Adventist musician receives a top Swedish civilian honor
‘Seraphim Medal’ recognizes ‘outstanding contributions within Swedish music’

ADRA International board votes leadership change, launches search process
Maier leaves president’s job; interim executive called

Remembrance: Ludescher was president of church’s Euro-Africa Division
Served as leader from 1975 to 1994; longtime missionary in Africa
Adventist musician Herbert Blomstedt, left, was awarded Sweden’s Seraphim Medal last week for his contributions to the country’s musical and cultural landscape. Here, the veteran composer accepts the Weniger Award for Excellence at the church’s Loma Linda University Campus Church in January. [file photo by Larry Becker]

Blomstedt was recently awarded the Seraphim Medal by King Carl XVI Gustaf. A June 15 announcement from Sweden’s Royal Palace stated that Blomstedt was recognized for “highly outstanding contributions within Swedish music.”

The medal is one of the country’s highest civilian honors. Bestowed directly by the king, it recognizes “outstanding services of a humanitarian nature or of general benefit to society,” according to the Swedish Royal Court.

“I am of course delighted,” Blomstedt told the Adventist Church’s Swedish Union, adding that while he typically downplays such recognition, this time is an exception.

Blomstedt conducted his first performance with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in 1954. During his career, he held posts as chief conductor of the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra, the Danish and Swedish Radio Symphony orchestras, Dresdner Staatskapelle and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra.

Over the years, Blomstedt has generously contributed to the Adventist Church’s musical landscape, as well as its education system. Blomstedt also used his public spotlight to share his faith in God.

“We who know Herbert personally also know how he has always seen his music as a way to bring glory to God and as a witness to the grace and majesty of our Creator,” said Bertil Wiklander, president of the church’s Trans-European Division.

“He has more than once testified to how the secret of his success is his Christian faith and, in particular, the blessing of the Sabbath, which has brought him rest and recreation,” Wiklander said.

Blomstedt was unable to attend the June 15 medal ceremony at the Royal Palace of Stockholm due to a prior conducting appointment. The 85-year-old continues to maintain an active career.

In September, Blomstedt will conduct the final concert at the Baltic Sea Festival in Stockholm.

ADRA International board votes leadership change, launches search process
Moving quickly to end months of internal turmoil and stem the loss of experienced staff, the governing board of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency International (ADRA) today removed the president of the organization and formed a search committee to find a replacement.

Leaving his position as ADRA president is Rudi Maier, head of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s major humanitarian aid agency since October 2010. Maier, who holds a Ph.D. in international management and previously taught at church-sponsored Andrews University for nearly 20 years, had been counseled to resign by ADRA board chair Geoffrey Mbwana, a general vice president of the General Conference, in a June 6 letter, but refused to do so. Maier asked for and was granted the opportunity to address today’s ADRA board meeting, and was present for questions and discussion. The board subsequently voted overwhelmingly to remove him from his role.

The board also moved to ask a retired senior General Conference administrator to serve as acting president of the agency. Confirmation of his acceptance is pending.

A search committee of seven individuals, comprising ADRA board members, an ADRA International employee, and an ADRA network representative, will begin immediately to seek a permanent successor. The committee has been tasked with conducting an international search to “recruit a sizeable and diverse pool of well-qualified nominees and applicants,” according to the terms of reference voted for the panel.

“We had a serious trend with the leadership of ADRA, which warranted the board’s intervention,” said Mbwana, who along with vice-chair Ella S. Simmons, also a general vice president of the General Conference, has been attempting to stabilize the aid agency. A surprise February 2011 reduction-in-force initiated by Maier roiled the organization by terminating 16 employees out of a workforce of 88. Another 14 employees have resigned or found other employment in the last 16 months.

“It is certainly disappointing anytime you have to make a change in the leadership of a dynamic organization,” Mbwana continued, noting that it is not ADRA board policy to publicly discuss reasons
for employee removal. “I’m encouraged to witness again the ADRA board’s total commitment to continue delivering its service with skill and excellence on an international scale. The ADRA board is focused on keeping together the team of professional and dedicated employees it has spent so long assembling.”

Mbwana added, “Most obviously, it is the constituency that ADRA serves – the poor, the hungry, the widow, the orphan – that we must stay attentive to in doing our work. As our Mission Statement affirms, ‘the agency’s work seeks to improve the quality of life of those in need. ADRA invests in the potential of these individuals through community development initiatives targeting Food Security, Economic Development, Primary Health and Basic Education.’”

The action to remove Maier and form a search committee to identify a new head of the organization came near the end of a specially called Sunday, June 24, ADRA board meeting. The agency’s governing board of 36 is composed of representatives from 14 countries, and includes individuals involved in global non-profit administration and humanitarian aid.

A report from one independent media source offered information supportive of Maier’s protests about his impending removal. Significant inaccuracies in that report, including the claim that ADRA board leadership had unauthorized meetings with ADRA staffers, have added to the confusion surrounding the agency in the last two weeks.

Maier’s refusal to resign with counsel resulted in the call for the special board meeting. ADRA employees were informed June 14 that the meeting had been scheduled.

Established in 1984, ADRA International is the successor to Seventh-day Adventist World Services (SAWS) and several development and humanitarian organizations sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is actively involved in relief and social service projects worldwide, and was noted for its relief efforts after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

ADRA International revenues in 2010, the last year for which figures are available, showed $74.7 million in total revenues and $55.4 million in project costs. The organization spent $8.7 million on employee salaries and benefits, and an additional $5.4 million on its extensive fundraising program. ADRA International offices are located in Silver Spring, Maryland, and manage a federation of country-specific ADRA organizations that obtain and administer aid grants from governments and entities around the world. According to ADRA statistics, more than 6,000 persons are engaged in implementing ADRA projects in more than 120 countries where ADRA or its affiliates operate.

Remembrance: Ludescher was president of church’s Euro-Africa Division
Edwin Ludescher, 84, who for decades served as president of the Adventist Church’s Euro-African Division, passed away on June 11. [photo courtesy EUD]

Edwin Ludescher, who served as president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Euro-Africa Division from 1975 to 1994, died on June 11. He was 84.

During his tenure, Ludescher was instrumental in negotiating with political leaders to improve the situation of church members living in the then Communist countries of Eastern Europe. Colleagues remember that his efforts helped isolated Adventists feel connected to the worldwide church.

Ludescher was also a strong advocate for education. Under his leadership, the Euro-African Division established a region-wide sponsorship program for church administrators to earn advanced degrees at the church’s seminaries.

Current division President Bruno Vertallier said Ludescher had “inspired many people as pastor, missionary and president. The church honors this man of God.”

Former division President Ulrick Frikart, and a long-time colleague of Ludescher said: “A great man in the noblest sense of the word just left us. He has marked the lives of thousands of people in Europe and in Africa. By his administrative talents, his love and vision for the church, and especially his deep and balanced faith, Edwin Ludescher has left lasting traces.”

Ludescher’s ministry began in 1948 as youth pastor in Austria, where he met Gerda, who would later become his wife. In 1954, he served as a dean of men at the Collonges Theological Seminary in France for two years.

In 1956 he received a call as a missionary in Cameroon, Africa, where he and his family lived for nearly 10 years. In 1968, Ludescher was appointed director of the church’s Equatorial African Mission. Eliseo Cupertino, a missionary and close friend of Ludescher during the time said, “Great progress was made under his direction … both in terms of development of new activities in new territories and in terms of development of new institutions.”

In 1975, during the General Conference Session, held in Vienna, Ludescher was elected President of the Euro-Africa Division, where he led until his retirement in 1994.

Ludescher was preceded in death by his wife Gerda in 2010. He is survived by two sons – Jurgen and Gerd – with their wives and children.

A memorial service is scheduled for Friday, June 29, at 2 p.m. at the Berne Seventh-day Adventist Church in Switzerland.
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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