The Seventh-day Adventist Church is experiencing impressive numerical growth and geographical expansion within the South-American Division. The division is made up of the countries of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay, and over the past several years has developed a rich assortment of church growth experiments. In a recent article “Building a Growing Church: The South American Experience,” I mentioned a sequence of six outreach strategies—literature evangelism, public evangelism, radio and TV evangelism, preaching to large audiences, small groups, and “Integrated Evangelism”—that became major turning points within the overall process (see Timm 2008:20-23). However, I believe that the positive results in the division are largely due to outreach programs that are able to attract, integrate, and involve all the active forces of the church in the fulfillment of its mission (see Evangelismo Integrado 1999:28; Dorneles 1999:18, 19; Dorneles 1999:14, 15).

A good example of such a program was project “Impact Hope” which culminated on Sabbath, September 6, 2008, with the vast majority of the church members of the division distributing 21,000,000 small four-color magazines and 26,000,000 colored pamphlets with the message of the second coming. In addition, significant distribution of the entire content of the magazine also took place in audio, video, and electronic formats in Portuguese, Spanish, and several other languages. On the Impact day, the websites www.esperanca.com.br (in Portuguese) and www.esperanzaweb.com (in Spanish) experienced an extremely high number of hits. Throughout the entire continent, the church experienced,
as never before, waves of strong mission-driven enthusiasm.

This article briefly describes how the basic structure of the project was conceived, developed, and implemented, with a few insightful glimpses into its successful outcome. The overall description illustrates what can take place when the church decides to channel its resources and potential into an integrated missionary endeavor.

Conceiving the Idea

Several major efforts have been made in the past by the Adventist Church in South America to involve all of its members in missionary outreach programs. In 1978, the former South Brazil Union Conference (at that time comprising the territory of the current Central Brazil and South Brazil Union Conferences, and a portion of the West Central Brazil Union Mission) chose March 31, 1979, as “D-Day” to begin a massive distribution of 5,000,000 copies of a flyer entitled Jesus em breve voltará (Jesus Is Returning Soon). The project was advertised on billboards, radio and TV spots, while newspapers and magazine articles described the second coming. This project and several other similar ones helped to develop the outreach potential of the Church in that region of the world.

Among the estimated 140,000 church members who participated in distributing the leaflets back in 1979 was a boy called Erton C. Köhler. Almost 30 years later when he became the president of the South American Division, he began dreaming about an even larger and more encompassing project than the one he had participated in as a boy. In July 2007, at a special strategic-planning administrative meeting in Buenos Aires, he shared with the union presidents of the division his vision for a massive distribution of 20,000,000 small magazines on a single day (September 6, 2008) throughout the entire division. The overall concept was well accepted, but a few administrators initially regarded the quantity of magazines as too ambitious and unrealistic. After some discussion, the group agreed with the proposed number and supported the project. The next step, however, was to develop more specific strategies for the program implementation.

Developing the Strategies

The South American Division Executive Committee, in a special meeting held in September 2007, decided to call the little magazine Living with Hope, made plans on how each department would corroborate and participate in the project, and set May 2008 as the official launch date for the project via satellite. All administrators and departmental directors were encouraged to assist in promoting the project wherever they visited and through all possible means. The goals established included putting up 10,000 billboards, distributing 1,000,000 bumper stickers, and passing out 20,000,000 small magazines.
Several church magazines such as the Portuguese and Spanish versions of the *Adventist Review*, *Elder’s Digest*, and *Ministry* and even the Sabbath School Bible Study Guides helped to promote the project.

Crucial to the project was the production of a small 16-page magazine (14 x 20 cm) entitled *Living with Hope*, with seven short articles: “Hope to Overcome Emotional Traumas” (by Michelson Borges), “Hope for the Family” (by Marcos Blanco), “Hope for Social Peace” (by Márcio Dias Guarda), “Hope to Eliminate Corruption” (by Carlos A. Steger), “Hope for the Planet” (by Marcos De Benedicto), “Hope to Live By” (by Francisco Lemos), and “The Greatest Hope” (by Paulo Roberto Pinheiro). On March 19, 2008, Köhler was present to hit the “start” button on the Heidelberg M-600 web offset press at the Brazilian Publishing House as they began the printing of the magazine in Portuguese. Meanwhile, the South American Spanish Publishing House printed the version in Spanish. It was not long before the Church administration realized that 20,000,000 copies would not be enough to meet all the demands coming from the fields. So, that number was raised to 21,000,000, and the union conferences and union missions along with both publishing houses sponsored the printing of 26,000,000 additional copies of a pamphlet with the same cover that, however, only included the last article from the magazine, “The Greatest Hope.”

All advertising resources (billboards, bumper stickers, printed handouts, radio and TV spots, etc.) indicated one of the following websites: www.esperanca.com.br (in Portuguese) and www.esperanzaweb.com (in Spanish). Each magazine was provided with a blank space where the address of the local Seventh-day Adventist Church could be stamped. In addition to the printed versions, the magazine was made available, as previously mentioned, in audio, video, and PDF formats. The entire content of the magazine was also provided on the websites in several other major languages (Albanese, English, French, German, Hebrew [modern], Italian, Japanese, and Korean) and even in a few South American indigenous languages (Aymara, Karajá, Quechua, and Tupi-Guarani).
The entire project was presented to church members in special issues of the Brazilian Revista Adventista (May 2008) and the Argentinean Revista Adventista (June 2008). On May 19 and 20, the division administrators and departmental directors participated in special TV training seminars for ministers and church elders broadcast via satellite through the executive channel used by the Adventist Church to communicate with local congregations and their ministers. All denominational institutions were encouraged to establish their own local Impact Hope projects, focusing mainly on reaching locations without any significant Adventist presence. As the project date drew near, an unprecedented sense of expectation was building and spreading among the members.

Implementing the Project

Special spiritual preparation preceded the actual implementation of the project. In addition to many special seasons of prayer, August 30 (one week prior to the event) and September 6 (the actual day of the event) were set aside for prayer and fasting. All congregations were encouraged to shorten the September 6 Sabbath School and worship service programs so that soon after the church service members could go out two-by-two (see Mark 6:7) into the streets to distribute the magazine. A special sermon presented by Elder Köhler on the second coming as depicted in the book of Revelation was viewed by 3,000 local congregations through the above-mentioned executive TV channel and could also be downloaded through the Internet. The basic suggestion was that on that Sabbath morning a massive distribution should be implemented door-to-door, as well as at stop lights, supermarkets, malls, bus stations, subway stations, airports, plazas, etc. In the afternoon, church members were encouraged to hand out additional magazines to their neighbors, relatives, and friends.

The program included a simple and well-defined basic structure that was maintained throughout the division but enriched significantly by local creativeness. For example, the North Brazil Union Mission adopted a well-organized, systematic approach of mapping out its entire territory and distributing the magazine to every single residence in the territory under the motto “A Hope in Each Home.” A small airplane flew over the Ecuadorian city of Santo Domingo de los Colorados and other nearby towns and villages towing a huge banner with a message about “living with hope.” In the Brazilian city of Pelotas, many cars joined the so-called “Hope Rally” taking the magazine into rural areas. Many politicians were also contacted with the presidents of Bolivia (Evo Morales), Brazil (Luis Inácio Lula da Silva), and Ecuador (Rafael Correa), each receiving a copy of the magazine. The Brazilian president received the magazine from three different people, including the mayor of the
city of Petrolina, Pernambuco. A copy of the magazine was also handed out to each player on the Brazilian, Ecuadorian, and Paraguayan national soccer teams, as well as to the members of the Argentinean Boca junior team.

In many cities people decided to negotiate with the press to insert the magazine as a special supplement into several prestigious newspapers. This effort resulted in 2,684,400 newspapers being sent out with a copy of the Living with Hope magazine. Around 30 busses in Buenos Aires had special project advertising. Nearly 800 taxis in Arequipa, Peru, received a copy of the magazine and a bumper sticker. In the city of Caruaru, Pernambuco, Seventh-day Adventist young people decided to join the Brazilian Independence Day parade on September 7 with seven floats, each one representing a specific theme from the magazine. When they arrived at the judges’ circle, two young adults rappelled down and unfolded a banner regarding the Impact Hope project. However, these are only a few examples of many other ways in which the basic project was enriched by local flavors in different places.

It is noteworthy to mention that all church headquarters at the division, union, and local conference or mission levels and all church institutions selected a special time for their workers to participate in the project. From the Brazil Adventist University Engenheiro Coelho campus alone, 28 busses with 600 missionary partners went out to distribute the magazine. Within the territory of the South American Division, the magazine was taken into 1,416 places (towns, villages, and neighborhoods) where there was no Adventist presence and to 414 cities listed as Global Mission priorities.

The following Sabbath (September 13) was chosen as “Friendship Day” when many congregations presented a special program for non-Adventist visitors who had been invited to the program during the magazine distribution.

Besides the 21,000,000 magazines and 26,000,000 pamphlets distributed, 195,468 magazines in electronic format were sent out. On Sabbath, September 6 alone, www.esperanca.com.br received 17,412 hits, and www.esperanzaweb.com, a total of 3,822 hits. By September 21, the Portuguese website had al-
already received a total of 353,877 visits, and the Spanish one had 57,465 visits. Those numbers suggest the outreach potential of the Web in helping to spread the Adventist message to our globalized world.

**Reflecting on the Outcome**

The Impact Hope project strengthened the mission focus of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in several ways. First, it brought the Adventist hope to the lives of many people. For example, some families in the Amazon region received the *Living with Hope* magazine when they found “missionary bottles” floating in the rivers (cf. Eccl 11:1). A prisoner in Foz do Iguacu stated: “I want to read this magazine and learn more about God’s love. My only hope in this world is that one day Jesus will return to take us to a place without pain and sufferings. I want that day to arrive soon” (Projeto tocou vidas 2008:7).

At the harbor of São José do Norte in the south of Brazil, 16-year-old Priscila gave the *Living with Hope* magazine to a man called Assuncão, who reacted: “Why are you giving me this magazine? Who sent you here?” Priscila replied: “It was God who sent me.” With tears in his eyes, Assuncão explained that at that very moment he was praying for God to solve problems with his 15-year-old daughter Keina who was going down a wrong path. The next Sabbath, Priscila and the local church pastor visited the Assuncão family and gave them a copy of *The Desire of Ages*. On Sunday evening, the whole family attended the evangelistic meeting at the local Adventist church and began to receive Bible studies (Projeto tocou vidas 2008:7).

Second, the project was also extremely successful in involving hundreds of thousands of church members in a single evangelistic program. Reflecting on the way it spread throughout the entire membership, José Carlos de Lima, general manager of the Brazil Publishing House, suggested that with this project “the Church lost its shyness.” Carlos A. Steger, editor-in-chief of the South American Spanish Publishing House, stated that “the project united and mobilized the Church in an unprecedented way. Even stagnated congregations, which usually did not respond to other appeals, became enthusiastically involved in this project.” And Alcy F. de Oliveira, president of the East Sao Paulo Conference, added that “South America will never be the same after this project.”

Third, the overall magnitude and local presence of the project gave the Adventist Church more visibility. The Seventh-day Adventist Church was the first evangelical denomination in some South American countries to use radio and TV as evangelistic tools. But over the years, many Pentecostal denominations have aggressively used the media (especially radio and TV), so have become much more widely known than Seventh-day Adventists. The Impact Hope
The project demonstrated that there is still room and acceptance for a more aggressive preaching of the Adventist message in a world taken over by populist religious propaganda.

Furthermore, the project gave the church members the assurance that the financial administration of the church is still mission focused and mission driven. This is especially meaningful in a time when many criticize the church for investing too much of its financial resources in administrative buildings, salaries for personnel in leadership positions, and investments in money markets. As important as such investments can be, the denomination cannot place more priority on them over frontline investments without facing the risk of institutionalization. The financial investments in the Impact Hope project by the division, the unions, the local conferences and missions, the publishing houses, and other denominational institutions will have a long-lasting positive effect if followed up by other similar investments.

The whole content of the magazine was not only published in both Portuguese and Spanish, but also made available in electronic format in several other major languages and a few indigenous languages in partial fulfillment of the mission to preach the “eternal gospel ... to every nation, tribe, language and people” (Rev 14:6, NIV). After all, the Adventist hope cannot be confined to any specific ethic group or geographic area of the world.

Much of the overall success of the Impact Hope project was due to the fact that it was conceived and coordinated by the division president with the support and personal involvement of all the other division administrators and department directors and personnel from all levels of church administration. The great support received for this project resulted because the district pastors and local church members really believed in the goals and vision of the church leaders.

**Conclusion**

Erton C. Köhler believes that at least five reasons exist for the success of the Impact Hope project, namely, “because (1) it was God’s program, (2) it broke all structural barriers, (3) it
involved all the active forces of the Church, (4) it was a project coordinated directly by the division administration with support from its various departments, and (5) it was simple enough to be implemented everywhere.” Köhler suggests that in projects of such magnitude the division has to provide the basic structure and coordination while allowing enough room for local creativity and contextualization (personal communication, September 2008).

The evidence that the Impact Hope project achieved (and even surpassed) its original goals is the fact that throughout the entire territory of the South American Division, pastors and other church members were asking, even before September 6, 2008, for a similar mission project to be implemented in 2009. In response, the division is launching on Sabbath, May 30, 2009, the “Homes of Hope” project (see Homes of Hope Project 2009:2-20). On that Sabbath 600,000 Adventist homes are expected to be opened for non-Adventist families to have lunch with an Adventist family and afterwards to watch a short DVD message by Mark Finley and receive a copy of Alejandro Bullón’s book in Spanish titled Señales de esperanza (Signs of Hope) (2008a) and in Portuguese Sinais de Esperança (Signs of Hope) (2008b). Plans are presently being made by the division for a similar project in 2010 focused on the seventh-day Sabbath as a day of rest.

Such integrated projects, besides having spiritual and evangelistic potential, generate a strong psychosocial feeling of belonging to a dynamic church that enthusiastically fulfills its mission to the world. These kinds of projects demonstrate what can happen when the Seventh-day Adventist Church becomes more intentional in exploring and utilizing its potentialities in an integrative and cooperative way.

Works Cited
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