Revista Adventista*, December 1981, 33.
25. Hosokawa and Schuneman, 119.
26. Takatohi, 27.

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