

Wolff, João

(1930–2023)

THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP

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João-Wolff

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João Wolff was a pastor and administrator in South America. He was the South American Division president for 15 years.

Early Life and Education

João Wolff was born on June 12, 1930, in the city of Pinheirinhos, district of Santo Antônio da Patrulha, current town of Rolante, state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.¹ He was the son of Jacob Wolff Filho (1900-1970)² and Guilhermina Marquart Wolff (1905-2001).³ From their union were also born: Eli, Esther, Elice, Nelson, Arno, Elzita, Marvin, and Neli.⁴

João grew up in a simple family that earned their livelihood through agricultural work, which made them move a lot. He received a Christian education since his childhood from his Adventist parents. His father was a lay preacher where they lived, and his influence led to the formation of many congregations; many of them began in the family's living room.⁵ At 13 years old, he left the city of Porto Alegre, state of Rio Grande do Sul, to live with his uncle and aunt in São Paulo, who lived near Brazil College (today UNASP-SP). There he studied for two years of elementary school (1944 to 1945) and concluded it at Taquara Academy (today IACS). João came back to Brazil College in 1948, where he graduated in bookkeeping (1950).⁶ There he also graduated in theology (1952-1955).⁷

Ministry and Family

He received the invitation to serve in Rio Grande do Sul Conference in 1956, starting his activities as an accounting assistant in the conference's office. On the weekends he also pastored in the Niterói Adventist Church in the city of Porto Alegre. In the same year, he was assigned to pastor the Central Adventist Church in Porto Alegre, which he did for a year.⁸

In 1957 he was appointed as leader of the Education, Temperance, and Youth departments.⁹ In the same year, on July 17, 1937, he married Edy Lil Louzada¹⁰ in the church of Londrina, state of Paraná. They met as students at Brazil College, where she graduated as a school teacher. By her husband's side, she also dedicated herself to the denominational work. She taught in many Adventist schools, was a department chief at Belém Adventist Hospital, secretary of the Nursing School at Brazil College, and for fifteen years secretary for the South American Division.¹¹ João and Edy had two children: Marisa Lil Wolff (Juhasz) and Denise Wolff.¹²

João served the Rio Grande do Sul Conference until the end of 1960.¹³ During this time he headed the Public Relations Department for two years (1958 and 1959)¹⁴ and was ordained to the ministry on February 13, 1960.¹⁵ Besides, he was involved in the first youth camp in the Rio Grande do Sul Conference¹⁶ and led, along with Pastor Sesóstris Cesar Souza, the *Federação Adventista da Mocidade Gaúcha* (Young Gaúcho Adventist Federation); the goal was to involve the young people in church activities in that state.¹⁷

In 1961 João was elected director of the Education and Youth departments at the Paraná Conference. Back then the first Pathfinders Clubs were being established in Brazil. As a youth leader, he coordinated the first Pathfinders Camporee of this conference, which took place at the Paraná Adventist Academy.¹⁸ He worked in these departments until 1962,¹⁹ and in 1963 he accepted the invitation to take over those same departments at the South Brazil Union Conference (1963-1966).²⁰

At the end of 1966, he was appointed as president of the Paraná Conference (1966 and 1967).²¹ Finishing his activities in the south of the country, in 1968 he was elected president of the North Brazil Union Mission. During his administration, due to the facilitation of transport offered by the construction of the Trans-Amazon Highway, he encouraged the ministry of mobile clinics that, in association with the Brazilian Federal Government, helped

the underprivileged population in that region. Through this program, the Adventist message reached many people.²² He also worked as a leader in the departments of Stewardship and Radio & TV for two years (1972 and 1973).²³ He worked in North Brazil until 1977.²⁴ In 1978 he was appointed as president of the South Brazil Union Conference.²⁵

South American Division President

Around 1980 João was elected president of the South American Division during the 53rd session of the General Conference, held from April 17 to 26, in the city of Dallas, Texas. As head of this institution, his main emphasis was evangelistic work. He coordinated many campaigns, such as: “Mil Dias de Colheita” (A Thousand Days of Harvest), “Colheita 90” (Harvest 90), and “Missão Global” (Global Mission).²⁶ Another important project was the distribution of missionary brochures by the name of “Ele é a Saída” (He Is the Way). About twenty million of them were distributed throughout the division territory. He worked in this capacity for fifteen years, until 1995.²⁷

After leaving the presidency, at the end of his ministry, he worked as leader of the Global Mission at the South Brazil Union Conference (1996-1998).²⁸ João retired in 1998 after more than forty-six years of service to the denomination.²⁹ He also was recognized as a participant in the socio-cultural area. Some highlights are that he was honored with the title Doctor *Honoris Causa* in Divinity, received from the South Union Adventist University, Keene, Texas, U.S.A., on March 2, 1993³⁰ and as an Honorary Citizen, conferred on April 26, 2001 at the Rio Branco Palace, in the city of Curitiba, state of Paraná.³¹

Demise and Contribution

After his retirement João was the spiritual counselor of the Hope Channel Radio (Novo Tempo) in Curitiba and pastor at the Portuguese-Brazilian Church in Toronto, Canada (2002).³² He died on June 11, 2023 at 92 years of age, in Curitiba.³³ During his ministry he made significant contributions to the Adventist Church, especially in administrative areas, passing through many levels of the Adventist organization, from conference to union and division.³⁴

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5. *Ibid.*, 241.
6. *Ibid.*, 242-243.

7. Ibid., 243.
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26. "Divisão Sul-Americana tem novo presidente," *Revista Adventista*, year 91, n. 08, August 1995, 16.
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