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Hundreds of thousands follow Advent message

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Served at world headquarters in 1970s

Wilson, denominational leaders visit Adventist believers in China
Adventist Church President Ted N.C. Wilson (lower right) speaks to a capacity congregation at the Mu’en Seventh-day Adventist Church in Shanghai, China, on March 31. Wilson is leading a 10-day visit of church officials to the nation, which is home to over 400,000 Adventist believers. [photo: Owen J. Cox]

Members of the Adventist leadership delegation pause in Wenzhou, China. Wilson and his wife, Nancy, are at the center of the photo. To the right of the world church president is G.T. Ng, world church executive secretary. At far left is Jairyong Lee, Northern Asia-Pacific Division president, and Robert E. Lemon, world church treasurer. Williams Costa Jr., communication director, is to the left of Wilson. [photo: Andre Brink]

Apr. 05, 2012
Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
Adventist Review staff

Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist world church, and other church leaders, are in the middle of a 10-day official visit to China, seeking to strengthen ties between the global Adventist family and an estimated 400,000 Adventists in the People’s Republic.

“We have visited wonderful, faithful, dynamic and courageous Seventh-day Adventist church members,” Wilson wrote in an April 4 email to Adventist Review editors. “We have seen lovely churches that we own, heard wonderful choirs, seen enthusiastic young people in churches and the results of earnest mission activities on the part of church members. We have seen some of the large, modern cities of this vast country as well as the strong infrastructure and natural beauty – and, of course, the thousands upon thousands of people just about wherever you turn.”

Joining Wilson are G. T. Ng and Robert Lemon, Adventist world church secretary and treasurer, respectively, along with Jairyong Lee, president of the denomination’s Northern Asia-Pacific Division, David Kok Hoe Ng, Chinese Union president, and Eugene Hsu, a retired general vice president of the world church. Williams Costa Jr., Adventist Church Communication department director and Andre Brink, an associate Communication director of the world church, as well as regional Communication director Suk Hee Han, are part of the delegation.

One of the stops on the itinerary is the city of Wenzhou, in southern China. The city has 9 million inhabitants and 1 million Christians. With such a high density of Christians, it is sometimes called “the Jerusalem of China.”

“In the Wenzhou area there are 40,000 Sabbath keepers that expect the second coming of Jesus,” Hsu said. “They are approximately 10 percent of China’s Seventh-day Adventist membership and the second largest Christian group in the region,” he added.

China has more than 1.3 billion people and a growing Christian community. Adventists, in many cases, worship in the same church buildings used by other Protestants. Nevertheless, Chinese Adventists keep the Sabbath and embrace the same core biblical beliefs held by members around the
world.

"It is touching to see how God's love unites us as a world family and how the Holy Spirit works even without a formal Church structure and external assistance in this country," said Ng.

On March 31, Wilson preached in the Shanghai Mu'en Church and met with more than 1,500 members. In the afternoon the delegation went to the city of Wuxi, two hours drive from Shanghai, and found an enthusiastic group of Adventist believers in the Wuxi Xi'an Church greeted the leadership team with a service of music and prayer.

On the evening of April 1, a special program was presented at the Jingshi Seventh-day Adventist Church in the city of Wenzhou. At each stop, Wilson offered words of encouragement to Adventist believers.

—with information from Williams Costa Jr. in China

Adventist Church breaks ground on its first university in Liberia

Apr. 05, 2012
Monrovia, Liberia
Emmanuel Gamoe Kla George

Local Seventh-day Adventist Church officials in West Africa held a groundbreaking ceremony last month for the construction of an Adventist university in Liberia, the first denominational tertiary institution in the nation and the fourth in the church's West-Central Africa Division.

The school will be called Adventist University of West Africa, so named for its location within the denomination’s West African Union Mission, with headquarters in Monrovia, Liberia's capital. The construction site is located on 100 acres of land in Gbeh Town in Margibi County.

When completed, the school will initially launch as a junior college and offer two-year associate degrees in education, business, nursing and theology.

Government officials have previously commended the Adventist Church for its contribution to education in the nation. The church there operates several elementary and secondary schools, including the country’s only boarding school.

The development of a university there marks the church’s first tertiary education offering in Liberia, and church officials hope to contribute to national development following periods of civil war.
Shelton Beedoe, acting president of the Adventist University of West Africa, was quoted in a local newspaper, The Inquirer, as saying the university would offer a "new dynamism" to the educational sector of Liberia and that the university will make a difference amongst other universities in the nation.

Liberia’s director of the Commission of Higher Education said the Adventist Church’s development of a university was “long overdue” since the beginning of Adventist work in the country 83 years ago.

The commissioner also said the endeavor supports the government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy in the area of manpower development.

Liberian and Adventist leaders attended the March 27 ceremony, including the assistant minister of operation of the Ministry of Public Works, members of the National Legislature, and J. A. Kayode Makinde, president of the church’s Babcock University in Nigeria.

According to The Inquirer, Makinde said, "AUWA needs to grow so as to meet the educational needs of Africa to reduce the illiteracy rate and reduce the poverty rate around the continent.”

The Inquirer described Makinde as saying Africa cannot progress without education, and that Africans must mobilize their resources to ensure that they control their own destiny.

During the ceremony, a representative of the denomination’s Columbia Union Conference presented a $50,000 check to the construction project. Columbia Union is the administrative unit of the Adventist Church in the Eastern Mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

The establishment of the university dates back to 2003, when Liberia’s legislature granted a university charter to the Adventist Church’s Liberia Mission. But the project was delayed by civil skirmishes and the lack of a permit from the Commission on Higher Education. The permit was later granted in 2010 and the Liberia Mission acquired land for the project.

The school will be the 18th Adventist university in Africa. The Adventist Church currently operates 112 tertiary institutions worldwide.

Liberia is home to some 3.8 million people, about 26,000 of whom are Adventist Church members, according to local records.

—additional reporting by Ansel Oliver

World religious freedom congress to help advocates identify emerging threats
The three-day conference, set to begin April 24 in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, is expected to draw more than 800 government officials, legal experts and religious liberty advocates from 60 countries to explore the impact of “radical secularism” and other forces that are thought to erode religious freedom protection around the world.

The event comes as research shows that global restrictions on religious freedom are on the rise. A Pew Research Center study last year reported that religious freedom restrictions increased for about a third of the world’s population during the last decade. The limits were mainly due to government restrictions occurring in a few, but populous, countries.

The congress will focus on the theme “Secularism and Religious Freedom—Conflict or Partnership?” which highlights an area of increasing concern.

“For many people of faith, the word ‘secularism’ carries a host of negative connotations,” said John Graz, Secretary General of the International Religious Liberty Association, which is sponsoring the event. “They may see it as a force that’s hostile toward religion. But religious freedom has historically flourished under a secular government that doesn’t play ‘religious favorites.’”

Other issues to be addressed at the Congress include the political and religious fallout from the Arab Spring revolutions, and well as continuing fears around the world of religious extremism and religiously motivated violence.

According to Graz, another emerging threat to religious minorities is so-called “radical secularism,” which casts religion as just another “special interest group” in society, and seeks to limit religious expression on the grounds of “protecting secularism.” He cites the 2011 “burqa ban” for Muslim women in France as an example of this trend.

Among those attending the 7th World Congress are government officials and legal experts from the United States, the Caribbean and South and Central America, Europe, Russia and the Middle East, along with scholars and human rights activists from around the world.

The International Religious Liberty Association was chartered by Seventh-day Adventist leaders in 1893 and is dedicated to defending and promoting freedom of religion for people of all faiths. The IRLA has non-governmental organization consultative status at the United Nations, and affiliates and partner associations in 80 countries, and is the world’s oldest association for defending religious freedom.
In the U.S., ministries could re-locate from California’s media center

Apr. 09, 2012
Simi Valley, California, United States
NAD and ANN staff

The board of the Adventist Media Center, home to productions such as Faith For Today and It is Written, is requesting from each of its ministries a business proposal that can include the option of relocating from its Simi Valley location.

The action, voted April 3, would allow ministries to move to locations with a lower cost of living than Southern California, said Warren Judd, the center’s manager.

There is no indication yet of which ministries might choose to relocate, said Dan Jackson, AMC board chair and president of the denomination’s North American Division.

The media ministries of the division include Breath of Life, Faith For Today, It Is Written, La Voz de la Esperanza and The Voice of Prophecy.

The board said business plans of each media ministry should be presented to division administration by June 3. The proposals will then be brought to a future AMC board meeting for consideration.

The move comes nearly a year after church officials in North America met for a summit with producers, lay members and consultants to review the effectiveness of media ministries. In a subsequent release, Jackson said awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America did not match the money spent on past media ministries and required re-evaluation.

In a statement Friday, Jackson affirmed ministries at AMC, which is home to about 125 employees.

“The media ministries’ mission and messages of hope have helped to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout North America and beyond. We have appreciated the tireless efforts of the many people who have been involved with each of the ministries,” Jackson said.

Also during its April 3 meeting, AMC’s board voted to divest itself of LifeTalk Radio. That decision follows a January 2011 vote to move LifeTalk’s administration to AMC for financial reasons. LifeTalk broadcasts to about 75 stations across North America and internationally in Guam, Saipan and

Remembrance: Retzer, 90, was Sabbath School director, South America missionary

Fernon Retzer, Sabbath School Department director at the Seventh-day Adventist Church world headquarters in the 1970s and a missionary in South America, died April 5 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He was 90.

"Dad was a very positive leader, always smiling, always encouraging, always affirming," said his son Gordon Retzer, who served as president of the Southern Union Conference from 2003 to 2011. "He was a caring person who exemplifies the gentle spirit of Jesus."

As a department director, the elder Retzer was known for his creative promotion of mission. At large scale-meetings, including General Conference Sessions, his mission pageants employed spotlights, flashing colors and a dazzling globe that sparkled when the house lights were lowered. The entire production of scripts, signs and costumes would later travel to perform at camp meetings around the United States.

In retirement he continued personal witness, hosting a neighborhood Bible study. A life-long baker, Retzer would offer each participant a loaf of home-baked bread.

Retzer was born in Bowdle, South Dakota, on November 12, 1921, and moved with his family to Lodi, California. He graduated from Pacific Union College with a degree in theology and pastored in the Northern California Conference. General Conference President R. R. Fighur preached at his ordination service in 1948.

In 1949, he and his family moved to Colombia, where he served as president of the Colombia Mission and later president of the Colombia-Venezuela Union.
After serving as President of the Central America Union in San Jose, Costa Rica, Fernon became Sabbath School director for the Inter-American Division, headquartered in Miami, Florida. In 1966, he became the associate director of the Sabbath School department at the denomination’s world headquarters, before becoming director in 1968.

He later served in the Southern Union in the Sabbath School and Religious Liberty departments.

After retiring in 1986, he worked for four years for Mission Spotlight, a supporting ministry that operated from 1970 to 2007 and highlighted world mission projects through media presentations.

His wife Dorothy preceded him in death in 2007. He is survived by two siblings, Delores Buller and Harvey Retzer; four children: Gordon, Gerry, Doreen and Richard; and six grandchildren.

—Ansel Oliver contributed to this story

The ANN news bulletin is a weekly recap of news and information from the Communication department of the Seventh-day Adventist world church headquarters and is distributed by Adventist News Network.

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