

Westphal, Frank Henry (1858–1944)

THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP

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Frank Henry Westphal

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Frank Henry Westphal was a pastor, evangelist, and pioneer missionary.

Early Years and Marriage

Frank Henry Westphal was born on December 15, 1858, in New London, Wisconsin, United States of America.¹ He was the son of Gustave F. Westphal (1834-1912)² and Henrietta Maas Westphal (1837-1892).³ Gustave was born in Rhine River, Germany, and had immigrated at age 13 with his parents, settling in New York, U.S.A., until the family moved to New London, Wisconsin, in 1854. Frank's father met and married Henrietta in 1854⁴ and had eleven children, of which Frank was the second.⁵ One of his siblings was Pastor Joseph W. Westphal, who also significantly contributed to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a missionary in South America.⁶ Frank's mother died early at age 55 due to the flu.⁷ Three years later, his father married Mary Parfit, with whom he had a son.⁸ Frank spent his childhood on the family's farm in New London.⁹

In 1887, Frank married Mary Thurston (1860-1931), who was born in Plainfield, California. As his loyal partner in the missionary service, Mary worked from 1880-1890 at the Wisconsin Conference as a secretary and treasurer of the temperance and Sabbath school departments.¹⁰ She was the treasurer of the South America East Coast Mission and secretary of the tract society and Sabbath school department. In Chile, she worked as the secretary of the Sabbath school department for ten years, as a school dean for five years, and as a treasurer for another five years.¹¹ Frank and Mary had four children, Charles,¹² Helen,¹³ Ruth Evangeline,¹⁴ and Grace.¹⁵ Three years after Mary's death, Frank married Dena Barr (1866-1953), with whom he spent the rest of his life.¹⁶

Beginning Ministry: Wisconsin

Frank did not profess any religion until age 19. He became interested in the subject in 1878 when the evangelist, H. W. Decker, conducted a series of meetings in a tent in his hometown. Frank attended the meetings regularly, learned about, and accepted the Adventist message. He was baptized in 1879 and joined the church that had been founded as a result of the evangelistic campaign.¹⁷

From the moment of his conversion, he actively participated in missionary service. As soon as he joined the new body of believers, he was chosen to occupy a leadership position. Some years later, wanting to be more useful to the Church, he applied to the theology course offered by Battle Creek College in Michigan. After graduating, he worked as a canvasser, selling the first German Adventist Church periodical, *Die Stimme der Wahrheit*.¹⁸

Around 1884, he became involved in the evangelistic efforts of the Wisconsin Conference,¹⁹ thus contributing significantly to the establishment of Adventism within the German-speaking communities in many cities of the state. He participated in evangelistic series in Dupont in mid-1885,²⁰ Almond from July-September 1886,²¹ Richford in mid-1886,²² Loyd in July 1887,²³ Lime Ridge from August to the end of 1887,²⁴ Milwaukee from July-September 1888²⁵ and again in July 1889,²⁶ Westfield in July 1890,²⁷ Lawrence from June-September 1890,²⁸ Fond du Lac in July 1891,²⁹ and Watertown in mid-1892.³⁰

In 1886, Almond was the first city to receive the evangelistic series intended to reach the German population of the state of Wisconsin.³¹ That same year, Frank Westphal received his ordination into pastoral ministry.³² In June 1888, as a result of these conferences, a church was established in Lime Ridge.³³ Then, in September 1890, Westphal established the first German Church of Wisconsin in Almond. He also ministered to French and German speakers while attending Battle Creek College in October 1890.³⁴

By the end of the Fond du Lac meetings in September 1891, Westphal was asked to join the German department of the newly established Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska.³⁵ In May 1893, the General Conference transferred him to Illinois to begin evangelistic efforts in the state among the German population.³⁶ His evangelistic efforts started in Freeport through the distribution of fliers from home to home.³⁷ He did not do this for long, for unexpected needs arose, which made Westphal an important individual for the missionary efforts

of the Adventist Church in foreign lands.

Missionary Work: South America

A letter from the city of Crespo in the province of Entre Ríos, Argentina, arrived at the General Conference requesting a German-speaking missionary. The letter had been sent by a group of Sabbath keepers who had organized as a result of the missionary efforts of Jorge Riffel, a native from Switzerland. Riffel had immigrated to Germany at the beginning of the 18th Century due to the scarcity of land and the persecution of Protestants. This had forced him to move to Russia, then Brazil, then Argentina, and, ultimately, the USA. Riffel had learned about the Adventist message while in the USA and was baptized with his family in 1888.³⁸ After accepting the new faith, Riffel felt like sharing what he had learned with his Argentinean friends, returning to Argentina with three German Adventist families at the beginning of 1890.³⁹ Riffel directed his evangelistic efforts to the people of Crespo, resulting in eight families accepting the Adventist message in a short period of time for a total of 20 new Sabbath keepers.

Because of the increasing interest in the Adventist faith, the need for missionary support became evident.⁴⁰ In 1891, the first canvassers arrived in South America. In 1893, Richard B. Craig was sent to be the director of publications.⁴¹ In 1894, the General Conference voted for Frank Westphal to be the first ordained minister to enter these lands.⁴² On July 18, 1894, Westphal, his wife, their son, and their baby daughter boarded the S. S. Paris accompanied by W. H. Thurston, his family, and Georgia Burrus, the first missionary to India.

First, the ship went to Southampton, England, since there was no line of direct navigation to South America. From there, they took the S. S. Magdalena. After a brief crossing at the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, they stopped over at Bahia and went to Rio de Janeiro, where William Thurston disembarked. The Westphal and Thurston families were related because Frank Westphal had married Mary Thurston. The Westphal family continued traveling to Argentina, disembarking at Ensenada Port in La Plata, where Craig welcomed them. Soon after, they left for Buenos Aires, arriving on August 18.⁴³

Westphal started his evangelistic work as soon as they arrived in Buenos Aires. A week after, they left for the city of Crespo in the province of Entre Ríos, where they met those that had requested his support.⁴⁴ Crespo was a German colony of approximately seven thousand families, of which most were Catholic, some were Baptist, and others were Lutheran.⁴⁵ After some weeks of work and evangelistic outreach, the first Adventist Church in South America was established on September 9, 1894, with a total of 36 members.⁴⁶

In 1894, Westphal was elected president of the South America East Coast Mission, which covered the territories of Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Brazil.⁴⁷ The main office was located in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from where he would depart for his missionary work in the countries under his responsibility.⁴⁸ The second place he visited was the city of San Cristóbal in the province of Santa Fé, where he established a church with 13 members. Westphal then visited the cities of Esperanza and Felicia in Santa Fé to conduct evangelistic meetings

among French immigrants with help from Canvasser L. Brooking, after which he returned to Buenos Aires to help establish a church in that city.⁴⁹

In December, Westphal visited the city of San Javier, Santa Fé, where a group of Adventist converts desired to be baptized.⁵⁰ After working for about six months in Argentina and Uruguay, he visited Brazil for the first time on February 22, 1895.⁵¹ After passing through the city of Rio de Janeiro, he went with A. B. Stauffer to the city of Rio Claro, São Paulo, and arrived on March 14. Then, they went to Indaiatuba, Piracicaba, Rio Claro, and Piracicaba again, all cities of the state of São Paulo, aiming to visit families that would accept the Adventist message. Sabbath schools were established in Rio Claro, Piracicaba, and Indaiatuba, where Westphal baptized many converts. The first person to be baptized in the country was Guilherme Stein, Jr., in Piracicaba, São Paulo, in the month of April.

Westphal and Canvasser Albert Bachmeyer went to Joinville, Santa Catarina, and, with the help of a group of Sabbath keepers, organized a Sabbath school with 30 members.⁵² After that, Westphal went to Brusque, the first Brazilian city in Santa Catarina that had received the Adventist message before canvassers arrived.⁵³ Bachmeyer had been the first one to find that group of Sabbath keepers in Brusque and he spoke about it to W. H. Thurston who lived in Rio de Janeiro. Thurston then contacted Westphal, who arrived there on May 30, 1895.

Westphal traveled to Gaspar Alto, a nearby city, where Guilherme Belz, who had been significant to the formation of that converted group, lived. As soon as he arrived, he searched for a place to rent to hold religious services and baptisms. His two attempts were obstructed because the priest of the local parish church threatened to publicly report the landlords as heretics to the church. Westphal decided to gather the group next to the Itajaí-Mirim River in Gaspar Alto, and, on Saturday, June 8, they celebrated the Lord's Supper ceremony and baptized eight people. A few days later, 15 more people were baptized. On June 15, 1895, the first Brazilian Adventist Church was organized in that city.⁵⁴

After finishing his work in Gaspar Alto, Westphal returned to his home in Buenos Aires. When he arrived at his home, which he had been away from for five months, he was faced with terrible news. Helen, his little girl, had measles and scarlet fever and had died on June 15, two weeks before he returned home.⁵⁵ Although this was a traumatic experience, Westphal remained committed to preaching the gospel.

Westphal kept working in Argentina and traveled to many cities, conducted evangelistic meetings, baptized many converts, and organized new churches. On September 10, 1895, Westphal began Argentina's first series of evangelistic meetings in the city of Diamante.⁵⁶ Among the places he worked were: Santa Fé, Crespo, Las Garzas, Buenos Aires, Malabrigo,⁵⁷ Nueva Helvecia, Nueva Alejandría, Moreno, Comorera, San Javier,⁵⁸ San Cristóbal, Esperanza,⁵⁹ Entre Ríos,⁶⁰ and Córdoba.⁶¹

In January 1896, Westphal was successful in the organization of Uruguay's first Adventist Church, having baptized 18 members from the German and Swiss immigrants of Nueva Helvecia in the Colonia Department.⁶² In 1897, Westphal, John McCarthy, and Jean Vuilleumier initiated the first monthly periodic Adventist Spanish

publication titled *El Faro*, with its first edition published in the month of July.⁶³ In 1899, they also participated in the opening of a training school in the province of Entre Ríos, Argentina, with the purpose of training new converts to serve the Church. This was the first permanent educational institution in the country, now known as River Plate Adventist University.⁶⁴

Westphal worked actively until 1901 when he returned to the United States on medical leave. He remained in the United States for three years and once again taught Bible subjects in the German department of Union College.⁶⁵ At the same time, he provided support at evangelistic conferences and camp meetings and preached to the German public. He worked in the states of Nebraska,⁶⁶ Oklahoma,⁶⁷ Missouri,⁶⁸ and North Dakota.⁶⁹

After recuperating, he returned to South America in June 1904 and continued as director of the West Coast Mission with its center of activity in Chile⁷⁰ until 1905.⁷¹ In 1906, he became the president of the Chile-Bolivian Mission⁷² and, from 1907-1915, he was the president of the Chile Conference.⁷³ After this period, he continued working as a pastor at the Chile Conference. In 1917, Westphal's wife helped establish a school, which was situated in the building of the local Adventist church near their previous home in the city of Pitrufquén in the province of Cautín.⁷⁴ Westphal was among others responsible for the foundation of the first Adventist church in the city of Punta Arenas in the peninsula of Brunswick in 1918.⁷⁵ He worked in Chile until the beginning of 1921, completing 27 years of missionary service in South America.⁷⁶

Final Years

Upon finishing their service in South America, the Westphals returned to the United States due to his wife's deteriorating health.⁷⁷ There, he continued serving in evangelistic outreach programs geared to the Spanish-speaking communities.⁷⁸ He was a pastor and elder in some of the churches of Southern California.⁷⁹ At that time, he contributed to the construction of the new Spanish Adventist Church inaugurated in the city of Los Angeles in 1930.⁸⁰ Westphal worked until 1936, completing 58 years of service to the SDA Church.⁸¹ Frank Henry Westphal died on February 24, 1944, at age 86 in his home in Glendale, California.⁸²

Beyond his significant participation as a missionary pioneer, Frank Henry Westphal also contributed to the historical recollection of his years of service in South America. In 1927, he authored the book, "Pioneering in the Neglected Continent," which details his work as a missionary in South America, covering the beginning and establishment of the Adventist Church in uncharted territories.⁸³

Contribution and Legacy

Frank Henry Westphal was an important pioneering missionary in the early history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As the first ordained Adventist pastor to be sent to South America, his contribution was fundamental to the establishment of Adventism on the neglected continent as it was known by the Adventist Church. In the

United States of America, Pastor Westphal also contributed significantly to preaching the gospel, mainly to German-speaking communities in the state of Wisconsin.

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