Australian coroner rules dingo indeed took baby in 1980
Ruling brings relief to Chamberlains, Adventists once accused of murder

New Adventist medical school in Nigeria is denomination’s first in Africa
A challenge to meet continent’s daunting public health needs

Now self-sustaining ‘conference,’ church in Singapore focuses on recruiting
Only a handful of next generation candidates; ‘oh great, now everyone knows’

Adventist youth musicians killed in Moldova crash
1,500 pay final respects at funeral

This week’s international Bible conference set for live streaming
Sessions, in Israel, to feature discussions on culture, contemporary theology

Australian coroner rules dingo indeed took baby in 1980
Today’s ruling from an inquest into the 1980 disappearance of a baby of Seventh-day Adventist Church members in Australia could mark the final chapter of a legal saga that for years tormented the family, divided that nation and marred the image of the religious denomination there.

A coroner in the Northern Territory city of Darwin ruled that nine-week-old Azaria Chamberlain, daughter of Michael Chamberlain and Lindy Chamberlain-Creighton, was taken by a dingo from a campsite near Ayers Rock, now known by its Aboriginal name, Uluru.

The disappearance of the infant created a living nightmare for the family, who endured years of public taunts and accusations of taking their own child’s life. Some accused the Seventh-day Adventist denomination – then relatively little-known – for encouraging such heinous acts. Chamberlain-Creighton was convicted of murder, for which she spent three years in prison before new evidence reversed her sentence.

The incident became recognized internationally with the release of the 1988 film “A Cry In the Dark,” starring Meryl Streep.

Today’s ruling, delivered by Coroner Elizabeth Morris at the Darwin Magistrates Court, is the fourth subsequent inquest of the case. According to Australia’s ABC News, she noted that there were reported dingo attacks on other children in the months preceding the incident and that a dingo lair was found in the area. She then delivered an amended death certificate.

Later this morning, Chamberlain-Creighton addressed the media outside the court, saying, “Obviously we’re relieved and delighted to come to the end of this saga…. No longer will Australia be able to say that dingos are not dangerous and only attack if provoked. We live in a beautiful country but it is dangerous and we would ask all Australians to be aware of this and take appropriate precautions and not wait for somebody else to do it for them.”

Azaria would have turned 32 yesterday, her mother said. The Chamberlains divorced in 1991 and have both since remarried.
Michael Chamberlain also addressed the media, saying, “Today, I heard Coroner Morris speak for the dead on behalf of the living. This battle to get to the legal truth about what caused Azaria’s death has taken too long. However, I am here to tell you that you can get justice, even when you think that all is lost. But, truth must be on your side. I cannot emphasize strongly enough how sacred human life is and must be protected at all costs. And I cannot express strongly enough how important it is to pursue a just cause even when it seems to be a mission impossible. If you know you are right, never give up on getting it right, when the serious issue could affect the life and livelihood of others.”

The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s South Pacific Division, based in Wahroonga near Sydney, released a statement welcoming the finding, calling the decades-long ordeal “one of the most egregious miscarriages of justice in Australia in the modern era.”

“We hope and pray that the finding today is just one more step in the healing process for the Chamberlains and for our nation,” the statement said. “We hope the experience of the Chamberlains will inspire all of us to act justly and to stand up for those who are mistreated.”

Church officials also thanked attorney Stuart Tipple and other legal professionals who worked on the case for the Chamberlains, as well as the millions of Australians who stood against the public injustice against the family.

“The ability of our legal system to recognize and correct mistakes is one of the features that make Australia a great nation. The inquest’s finding today is a sign of our nation’s strength and integrity,” the statement said.

Chamberlain-Creighton is writing a book for children and a book on grief and forgiveness, according to her website. She continues to conduct seminars and deliver speeches on stress, grief and the media.

Michael Chamberlain, now a retired teacher, earned a Ph.D. in education from the University of Newcastle in 2002. He is writing about his experiences in an upcoming book.

New Adventist medical school in Nigeria is denomination’s first in Africa

Pediatric neurosurgeon Ben Carson, left, with his
A new Seventh-day Adventist School of Medicine in Nigeria is the denomination's first in Africa. The Benjamin S. Carson Sr. School of Medicine and Babcock University Teaching Hospital was inaugurated this month during commencement services at church-run Babcock University in Lagos, Nigeria.

Adventist Education and Health Ministries officials say the new school signals a growing commitment by Africans to build self-sufficiency in addressing the sweeping public health challenges the continent faces.

According to United Nations reports, Sub-Saharan Africa alone is home to at least two-thirds of the 33 million adults and children worldwide living with HIV/AIDS, yet the region accounts for just 1 percent of global health spending and 2 percent of the global healthcare workforce.

The launch of a medical school in Nigeria, while not an immediate fix, is “a clear start” toward a “healthcare delivery system yet unrivaled in Africa,” said Babcock University President James Makinde.

The School of Medicine operates out of Babcock University College of Health and Medical Sciences, which also includes schools of Nursing and Public Health. Administrators say schools of Pharmacy and Dentistry are on the horizon. The school is accredited to grant a Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) degree, the first professional degree a medical student can earn studying at a university that follows the British model of post-secondary education.

The 37 students currently enrolled in the MBBS program have been studying since January, when Babcock University administrators first requested a public inauguration for the fledgling medical school. But at the time, the official launch was prevented by yet unmet accreditation requirements and unrest after the Nigerian government lifted a gas subsidy, said Lisa Beardsley-Hardy, Education director for the Adventist world church.

“We needed to verify that [accrediting] conditions had been met. They have now been substantially met,” Beardsley-Hardy said. The infrastructure for the medical school is now nearly complete, too, she added.

Adventist Education officials worked closely with the world church’s Health Ministries to set benchmarks for the medical school.

Health Ministries director Allan Handysides, who has supported medical mission work in Africa for decades, echoed Beardsley-Hardy’s endorsement.

“I have seldom seen such remarkable progress in such short time at any of our other institutions. The team at Babcock has taken the suggestions and guidance given seriously, and the result is outstanding,” Handysides said.

“We believe that this fledgling institution has the potential to grow and reach new heights and
“We are grateful to God for his blessings and also to the energy, vision and tenacity of the team at Babcock and the administration of the [church’s] West-Central African Division.”

World renowned pediatric neurosurgeon Dr. Ben Carson, after whom the medical school is named, spoke at the launch, noting that a top-notch medical school in Africa positions the continent as a player in finding solutions for the region’s challenges.

“I am extremely pleased to have my name associated with Babcock University because of its visionary leadership and the great potential that it has to produce a variety of excellent healthcare professionals that will have a positive impact not only on Nigeria, but on the whole continent of Africa and potentially the entire world,” Carson later told ANN.

Carson, an Adventist who has used the public spotlight to share the church’s message of hope and healing, urged Babcock medical students to look for opportunities for mission-minded outreach.

“Babcock University has a reputation for excellence and in fact is considered by many to be the number one private university in Nigeria,” Carson said. “It is well positioned to bring medical care followed by spiritual care to the masses in the same way that Jesus did.”

The Benjamin S. Carson Sr. School of Medicine is the Adventist Church’s fourth medical school worldwide, and its second English-language medical school. The church operates medical schools in Montemorelos, Mexico; Entre Rios, Argentina; and its flagship school in Loma Linda, California, United States. Adventist universities in Peru and the Philippines are also building medical programs.

Students at Babcock can choose from among three tracks: one serves Nigeria, one the entire West African region and another, the “global track,” includes rotations in the United Kingdom and the U.S.

In recent years, Africa has struggled to keep trained professionals in the region after graduation. The UN Development Program estimates that some 20,000 skilled Africans emigrate every year, often choosing the economic opportunities and political stability of Western Europe and North America. The loss of medical doctors has been “the most striking,” according to agency reports.

“I hope that the global track does not become the primary track, so that this just becomes another means of exodus outside the country,” Beardsley-Hardy said.

Adventist education officials say clear paths for medical service in the region will guard against further brain drain.

“We want to train not just doctors, but medical missionaries who will go to all parts of the sub-region and give healthcare from the Biblical perspective,” said Chiemela Ikonne, Education director for denomination’s West-Central Africa Division.

“The healing of the body can never be complete without the healing of the mind. This method of training brings the dimension that is lacking in the secular preparation of medical doctors,” Ikonne said.

-- additional reporting by Ansel Oliver
Now self-sustaining ‘conference,’ church in Singapore focuses on recruiting

Singapore Conference President Johnny Kan, right, goes over last-minute details with participants of the upcoming worship service, Saturday, June 2, at the Jurong Adventist Church. [photos by Ansel Oliver]

The Adventist Church in Singapore became a self supporting "conference" last year, transitioning from a "mission." It is the only self-supporting field in the denomination's Southeast Asia Union Mission, which is comprised of seven countries. Its conference headquarters is located in Jurong.
Chuen Rong is thinking of becoming a pastor, so last month, in order to gain perspective, the 19-year-old met with a majority of the full-time Seventh-day Adventist ministers in the country.

Here in Singapore that means five.

This tiny Southeast Asian nation has nine full-time Adventist ministers shepherding some 2,800 members. Chuen is one of less than a handful of candidates whom church officials here plan to mentor in hopes that they continue seeking a career in ministry.

Historically, it’s been a challenge for the church in Singapore to employ a sufficient number of staff. Last year, the denomination here became a self-supporting entity, and leaders say the transition could have happened even earlier if more staff had been in place.

For a denominational unit to transition from “mission” status to self-sustaining “conference” status, it must demonstrate stability in two areas: leadership and finances. The later is less of a problem in this modern city-state off the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, where the average per-capita income is $59,711, the 3rd highest in the world, according to the International Monetary Fund.

But the issue of enough employees held up the process, delaying leaders until just two years ago to receive the nod from the denomination to apply to the Singaporean government for self-supporting status. Leaders hope recruiting and mentoring future pastoral candidates will keep the issue one of ancient history.

“We need to work hard on recruiting our young people,” said Singapore Conference President Johnny Kan.

The challenge is finding candidates who are fluent in both English and Mandarin Chinese, the language spoken by many older members. Of the country’s 5.3 million people, about three-fourths are of Chinese decent.

Chuen said he’s fairly certain he’ll pursue a career in ministry. Soon he’ll enter two years of required national service – known as conscription – before likely heading to Asia-Pacific International University in Thailand to study theology.

“I feel God is leading me,” Chuen said. “But you must be committed. It’s a calling for life, so I want to make a good decision and with, of course, much prayer.”

Another candidate is James Tham, a management consultant in Australia now studying at the Adventist Theological Seminary in the United States. The 31-year-old plans to return to his native Singapore to work as a minister with a focus on lay involvement.
Kan said recruiting works best when current pastors each personally disciple and train a few young people. “There must be a very personal relationship,” he said.

It’s not a standard he only dishes out to local church pastors, but one he holds himself to, as well as the rest of the Singapore Conference staff. In Singapore, conference officers and departmental directors also help minister at local congregations, something Kan wishes happened in more parts of the world.

“They don’t lose touch with what it’s like to still be a local pastor,” Kan said.

The history of the Adventist Church’s launch in Singapore is hazy. The Adventist message arrived here circa 1890, likely with Asia’s first Adventist Missionary Abram La Rue, according to the Adventist encyclopedia.

Today it’s the only self-sustaining unit in the denomination’s Southeast Asia Union Mission, comprised of seven countries. Singapore, a mere 270 square-miles, has one of the world’s most prosperous economies and is a powerhouse in global trade. Adventist churches draw many foreign visitors and sometimes an employee from a docked container ship.

Kan said evangelism here can be tough amidst a wealthy society that is about 40 percent Buddhist, 15 percent Muslim and 15 percent Christian. To serve in the community, the church operates a nursing home, a stroke rehabilitation center, two schools, as well as a radio station that broadcasts in four languages.

Though Singapore has one of the world’s most business-friendly environments, it has strict regulations on other aspects of society, such as littering, transportation and speech. Chewing gum is banned and possession carries a fine of hundreds of dollars. To contain traffic, the government imposes a nearly US$71,000 fee for the privilege of owning a car. And defaming other religions isn’t tolerated, something Kan said he doesn’t mind.

“That’s actually a good thing for our pastors – it requires them to preach about why one should be a Seventh-day Adventist,” Kan said.

And leaders continue to find reasons for why young Adventists should become ministers. Periodically, leaders will find an opportunity to motivate candidates. Former mission president Danson Ng once told an executive committee meeting that Christian Choo was considering becoming a pastor, putting a bit of pressure on him publicly.

Choo, a 28-year-old school counselor, said he didn’t mind. Not much, anyway. He earned his degree in psychology with the expectation in the back of his mind that he might one day become a pastor.

On Saturday, at the Jurong Adventist Church, it occurred to Choo that talking to Adventist News Network might build the expectation even more.

“Oh great, now is the whole world going to know I’m thinking of becoming a pastor?” he quipped.
Adventist youth musicians killed in Moldova crash

Jun. 08, 2012
Kishinev, Moldova
Elena Katova/ESD with Adventist World staff

Three Seventh-day Adventists from Moldova, along with another young musician, were among those killed June 1 when the small bus in which they were riding collided with a tanker truck on a rural road. The truck driver also perished.

Deceased are Tatiana Catana and Viorica Ciobanu, two young musicians; Olga Jentimir, a spouse of one of the musicians and mother of another musician. Her son, Andrei Jentimir, was also a passenger in the minibus, and suffered a broken leg and arm among other injuries. The tragedy also took life of 12-year-old Artur Barba, who was not an Adventist but played in the orchestra.

The victims were from the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ivanovca Noua, Moldova, and were returning from a funeral that had been held in the city of Laloveni.

On June 5, a crowd of 1,500 gathered at the Adventist chapel in Ivanovca Noua to pay their final respects to those who perished. Musicians from the adjacent village Singerei Noi also saluted the victims.

A rescue team and eight emergency cars arrived at accident scene and transported eleven wounded musicians to the hospital. Four of them remain in very serious condition days after the crash. Moldova was stunned by the severity of the crash, and media reports were filled with details for several days.

Moldova, officially the Republic of Moldova, is a landlocked state in Eastern Europe located between Romania to the west and Ukraine to the north, east, and south. The country has a population estimated at 4.1 million, and according to world church statistics, there are about 10,700 Seventh-day Adventist Church members worshipping in over 150 congregations across the country.

This week’s international Bible conference set for live streaming
For the first time, members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church will be able to “attend” a weeklong International Bible Conference of the movement’s top scholars and theologians.

While the physical event takes place in Kibbutz Nof Ginosar, near Tiberias, Israel, and in Jerusalem, live Internet streaming of almost every session will allow viewers to hear discussions and major presentations.

“Our goal is to bring the International Bible Conference to the people, and the people to the conference,” said Clinton Wahlen, an associate director of the church’s Biblical Research Institute (BRI) and conference coordinator. The 2012 International Bible Conference, at which nearly 300 scholars, theologians and Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders are expected to attend, is the third such event. The first two were held in 1998 and 2006.

The theme chosen for the 2012 conference is “Issues in Biblical Anthropology from an Adventist Perspective.” A total of twelve plenary sessions are planned, some exploring the theme in connection with the ancient Near East, the Old and New Testaments, Greek philosophy and Judaism, Christian history, culture, and contemporary theology. Other plenary sessions will deal with ministry in an age of spiritualism, creation, evolution, and human nature, and death and hell in Scripture.

All of the plenary sessions – with the exception of the opening night on June 11, due to technical issues – will be available via live streaming at adventistbiblicalresearch.org/livestream. A link on that page will direct viewers to a “program book” for the conference indicating start times -- in Israel -- and subjects of the plenary sessions.

The Biblical Research Institute was established by action of the General Conference Committee in 1975. It consists of several Adventist theologians and staff working at the world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The BRI exists to promote the study and practice of Adventist theology and lifestyle as understood by the world church.

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is the governing body of the movement, and was organized in 1863. Today, 17 million people are baptized members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and an estimated 25 million people attend weekly worship services in 209 countries.

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