

Getting Things Up and Running: Examples from Brazil and Canada

*Periodically, members of the Theosophical Society inquire about how to activate the Theosophical Order of Service in a Section where it does not exist or is dormant. The following two interviews, reproduced from *The Service Link*, report on how TS members went about re-activating the TOS in their countries.*

The first shows Adolpho J. Silva's first steps on being appointed National Director of the TOS in Brazil in January 1999.

The Service Link: What made you accept the nomination as National Director in the TOS in Brazil?

Adolpho: I have been associated with the TS since 1962 and have always had the impression that the TOS represented an effective means of fostering, amongst members and non-members alike, the practical application of theosophical principles. I have noticed, with some concern, not to say distress, that non-members, after the initial attraction to our far-reaching teaching, attend lectures and participate in gatherings less and less frequently. It would seem that an initial 'awakening' takes place, followed by regular attendance at meetings, discussion groups, etc. and then somehow the realisation occurs that we are often still involved in a purely intellectual sphere. The focus suddenly shifts and there is the perception of what may be a lack of application of theosophical principles in the wider world.



In accepting the appointment as National Director of the TOS in Brazil, I am enjoying being able to set up opportunities for individual and group action in the light of Theosophy in such areas as healing, social service, peace activism, animal welfare, ecology, the arts and music and the family.

The Service Link: What were your first steps in re-activating the TOS?

Adolpho: My first steps in this direction were personal contacts with members in Rio de Janeiro and Brasilia to determine whether they would like to become involved in TOS activities. I talked of the kinds of projects undertaken in the different 'departments' and of the opportunity thus offered for service along the lines most suited to each of us, with our natural aptitudes and inner calling.

I exchanged letters with the International Secretary and asked her for a complete set of the newsletter, *The Service Link*, so I could glance through them and get a feel for the kinds of activities undertaken elsewhere. Secondly, I engaged in correspondence with Lodges and Study Groups throughout Brazil. I inquired at HQ about the existence of any TOS records and finally, with the encouragement of the International Secretary of the TS, contacted the General Secretary to discuss the procedure for re-activating the TOS. (The official procedure, I discovered, is that the General Secretary writes to the International President of the TS nominating a national director. The President considers the nomination and if she sees fit, appoints the nominee. It is then over to the new director to lead the work, reporting periodically to the International Secretary.)

The Service Link: Do you have a coordinating team of any kind?

Adolpho: In addition to a national director, we have two secretaries and a treasurer. (We're all volunteers, of course.) As a team, we produce a four-page newsletter every three months, outlining basic information about the nature of the TOS and reporting on current projects. We have also designed a bilingual TOS website for those connected to the Internet.

The Service Link: Do you have any plans to foster the formation of new TOS groups?

Adolpho: Yes, I have already started travelling quite widely, presenting new projects to potential TOS activists. It is early days here yet. We are happy to report, though, that eight groups have been formed so far: in Rio de Janeiro, Belem do Para, Brasilia, Salvador, Vitoria, Cataguazes, Piracicaba and Aguas de Sao Pedro. The Rio group started out ambitiously with an action plan for each department. So far, the principal undertaking there has been the creation of a choral group that puts on programmes in hospitals, schools, etc. The Rio members also regularly perform the TOS healing ritual, as do all our groups, in fact. Earlier this year, Maurilena O. Pinto, a member of the Belem de Para Branch (North Brazil), helped out with the Portuguese translation of the new edition of the ritual and we have distributed it gratis to all TS branches in Brazil. The healing ritual is promising to become our most popular TOS activity.

The Service Link: There is no doubt that certain inner qualities are necessary for sustained action.

Adolpho: What really enables people to carry on with their projects after the first excitement has worn off is probably the perception that our whole life, our dharma, is actually a mission in reaching out toward other people. This perception is rooted in a deep sense of fraternity. It gives an understanding of the ordeals of humanity and a warm and tender compassion for those in distress. Ever since my association with the TS began in 1960, I have been driven by this impulse to help allow Theosophy to benefit humanity. The TOS is a wonderful avenue for this work. Others will certainly pick it up and carry it forward long after me.

The Service Link: We look forward to updates on the TOS's progress in Brazil. All the best, Adolpho.

And from Canada . . .

In recent decades, there has been more than one attempt to start up the TOS within TS ranks in this country and now foundations have finally been firmly laid. Lorraine Christensen was appointed Correspondent in 2003 and became National Director in June 2006.



The Service Link: What motivated you to re-activate the TOS?

Lorraine: During my 30 years as a Theosophist, I have steadily grown to appreciate the importance of applying theosophical principles and ideals to every aspect of life. I have been inspired by the examples of our founders, and those who followed in their footsteps like Annie Besant and C. Jinarajadasa. Our history is abundantly illustrated with stories of Theosophists striving to better conditions in various fields such as science, the arts, medicine, education, the environment, animal welfare and social service.

Blavatsky's life was one of great service and sacrifice. In her classic *The Voice of the Silence* she wrote: "To live to benefit mankind is the first step." (Fragment 1, v. 144). The very Masters who inspired the forming of our Society were altruistic in the highest sense. We are told that above all the Masters are philanthropists.

In Canada, our own Theosophical history provides many illustrations of the social action of members. For example, the first woman to practise medicine in Canada, Dr Emily Stowe, was a founding member of the Toronto Theosophical Society. The great Canadian artist, Lawren Harris, was a very active and dedicated Theosophist. He led the Group of Seven artists who were amongst the first to portray a distinctive Canadian art, depicting the ruggedness and spaciousness of the landscape, and its mystic connection to the north. John (Kootenai) Brown, environmentalist, founder and first superintendent of Waterton Lakes National Park in Alberta, joined the TS as early as 1898.

The Service Link: How did you go about getting the TOS started again?

Lorraine: First I talked with our regional TS representative about the idea. Then I looked for records of what had been done in the recent past. Having familiarised myself briefly with what was available, I wrote to the International Secretary for information on current doings of the TOS around the world. I looked through past issues of *The Service Link* to get an idea of what is going on and how things appear to function. Then I set about creating an operating system. Through discussion with other interested members, seven areas of service were identified for members to consider: Administration, Animal Welfare, Culture (Education and the Arts), Environment, Healing, Peace and Social Service. We decided right from the outset that we would move at a slow and steady pace, keeping our plans realistic ... and joyful!

I drafted an introductory leaflet about the work of the TOS to distribute at the annual convention of the Canadian Theosophical Association in August 2003 and wrote for spare copies of the current issue of *The Service Link* to hand out at the same time. I gave a talk there on the work of the TOS. Those motivated to join in shared their ideas.

The first national project decided upon is one that carries over from earlier TOS activity in this country – namely that of promoting animal welfare. In this regard we were able to raise enough money in our first year to send a donation to the Animal Welfare Endowment Fund at Adyar.

As Canada is a vast country with a population scattered across great distances, written communication is an important part of our outreach. Under Administration, we have therefore started a bi-annual newsletter. We have also written a report on our fledgling TOS efforts for our national magazine, *The Light Bearer*. We hope to continue using both these organs to make our work known.

We decided that membership would be open to all who are willing to make a donation of any amount. We are also encouraging fellow Theosophists across the country to consider making memorial donations on behalf of deceased members. Two memorial donations were received this year.

The Service Link: All the best, Lorraine.

*There is another road, steep and thorny, difficult to follow, but which the Great Ones
of the human race have trodden.
It is the quick road, but the difficult one.
It is the road of self-conquest, the road of the giving up of self for the All,
the road by which the personal becomes the impersonal Buddha,
the impersonal Christ;
the road by which the love for your own is abandoned,
and your whole being becomes filled with love for all things both great and small.
It is a difficult road to follow, for it is the road of initiation;
it is the steep and thorny pathway to the gods;
for when you climb the heights of Olympus you must tread the pathway as there it lies
before you.*

--H. P. Blavatsky