

Nagel, Ruy Heinrich (1939–2015)

THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP

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Ruy Nagel

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Ruy Heirich Nagel was a pastor, manager, and treasurer from Brazil.

Early Years

Ruy Heirich Nagel was born on September 27, 1939, in the city of Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, although his birth certificate states Jaguari, in a rural area of that state. He was the youngest of Arthur Nagel and Ida Heinrich Nagel's five children: Ruy, Arthur, Ernesto, Tully and Maria.¹ His parents were German Adventist immigrants but, in the context of the Second World War (1939-1945), the family dissociated themselves from German traditions, including the German language. For this reason, Ruy was the only one in his family who did not speak German. He attended two years of elementary education in Jaguari, at a school operated by Catholic

nuns. Afterward, his family moved to the city of Porto Alegre, where he continued his studies at a public school until finishing the fifth grade.²

In 1952, at the age of twelve, he enrolled at Adventist Taquara Academy, Rio Grande do Sul, today Cruzeiro do Sul Adventist Academy, graduating from middle school in 1955. While a student there, he made the decision to become an Adventist pastor, so, following that, he enrolled at Brazil College (now Central Adventist University of Sao Paulo) in the city of São Paulo, where he graduated from the commercial (business) course in 1958. After that, he enrolled in the theology program, graduating in 1962. While a theology student, he worked at *Superbom* (Brazil food factory) and during his last year of college worked as an assistant accountant. After completing his undergraduate degree, he received an invitation to continue working at *Superbom*, but turned it down because his desire was to work as a pastor.³

While still an undergraduate student, on December 19, 1961, he married Evelyn Skrobot Paraná. Alongside her husband, she was of a great help in his ministry. After her husband's retirement, she was director of two ministries in the South American Division: womens ministry and the women's branch of the ministerial association (AFAM).⁴ After the launching of the Project Breaking the Silence (movement to mobilize against all types of abuse and violence) by the General Conference, she was a pioneer in Brazil to promote the project.⁵

Ministry

Ruy Nagel entered Adventist work in 1962 when he accepted a call from the Rio Grande do Sul Conference to lead a new pastoral district in Porto Alegre, a district that comprised 13 churches and companies. It was created to respond to the need after Pastor Enoch de Oliveira's series of evangelistic meetings. Pastor de Oliveira conducted meetings in the city of Petrópolis that resulted in a great increase in members. To assist Ruy, the experienced pastor, Emmanuel Zorub, president of the Rio Grande do Sul Conference, attended the Central Church, one of the churches in Ruy's district, for two years.⁶

After that, Ruy accepted a call to lead the Rio Grande do Sul Conference's Patrimonial Expansion Department, which was responsible for taking care of the field churches' patrimony. Part of his responsibility was to assist churches under construction. He served in this position from 1964 to 1966.⁷ At the request of the conference, he also led the Educational Department in 1966, being responsible for the field's church schools (many of them operating in a church backyard building).⁸

On January 27, 1967, Ruy was ordained to the pastoral ministry.⁹ The same year, he was called by the South Brazil Union to be secretary-treasurer for the Central Brazil Mission where he would be responsible for Adventist churches in the states of Goiás, the Federal District, and Minas Gerais.¹⁰ He had his first experience in the mission field as a treasurer. Leaving his hometown, family, and friends, Ruy and his wife contributed to the maintenance of the pioneer medical missionary launch on the Araguaia River. The mission launch promoted health education and provided free medical and dental assistance to the riparian population. He assisted the

evangelistic work among the Carajá indigenous people, located at the former Posto de Fontoura on Bananal Island. He also participated in the building of the Adventist Central Church of Brasilia, inaugurated in 1968.¹¹

In December 1969, after serving in the Central Brazil Mission for a year-and-a-half, he accepted an invitation to be treasurer of the São Paulo Adventist Hospital in Liberdade, serving there for nine months.¹² In 1970, he was called to work as secretary/treasurer of the North Brazil Union,¹³ led by Pastor João Wolff. During this period, he participated in the inauguration of Belém Adventist Hospital's new building.¹⁴

Afterward, in 1971 he was called to be the administrative director of Silvestre Adventist Hospital in Rio de Janeiro,¹⁵ requiring a move from the north of Brazil to the city of Rio de Janeiro.¹⁶ Later, in 1975, he participated in a five-month hospital administration training course at Loma Linda Medical Center, California. In addition, he also attended a hospital administration course at the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro.¹⁷ In 1977, he envisioned and created the Brazil Adventist Hospital Group (GHAB), holding its first congress on November 2, 1978, in the auditorium of the Silvestre Adventist Hospital. The meeting had the aim of encouraging young Adventist medical students to become medical missionaries, dedicating their time and talents to the Church.¹⁸

Afterwards, Ruy was chosen to be the first South American treasurer of the South American Division (SAD), serving in that capacity from 1980 to 1995.¹⁹ During those 15 years, he traveled throughout the division holding meetings with the treasurers from conferences and local churches.²⁰ He also saw the great numerical growth of the SDA Church in South America resulting from the new SAD management plan, which basically consisted of dividing to grow. The South American Division emphasized evangelism not only in large cities, but also in villages and small towns and in the jungle areas along the Amazon River. At the end of 1982, about sixty thousand baptisms were expected as a result of the work.²¹ At the General Conference meeting held in Indianapolis in 1990, Ruy was re-elected treasurer of the South American Division, occupying this position until 1995.²²

Then, at the General Conference held in Utrecht, the Netherlands in 1995, he was chosen to be president of the South American Division. Accepting the call, he emphasized the importance of personal evangelism work, and affirmed that Global Mission would continue being a priority under his management.²³ He also gave great emphasis to working with small missionary action groups involving pastors and the community.²⁴

Under his administration, several evangelistic meetings were held in stadiums across the South American continent. In addition, he launched the distribution plan for Ellen G. White's *Steps to Christ* in magazine format, entitled *Paz na Tempestade* [Peace above the Storm]; 2.6 million copies were delivered to the population. He also continued the "divide to grow" plan, which yielded good results for the division. The Northeast Brazil, West Central Brazil, Bolivia, and Ecuador Union Missions were organized, and the Peruvian Union was divided in two: North Peru Union Mission and South Peru Union Mission.²⁵

Also under Ruy's leadership the Adventist Communication System (SISAC) was created, supporting the purchase of FM radio stations throughout South America; this was the first step toward what became the *Novo Tempo*

Communication Network.²⁶ Due to the various efforts that were made during this period, in August 1997, Brazil became the country with the largest number of Adventists in the world.²⁷

Last Years

Ruy Nagel led the South American Division from July 1995 to December 2006,²⁸ being succeeded by Erton Carlos Köhler.²⁹ After his retirement, Ruy moved to his hometown Porto Alegre, where he actively worked in the local district, preaching almost every Sabbath in a different church.³⁰ Due to his long experience in church administration, he was sometimes invited to speak to pastors and treasurers of the Rio Grande do Sul Conference.³¹

Ruy Nagel died at his home on May 1, 2015 after a short illness. He was buried in Porto Alegre, where he had resided since 2007.³²

Contribution

Ruy Heinrich Nagel left a legacy of 44 years of contribution to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, serving as a pastor, secretary, treasurer, and manager in Rio Grande do Sul, North Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, and later in the whole field of South America. He was known as a secure leader who gave precise orientations to his employees. As treasurer and president of the South American Division, he administered the church in a time of great economic instability. Even so, the Adventist organization experienced good growth in this period. In addition, “his leadership contributed to the development of a strong and sustainable program of expansion in new locations.”³³

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