Church Chat: New religious study centers director wants to provide more tools for members

McEdward on the importance of member witness for growing the faith

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Ansel Oliver/ANN

Rick McEdward has coordinated church planting throughout Southeast Asia and in the United States in Texas and his home state of Washington. Now the former Global Mission director for the Southern Asia-Pacific Division has been tapped to head up the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Global Mission Religious Study Centers.
Rick McEdward is the new director of the Global Mission Religious Study Centers, and associate director of the Office of Adventist Mission. He served as a church-planting coordinator in Sri Lanka from 2001 to 2005, and from 2005 to 2009 he served as the Global Mission director for the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, based in the Philippines.

McEdward, who spent his teenage years in Saudi Arabia, said his goal is for the four centers to consistently produce more materials so that Adventists worldwide will have tools to better relate to friends of other faiths and beliefs.

The four study centers are: the Center for Asian Religions and Traditions, the Global Center for Adventist-Muslim Relations, Jewish World Adventist Friendship Center, and the Center for Secular and Post-Modern Studies.

McEdward, 46, most recently served as associate director of the Institute of World Mission, located on the campus of the denomination's Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States. In 2004, he helped provide denominational news coverage of the South Asian Tsunami while working as a mission coordinator in Sri Lanka.

He is currently completing a Doctor of Missiology degree at Fuller Theological Seminary School of Intercultural Studies, and he holds a Master of Divinity degree from the Adventist Theological Seminary, located at Andrews.

In an interview yesterday, he discussed his goals for the centers, as well as why church members are the best witness for growing the denomination. Edited excerpts:

**Adventist News Network:** Why have study centers?

**Rick McEdward:** The majority of our growth as a church, even in non-Christian countries, is really among people who are from Christian backgrounds. Somehow as a church we need to relate more effectively. So the purpose of the study centers is to help develop a sense in the church that there are some tools and models that may be available to help people relate to their neighbors and people they work with. That's the goal, to assist churches, members and institutions to be more relevant in an area where they're not as strong as they'd like to
ANN: What are you hoping to accomplish with the centers?

McEdward: First thing I want to do is work with the study center directors, learn who they are, what journey they've been on, understand their challenges, and create some mechanisms to help them evaluate their own work. Then to address the more difficult situations they're seeing around the world so they can develop more resources for church members to witness to people.

ANN: You've said you don't use the term "laity," but prefer the phrase "church members." Why the distinction?

McEdward: Because it creates an artificial division between pastors and church members. Clergy and laity are not biblical roles. The true role is that a pastor is a leader among equals. A pastor's role is to equip other Christians.

ANN: How can the church best grow?

McEdward: If all 17 million Adventists around the world took to heart to be salt and light to their neighbors, be loving and lovable Christians, I think our church would not only be stronger but would be more relevant to people of other faith backgrounds. That's the bottom line -- who are we and how we relate the message we have to others.

ANN: What's an effective witness?

McEdward: It's three things: First, Adventists having a deep faith walk with God. Two, the need to know how to articulate our faith clearly for the person who is hearing us, rather than the way we want to say it. Third, building friendships with people who are not part of our church.

ANN: Some feel they're in a battle of who's right. How do you respond?

McEdward: I'd like to see a cordial witness, one that builds a warm relationship with others rather than one that focuses on putting the other ones down. In Christian history we haven't always been cordial. Even as Adventists we don't always do well in that regard. Since we see ourselves so strongly as having a message we desperately want the rest of the world to believe in, sometimes what we've done is put others down a bit, even other Christians. That witness has not always served us well. Especially in areas of the world that are risky or where other faiths are dominant. Everything rides on the back of building a relationship with someone. If you try to drive home truth without a relationship, I think you bear the consequences of putting people off. It's a life, it's a faith, it's an everyday trust in God that makes us transformed people. That's what I really want Hindus and Muslims and Jews and Atheists around the world to understand. We can't do that unless they are able to understand what we're trying to communicate.

--Visit the Adventist Mission website for links to each of the four study centers. For more information, email Rick McEdward directly at McedwardR@gc.adventist.org.

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Euro-Africa religious liberty director dies in swimming accident

Nowak was to attend IRLA meeting of experts in Sydney

19 Aug 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
Karel Nowak, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Euro-Africa Division, died while swimming in the ocean off the coast of Australia this morning.

Nowak, 60, was snorkeling with colleagues off the coast of Cairn, Queensland. A rescue helicopter brought him to Cairns Base Hospital, where he was pronounced dead, said Corrado Cozzi, Communication director for the Euro-Africa Division, based in Berne, Switzerland.

Nowak was to attend next week's International Religious Liberty Association's 13th Meeting of Experts, held this year at the University of Sydney School of Law. It begins August 21.

"This is a loss for the religious liberty family," said John Graz, IRLA secretary-general. "Karel was excellent in his work and we looked at him as one of the best defenders of religious freedom."

As PARL director in Euro-Africa, Nowak represented the denomination as a religious liberty advocate both at local and continent-wide meetings, including European Parliament in Brussels and at the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in Geneva.

"I am convinced that all churches and religious communities should have the same rights and responsibilities toward the society represented by the state," Nowak told ANN in 2003 following a meeting with leaders of the Czech Republic.

Nowak was born December 10, 1951 in Velopoli, Moravia, Czech Republic. He originally trained as a tinsmith but later studied theology and graduated from Andrews University in the U.S. state of Michigan with a Master's of Divinity degree, Cozzi said.

Nowak pastored a church in the southern Moravia town of Znojmo from 1973 to 1978, and later directed the Czechoslovakia Publishing Department of the Adventist Church before serving as president of the Czechoslovakia Union from 1989 to 2004. He served as PARL director at the division beginning in 2005.

He is survived by his wife, Dana, and their three children.