ADRA Japan coordinating with National Disaster Office

Wilson has message of support; four church buildings sustain minor damage

11 Mar 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
ANN staff

MARCH 13 UPDATE: Seventh-day Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson today issued the following statement:

"Seventh-day Adventists around the world unite today with the people of Japan in mourning the losses caused by the 2011 Sendai earthquake and the resulting tsunami. Our thoughts, our prayers and our sympathies go out to those who have suffered such loss.

"The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is mobilizing to share resources and meet human need in the affected regions. An ADRA representative was in Fukushima on March 12, and more help is coming."
"We remember the Bible's promise in Psalm 91, verse 1: "He who dwells in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty," and we claim that promise for the people of Japan, and for all areas affected by this tragedy.

"Seventh-day Adventists have worked in Japan since 1889 and continue to serve the people of that great country. We are committed to helping meet human needs and sharing the greatest news of all: that God loves and cares for each of us, and that He is coming again soon! We call for all Seventh-day Adventists and others to pray for the people of Japan during this time of intense need."

**MARCH 12 REPORT**: A spokesman for the Adventist Development and Relief Agency said an ADRA assessment team today reached Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, one of the hardest-hit regions.

ADRA Japan is coordinating with the Japan National Disaster Office and local non-governmental agencies.

ADRA International has committed US$25,000 to fund an initial response in the country, and is accepting donations for the agency's [Emergency Response Fund](#).

The magnitude-8.9 earthquake -- the largest in Japan's history -- struck off country's northeastern coast Friday, killing hundreds, cutting off electricity to millions of homes, interrupting the region's mobile phone network and paralyzing Tokyo's train system, according to media reports.

Masumi Shimada, president of the Adventist Church in Japan, said that four institutional buildings in Japan have sustained minor damage. There are no reports of casualties among church members, he said.

Shimada said there are 17 churches, 10 schools and five other church institutions in the earthquake-affected areas.

In Tokyo, ADRA has set up as a refugee shelter at the Tokyo Central Adventist Church, providing food and free Wi-Fi.

There are about 15,000 Adventists in Japan worshiping in 115 churches.

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**Undersecretary: Adventist work in Middle East is 'varied'**

*Trecartin responds to questions on regional work; acknowledges little reported so far*

11 Mar 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

ANN staff

As major political changes grip parts of Southwest Asia and Northern Africa, Seventh-day Adventist Church officials announced today they are continually monitoring the denomination's work there, and said a report is due next month from an internal commission.

While ANN and regional denominational news services have reported on church operations in Egypt, little has been reported about work in neighboring countries.
Church Undersecretary Homer Trecartin responded in an interview today, explaining that the nature and extent of the church's work in the Middle East is "extremely varied."

In some countries the Adventist Church is officially recognized, operates schools, and members meet openly in church-owned facilities. Christians in other nations aren't allowed to own property used for religious purposes and must share space with other groups in government-recognized "Christian" facilities, Trecartin said.

In some countries, it is prohibited to operate a Christian church. "In some of those countries we have no members. In others we have no official church groups meeting," Trecartin said.

"We don't know what the future might hold for that region but we are praying that the Lord will do great things to reveal His love there," he said.

The church's Middle East Study Commission, established in October, is examining the administrative structure of the Adventist Church in the region.

Trecartin said the commission would bring a report to the denomination's Executive Committee, meeting next month for Spring Meeting in Huntsville, Alabama, United States.

The commission is comprised of officials from the world church headquarters and its Trans-European and Euro-Africa divisions, both of which oversee work in Southwest Asia and Northern Africa.

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**In Ethiopia, dozens of Christian churches, among them Adventist, burned in interfaith violence**

*Religious extremists blamed for attacks in region known for harmony*

10 Mar 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

ANN staff

At least 30 Protestant churches in western Ethiopia, among them seven Seventh-day Adventist houses of worship, were burned down last week in a series of attacks by religious extremists from the region.

Unrest was first reported on March 2 and has since killed at least one Christian, wounded several others, left personal property destroyed and displaced thousands of Christians, reports indicate.

"The level of destruction is not fully and clearly confirmed," said Tamire Shaemalo, Communication director
for the Adventist Church in Ethiopia, citing inconsistencies between reports.

Preliminary reports, however, indicate that dozens of Adventist homes were burned alongside the churches, members were robbed and food and farm animals were destroyed during the attacks, Shaemalo said. Church officials in Central Ethiopia estimate a total loss of more than 5 million birr (about US$30,000) in church property, including burned tithes and offerings, he added.

Some reports indicate the violence erupted in response to recent border skirmishes, in which Ethiopian soldiers sought to deter Muslim extremists. Others said the attacks were provoked when a Christian allegedly desecrated a copy of the Quran.

Police in Ethiopia yesterday arrested 130 religious extremists linked to the violence, Voice of America reported.

The attacks have ignited tensions in a region known for longstanding harmony between Muslim and Christians, church religious liberty advocates said.

"We are deeply troubled by what has happened in Ethiopia, where relations among religions have been relatively peaceful," said John Graz, director of the Adventist world church’s department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty.

"We hope that these incidents will not incite further violence in the region, and we encourage people of all faiths who stand for peace and religious freedom to work toward reconciliation," Graz added.

Ethiopia is about 60 percent Christian and 40 percent Muslim, census reports indicate. Approximately 170,000 Adventists worship in more than 800 churches across the country.

The Adventist Church in Ethiopia will send six church officials to join representatives from five other faith communities later this week at the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia, which is expected to survey the situation, Shaemalo said.

La Sierra University won't neglect creation teaching, president, chairman vow

Open letter signals shift in two-year controversy

11 Mar 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
Mark A. Kellner, Adventist Review

In an open letter welcomed by many Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders and members across North America, La Sierra University on March 9 acknowledged serious problems in its teaching of origins over the last several years, and apologized for not having adequately communicated Seventh-day Adventist beliefs about creationism to its students.

"We found that only 50 percent of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that our Adventist view of creation was presented, and only 40 percent agreed or strongly agreed that our Adventist view was supported," LSU President Randall Wisbey and LSU Board Chairman Ricardo Graham wrote in the open letter.

The letter accompanied the release of a Board-approved report on the controversy that has focused on the Riverside, California, campus for nearly two years.

"This is not acceptable, and we apologize," the two leaders added.
Dr. Lisa Beardsley, Education director for the Adventist Church world headquarters, called the statement "a step in the right direction."

"My prayer is that Adventist education at La Sierra University will grow and acknowledge its redemptive purposes," Beardsley said.

Larry Blackmer, vice president for Education for the church's North American Division, also saw promise in the university's letter.

"I am so pleased with the board and administration's openness in addressing the issues that have concerned the church for the past few years," Blackmer said. "I found their statements to be sincere, looking to do what is right.

"This issue has been a controversy regarding the university for the past two years, and I hope with strong administrative follow-through, with monitoring by the board of directors and a continued commitment to the core values of the church, that this chapter can be closed and we can focus on the many wonderful things that are happening on the LSU campus," he said.

A team from Adventist Accreditation Association (AAA) -- which recently conducted a site visit at La Sierra -- concluded that, subject to AAA approval, the university "should receive the maximum accreditation possible under AAA guidelines." La Sierra announced the team's findings online on February 8, but has since removed the statement from the university's website.

The full board of AAA will vote next month on a final accrediting recommendation for the school.

In its place, La Sierra has posted "An Open Letter Regarding the Teaching of Creation," in which the school states its apology, adding, "Instruction at the university, while being strong in many areas, has not adequately presented the denomination's position on the subject of creation."

"There is some evidence that students have not always been respected for their belief in the Biblical creation position," the La Sierra statement said.

In 2009, one LaSierra student said he'd felt that lack of respect. Louie Bishop told Adventist Review he was placed on "citizenship probation" by the school for circulating letters opposing the teaching of evolutionary concepts and for posting notes of a professor's classroom lecture online.

Following consultation with its Board of Trustees at a February 10 meeting, the university announced, "The Board adopted, and directed campus administration to implement, the following measures:

* Accept and implement the recommendations from the Adventist Accrediting Association.
* Develop faculty workshops regarding the challenges of teaching controversial topics such as those in biology.
* Continue the work in progress, (as identified elsewhere in the statement).
* Conduct regular follow-up surveys of biology students.
* Provide the Board with ongoing candid and prompt reports of both progress and challenges in dealing with this issue."

Moreover, the school said, "The university president and provost identified steps to address this issue that have already been taken or are currently in progress. These include:

* Ensuring that all biology students discuss key documents relating to our Adventist belief regarding origins, including Fundamental Belief #6 [and] the 2004 Annual Council Reaffirmation of Creation, and Genesis 1 and 2."
* Increased participation by the Church's Geoscience Research Institute in planning the General Biology Seminar.
* Ongoing refinement of the General Biology Seminar, based on student exit surveys and other input.
* Attendance of biology faculty members at the Geoscience Research Institute summer workshop.
* Continue the lecture series that presents a range of Adventist views on the integration of faith and science.
* Establish dialogue with biology professors from sister Adventist colleges and universities.

According to the statement, La Sierra's "biology department specifically commits to:

* Faithfully present the Seventh-day Adventist Church's position on creation.
* Respect every student's religious beliefs.
* Help students learn how to grapple with issues of faith and science in faith-affirming ways.

In conclusion, the statement said, "La Sierra University is committed to being an institution that does not just present the Church's view of creation, but fully supports it. We pledge our commitment to work prayerfully and diligently to ensure that our mission to provide a rigorous and faith-affirming Seventh-day Adventist education is carried out on behalf of our students and our Church."

Daniel Jackson, president of the church's North American Division, expressed hope at the news.

"I appreciate the expression of the La Sierra University administration and the Board in terms of their stated determination to promote the teachings of Scripture, in particular creation," Jackson said in a telephone interview.

"My prayer would be that God would give them the commitment and resolve to see this matter through in a way that will be a blessing to students, faculty and the constituency at large," Jackson said. "La Sierra University has had a reputation as an excellent institution."

David Asscherick, the Adventist pastor and evangelist whose open letter to church leaders in 2009 brought attention to the concerns at La Sierra University, also expressed optimism.

"I'm happy to see the university affirm the reality and seriousness of these issues, and I look forward to observing the implementation of their plan," he said during a March 10 visit to the Adventist Church headquarters.

'Memorandum of Understanding' positions Washington Adventist University to provide higher education at Atlantic Union College

Move responds to AUC's recent loss of accreditation; WAU satellite planned for AUC campus

10 Mar 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
ANN staff

A memorandum signed today between administrators of Washington Adventist University and Atlantic Union College in Massachusetts positions the two Seventh-day Adventist-owned institutions to work toward an agreement to establish a satellite location of Maryland-based WAU on the New England campus.
Top administrators from Washington Adventist University and Atlantic Union College sign a memorandum expected to shape the future of their respective institutions. From left: Weymouth Spence, president of Washington Adventist University; Dave Weigley, chair of the Washington Adventist University Board of Trustees; Don King, chair of the Atlantic Union College Board of Trustees; and Norman Wendth, president of Atlantic Union College. [photo: Kevin Manuel]

The "Memorandum of Understanding" is expected to result in WAU becoming the "sole provider of higher education" at AUC, a statement posted on WAU’s website said. WAU would lease the facilities of AUC in the arrangement, the statement added.

"All provisions are dependent upon approval from the required accrediting and regulatory agencies," the statement continued.

The move follows a recent decision by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to suspend AUC's accreditation effective July 31, 2011. The regional accrediting agency cited financial reasons in its decision.

Last year, AUC President Norman Wendth told the Adventist Review in an interview that AUC would appeal the decision, describing the college's case as "strong," but said contingency plans would be in place if AUC was unable to change the agency's mind.

AUC is the Adventist Church's oldest college still located on its original site.

Wendth called today's response to AUC's accreditation challenge "historically significant."

"I have believed for many years that to unite Atlantic Union College with Washington Adventist University would create a truly impressive educational institution," Wendth said.

WAU's recent enrollment growth and financial position "enables us to continue to provide accredited higher education to the community and constituents that Atlantic Union College serves," said WAU President Weymouth Spence.

Between 2008 and 2010, enrollment at WAU grew 30 percent, from about 1,000 to nearly 1,300 students.

The growth resulted from the university's efforts to overcome "failing infrastructure, decreased enrollment, $8.6 million of debt and a growing disconnect with constituents," Dave Weigley, president of Columbia Union Conference, wrote in this month's edition of Visitor magazine.

Today's memorandum is expected to prompt a "formal and binding agreement" as both institutions collaborate to "facilitate a smooth transition for both current and future students," the statement said.

"Our desire is to build upon the rich heritage [AUC has] established with a focus on the future," Spence said.
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