In newest country, radio ministry coming soon
South Sudan’s church infrastructure growth, needs

Adventist Risk Management’s anti-abuse message now a global movement
The Seven Campaign finds grassroots support at teacher’s conference

Adventist Church president appeals for unity in television interview
"All of us need to show respect to each other,” Wilson says
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Ansel Oliver/ANN
Juba, South Sudan

Shipping containers here in Juba don’t just hold transported goods, they’re also used as homes and offices. Even some entire hotel complexes are constructed of the large steel boxes.

In a few months, the Seventh-day Adventist Church plans to launch a radio ministry from a beige container recently installed on the compound of its local field office. The ministry, in development since 2006 at the prompting of a pastor, is meant to connect with a community where traditional outreach isn’t possible, church leaders say.

“We are committed to share the word of God with people in this community,” said Alumai Dominic, a lay member and chair of the committee overseeing the project. “This message isn’t [otherwise] reaching the people outside of Juba. We’ll be able to reach other communities.”

Years ago, the committee requested a radio frequency from the government and was pleasantly surprised to receive four. They named their flagship frequency 94.0 Salvation FM.

The ministry plans to offer programs about the gospel, health, family and youth issues. Programs will be broadcast in local languages, including Bari, Juba Arabic, Dinka, Muro, Shiluk and Zende.

The project is one of several that the church here is planning for future development and ministry.

Development is the theme here in South Sudan, the world’s newest country, where newly gained independence could lead to much needed growth of infrastructure and industry. Poverty is widespread and most residents outside of cities are illiterate.

The former southern region of Sudan became a separate nation a little over a year ago following a referendum that authorized secession. For decades, the south and the north fought civil wars over development funds and representation in government in the northern capital of Khartoum. A peace agreement in 2005 set up a 2011 vote on southern independence, which passed by 98 percent.
South Sudan is a rapidly growing country, with foreign workers arriving daily. Many locals are optimistic about the country’s future under independent rule. Patrons in city restaurants strike up conversations with visitors and tell of their enthusiasm.

“Before we didn’t have many chances, but now we are free. We have money, we can open businesses,” said Peter Guzulu, while dining one recent evening. He said he lived in the United States for 10 years and returned to work for an NGO.

Billboard advertisements riff off the idea of a new nation. Beverage companies invite consumers to enjoy “The taste of progress,” and heavy equipment companies dub themselves “Your partner in development in South Sudan.” Even causes with little connection capitalize on the theme: “New country, new beginning. Take an HIV test today.”

Still, the new nation has huge struggles to overcome. There are about 10.6 million people in South Sudan, and slightly less than 30 percent of the population is literate.
The lack of infrastructure, such as electricity, running water and roads, is daunting. Most vehicles are all-terrain, which are needed to negotiate the bumpy dirt roads outside the inner city. It can take Adventist pastors an hour to reach a district church a few miles away. Many pastors outside the city walk for six to 12 hours between churches.

The Adventist Church is expanding buildings on its main compound in Juba. The compound is the headquarters for the Greater Equatoria Field office, a primary school with about 1,000 students, a clinic, two churches and the headquarters for the Adventist Development and Relief Agency’s national office. This ADRA operation is the largest in the world, employing about 700 staff, but that figure will slim down to about 400 with a major project ending soon, an official said.

The field’s parent East-Central Africa Division will soon build and operate a guesthouse, which will ultimately cost less than having visitors and church leaders stay in nearby hotels.

Other upcoming plans include residences for church officers and a larger field office. Currently, field staff makes do with small and crowded quarters. Morning worship is held in the president’s cramped office with most attendees spilling out into the packed, narrow hall. The speaker sits at the corner of the desk so people in both the office and hallway can see him.

“We make use of the space we have and move forward,” said Field Treasurer Philip Javaid, a Pakistani national who holds a master’s degree in banking and finance. “We still have many challenges. Our facilities for working are limited.” He pointed to the president’s computer, saying, “These are personal laptops. I’m not happy that they’re using personal laptops, but at the moment we don’t have much choice.”

The church in South Sudan is divided into three fields. The Greater Equatoria Field, based here in Juba, has about 9,800 members. The church operates 18 primary schools, and a member runs a weekly prison ministry at the Juba Prison. Each week he holds services with rotating volunteers there Saturday mornings. Prison officials said they see a change in people who attend services.

The upcoming radio ministry was the brainchild of Fulgensio Okayo, a retired pastor who in 2006 threw down the challenge of starting a radio ministry. “People here really want to hear from the word of God. If we use radio we can reach them,” he said. Members quickly bought into the idea and contributed to the project.
Studio equipment has been purchased, eight volunteers are being trained to staff the operation, and a 30-meter mast has been assembled next to the container and is capable of broadcasting to an eight-kilometer radius. Later, an antenna will be constructed on a hill outside of town, capable of reaching the entire capital city of some 350,000 people.

Still, another 50,000 South Sudanese pounds – or US$11,400 – is needed to launch the ministry, said James Yangi, the committee’s treasurer. To date, members have contributed about 140,000 pounds, he said. He estimates a broadcast launch in about three months, after more contributions trickle in. Subscribers are already committed to regularly contribute for ongoing costs once the ministry begins. Yangi said other local members will likely contribute later and compared their hesitancy to the doubting New Testament disciple.

“We know there are also Thomases who want to see first and then get excited when the ball gets rolling,” he said.

-- Steven Bina contributed to this story

-- click HERE to see a Flickr slideshow of more story images of the Adventist Church in South Sudan. Click “show info” to see captions.

Adventist Risk Management’s anti-abuse message now a global movement

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Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN

Seventh-day Adventist risk management officers are hoping a grassroots campaign to stop child abuse finds traction among the church’s 17-million member global family.

Launched last week at the North American Division’s Teacher’s Convention in Nashville, Tennessee, United States, the Seven Campaign invites Adventists worldwide to join in spreading a clear message against all forms of child abuse, bullying and neglect.

“The children are one of the most important resources entrusted to us by God, so we feel it’s important to work together with our partners to mobilize Adventists around the world -- along with our community partners -- to advocate for an end to child abuse,” said Julio Munoz, manager for client experience for Adventist Risk Management.

The Seven Campaign is the latest step in the organization’s recent emphasis on abuse awareness.
and prevention. In February, ARM launched the Child Protection Plan, which shores up Adventist Church guidelines on child abuse with practical methods of training and screening employees and volunteers who work closely with minors.

Now, ARM officials want to spur a groundswell of advocacy to further ensure that Adventist Churches, camps and clubs shelter children from abuse and misconduct.

“We want to not only make it clear that we stand against child abuse, but we want to get our members talking and actually engaged in spotting and preventing misconduct,” said David Fournier, ARM manager for Marketing & Communication.

Already, more than six thousand Adventist educators from the United States, Canada, Bermuda and the Micronesian islands have pledged to rally their students in an awareness campaign using social media and a digital resource kit that includes flyers, posters, talking points, petition forms and logos available on the initiative’s website.

“A grassroots movement such as the Seven Campaign is important because people know what’s going to work best in their communities, so we give them the resources and they can customize the campaign for their community, Munoz said.

ARM is also depending on the involvement of its partners – chief among them the North American Division’s Education department – in spreading a strong message of awareness and advocacy.

“It is our responsibility as educators, administrators and church members to make each child feel valued and safe,” said Larry Blackmer, NAD vice president for Education, in the Seven Campaign launch press release.

Other partners include the Center for Conflict Resolution at La Sierra University, Christian Record Services for the Blind, the Center for Youth Evangelism, John Hancock Center at La Sierra University and the Children’s, Women’s, Family and Youth Ministries departments of the Seventh-day Adventist world church.

“Hopefully this will become a cultural movement among Adventist membership, and with that, create upward pressure to make use of the Child Protection Plan and other child-protection resources that Adventist Risk Management offers,” Fournier said.

To download the Seven Campaign digital resource kit, visit www.thesevencampaign.com.

Adventist Church president appeals for unity in television interview
Seventh-day Adventist world church President Ted N.C. Wilson appealed to the world church family to remain united in the face of issues that threaten to create dissension and distraction.

Wilson made his appeal in a one-hour interview televised on 3ABN, a private network supportive of the church, and also carried on the denomination’s official television network, Hope Channel. The discussion took place last week at the 2012 Adventist-laymen’s Services & Industries convention in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Acknowledging that recent actions by constituent union conferences on the question of the ordination of women are “causing considerable distraction” in the church, Wilson said he would not address that issue, but instead called for the movement to remain united.

“All of us need to show respect to each other,” he said. “We need to work together in unity and submission – submission to each other and to the Lord.”

Wilson noted that despite earnest appeals for unity from the worldwide church leadership – officers of the General Conference and 13 division presidents – several union conferences either have voted or are planning to vote actions contrary to policy established by the General Conference in Session. He said this goes against the counsel of Ellen G. White, a pioneering co-founder of the Church, whom Adventists believe exercised the gift of prophecy during her ministry.

Wilson quoted White’s statement in Testimonies to the Church, Volume 9, pages 260-261: “But when, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered.”

He added that submission to the collective decisions of the world church is an essential part of living in unity. “We have a worldwide administration; we have working policies – agreements we abide by collectively to provide for a strong push for the mission of the church. When we don’t see unity in what we are doing, then we see a fractious and divided spirit,” Wilson said.

Mark Finley, a special assistant to Wilson and a longtime Seventh-day Adventist evangelist and broadcaster, added, “Unity comes as the church together in counsel mutually agrees, and as that mutual agreement takes place, and [we] put aside differences for what’s good for the church and the mission of the church.”

However, Wilson noted, unity does not mean cookie-cutter uniformity. “We do not have to do everything in lockstep when it comes to particular areas that may differ in certain particular situations or settings,” he said. “Unity helps us understand that definitely [in] the action of bringing us together
with major doctrinal or Biblical themes, and the understanding that what I do may affect another part of the body." Wilson urged that the entire world church needs to work together in items that are of great importance, including the subject under discussion.

The world church leader, who was elected to the position in 2010 at the General Conference Session in Atlanta, Georgia, concluded the interview with an appeal for unity: "We need to keep in mind the vision of who we are as a people. That God has called us to be His remnant church. He’s called us to be faithful to the Word of God. He’s called us to proclaim the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14. ... My appeal to the Church would be to keep that vision in mind. Look beyond just the challenges of that immediate crisis or situation."

Following the interview, Wilson called attention to the practice of the apostolic church as described by Seventh-day Adventist Church co-founder Ellen White:

“The order that was maintained in the early Christian church made it possible for them to move forward solidly as a well-disciplined army clad with the armor of God. The companies of believers, though scattered over a large territory, were all members of one body; all moved in concert and in harmony with one another. When dissension arose in a local church, as later it did arise in Antioch and elsewhere, and the believers were unable to come to an agreement among themselves, such matters were not permitted to create a division in the church, but were referred to a general council of the entire body of believers, made up of appointed delegates from the various local churches, with the apostles and elders in positions of leading responsibility. Thus the efforts of Satan to attack the church in isolated places were met by concerted action on the part of all, and the plans of the enemy to disrupt and destroy were thwarted.

"God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." 1 Corinthians 14:33. He requires that order and system be observed in the conduct of church affairs today no less than in the days of old" (Acts of the Apostles, 95-96).

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