Appeal For Missions magazines, 1984, produced in English, Greek, and French.
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Appeal for Missions, South Pacific Division
The Appeal for Missions was an annual campaign in which church members voluntarily went door-to-door, soliciting donations from the public for the church mission program in the Pacific Islands.

The Adventist Church introduced the American concept of Harvest Ingathering to Australasia in 1918 under the title Ingathering for Missions. In fact, for a short time some church members continued to use the term Harvest Ingathering. The Australasian Union Conference (AUC) Home Missions Department, at that time under the supervision of Cecil Meyers, had responsibility for the project's promotion and organization. The rapidly expanding mission enterprises in the Pacific drove the urgency for such funds.

Meyers cited a 1908 Ellen White tract titled An Appeal to Ministers and Church Officials that defended the propriety of accepting money from the public and using it for religious purposes. He also provided some examples of success by solicitors in China and Australia who had already used the method. The aim set for the Australasian churches was a goal of £2,500. Finally, he concluded his article with some words of encouragement for the timid.

In the wake of the worldwide depression the church set the annual goal at only £12,000. The amount in 1933, for example, edged to £12,859. However, beginning in 1933, Pacific Island missions obtained additional funds from the Big Week program. Big Week was a project in which church members went door-to-door selling booklets of a religious nature, generally about signs of the apocalyptic end-time. In 1933, for example, total sales of Big Week books amounted to £1,288. A further source of mission funds involved the sale of The Interpreter of the Times periodical, purchased by church members and distributed under the project name "Free Literature," i.e., literature given gratis to non-members. It became customary to report the totals of the three annual campaigns as a single sum. In 1940, for example, the total amount realized for missions was £19,418. In the same year the AUC treasurer observed that the Appeal for Missions funds alone accounted for 21 percent of all operating monies AUC received, including tithe, appropriations, and offerings.

With the passage of time the setting of goals and the distribution of funds became more sophisticated. The AUC adopted a general goal for the entire Australasian field and then sub-divided it among the local conferences. Each local conference met any Appeal for Missions expenses from their own funds so that the goal achieved plus any excess went entirely to Pacific Island missions. The church did not subtract any operating expenses from the money collected among the public. AUC explained to church members in 1951 that if a local conference exceeded their goal for the year, then that conference would receive half of the overflow in the form of an allocation from the union. Thus, if a local conference exceeded its goal by £4,000, then AUC would give the conference £2,000 from a fund not connected to Pacific Island missions. The allocation was, in effect, an incentive for the conferences to exceed their Appeal for Missions goal.

Every church was assigned a territory usually surrounding their location. Ideally the members would canvass the same area each year, thus allowing them to become known to the householders. Often a friendly association would develop, enabling conversations to turn to religious topics. The campaign became a form of evangelism. For decades colleges and academies would suspend classes for a few days to enable students and teachers to participate. In this manner the church harnessed the energy of the youth to raise significant amounts for missions.

In 1978 the church discontinued the large format brochure with its short mission stories and replaced it with a small bulletin titled Appeal Report. It contained only snippets of information from the mission field. A further change took place in 1983 when larger bulletins began to appear under the new title Adventist Appeal.

The Big Week and Free Literature campaigns no longer exist. It became increasingly dangerous for members to go from door-to-door with a bag of money in hand, no matter how well it was disguised and despite the fact it was regarded as charitable funds. Women and children serving as collectors were especially vulnerable. Nevertheless, significant totals continued to accumulate from the campaigns which, since 2000, have become the Adventist Development and Relief Agency Appeal. Donors gave to this entity with the knowledge that the money raised was used to rebuild after floods, fires, and other disasters worldwide. However, twenty-first century results testify of a shrinking trend in the annual totals collected during Appeal for Missions door-knock appeals. In 2003 the total amounted to $1,318,205. By 2006 aggregate was $1,246,848. It further declined to $1,029,804 in 2011, $837,162 in 2014, and $669,123 in 2017. For the past decade the campaigns have been confined to Australia only.
SOURCES


“An Echo of the Harvest Ingathering.” Australasian Record, December 22, 1919.


“Time - Our Greatest Asset.” Australasian Record, December 9, 1929.

NOTES

1. “An Echo of the Harvest Ingathering,” Australasian Record, December 22, 1919, 5.?

2. Cecil K. Meyers, “Ingathering for Missions,” Australasian Record, May 20, 1918, 1, 2.?

3. Ibid.?


5. E.g., “Time - Our Greatest Asset,” Australasian Record, December 9, 1929, 5.?


