Adventist Olympian says post-marathon celebration is testament to faith in God
Kirui, who once watched airplanes, now ‘flies’ on marathon track

Church officials say Pacific Union vote on ordination preempts study process
Leaders issue response; Pacific Union’s vote follows Columbia Union’s similar action

Church Chat: Adventist study abroad program turns 50, adds Lebanon
Ferreira on benefits of a year overseas: growth from South America, Asia

Adventist Olympian says post-marathon celebration is testament to faith in God
Abel Kirui offers a prayer of gratitude to God after winning the silver medal in the men’s marathon at the 2012 Summer Olympics this week in London, England. The Adventist long-distance runner from Kenya says competing in races gives him a platform to share his faith. [photo: Associated Press]

From left, Kenya’s Abel Kirui, Uganda’s Stephen Kiprotich and Wilson Kipsang Kiprotich, also from Kenya, pose with their medals for the men’s marathon during the Closing Ceremony of the 2012 Summer Olympics. [photo: Associated Press]
When Seventh-day Adventist long-distance runner Abel Kirui crosses a finish line, he drops to his knees and bows his head, offering a prayer in celebration.

The whole world witnessed his gesture of gratitude this week when the 30-year-old Kenyan won the silver medal in the men’s marathon at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, England.

Kirui is also a consecutive repeat winner of the World Championship Marathon, winning the event in 2011 by the largest ever margin -- two minutes and 28 seconds. His personal record of a two-hour, five-minute marathon places him sixth among an elite community of long-distance runners.

In a sport where athletes often compete for personal gain or national recognition, Kirui says he finds motivation in bringing glory to God.

“Every race is an opportunity. What I tell God is, ‘Wherever you place me, I will share you.’ So every time I finish a race I say, ‘Thank-you, God,’” Kirui says.

Raised in rural Kenya in what he affectionately calls a “humble” single parent home, Kirui says he learned to depend on God early in life. His mother, whom he cites as his biggest spiritual influence, encouraged him to attend church on Sabbath mornings. Today, he says his habit of early-morning prayer is an inheritance from her.

“I remember she would wake up in the wee hours to pray that we would choose whom we are going to serve in life,” he says. “Now every morning I get up very early to pray and ask God to give me strength to run.”

As a young boy, Kirui says he dreamed of a life beyond the local village.

“I would see the [airplanes] and I remember thinking, ‘I am going to fly one day,’ but then I see it is impossible for me. But then I realized that my passport to the world is running,” Kirui says.

His first competition wasn’t far from home, though. As an elementary school student Kirui placed second in a district championship race just six miles from his village. Later, as a teenager, he remembers idolizing Kenyan long-distance runners such as Paul Tergat, a marathon world-record holder.

At the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney, Australia, Kirui watched Ethiopia’s Haile Gebrselassie pull ahead of Tergat in the last nano-seconds of the 10,000-meter race. His other fellow countryman, Erick Wainaina, was similarly beaten in the men’s marathon.

Soon after, Kirui says he decided there was room for another career long-distance runner from Kenya and that he would use the spotlight to share his faith in God.

Running wasn’t always easy, though. Kirui remembers blacking out from dehydration before the finish line and dealing with injury. He says one race in particular stands out as an example of poor preparation. “I was crawling toward the finish line; the other runners were all passing me.”
Now, he trains for up to 1,000 kilometers (621 miles) leading up to a marathon. Still, he’s often beset by pain — especially, he says, in the last five kilometers (3.1 miles) of a marathon.

“How you deal with the pain depends on the state of your mind. Pain is not something that can kill you, so long as you are healthy inside your body. It is like spiritual things,” he says.

“I ask God to give me the power to overcome.”

So far, Kirui says his career hasn’t conflicted with his observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. Marathons are largely held on Sundays.

“I go to church with my wife and two kids on Sabbath and then on Sunday morning, I go for training,” he says. “And anywhere I compete, I go with my Bible, my Sabbath School lesson and I take time to pray in my room.”

Kirui also has big plans to invest in Adventist Church infrastructure in his native Kenya. Already, he’s helped establish a new church structure. Plans for a church-run school and hospital are on the horizon, he says.

In the meantime, Kirui is adjusting to the fame that comes with medaling in high-profile events such as the World Championship Marathon and the Olympics. “People in Nairobi will call out, ‘This is Abel Kirui, the guy who was running!’ The first time someone recognized him, Kirui says he was shocked.

“I didn’t think anyone knew me.”

But now, Kirui says he’s happy the world is watching. “I want them to know that it is the power of God that keeps me running. All the time, the power of God.”

—with reporting by Williams Costa Jr.

Church officials say Pacific Union vote on ordination preempts study process

Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson
The 17 million members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are united through the Holy Spirit in a common commitment to Christ and the truths of His Word, an urgent end-time mission, and a divinely inspired church organization. A threat to any one of these places at risk the unity of the church. It is for this reason that the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms the Pacific Union’s action not to change their Constitution and remain in harmony with the world church. This represents a step in a positive direction. The General Conference leadership is seriously concerned, though, with the Pacific Union’s subsequent action to preempt the collective decisions of the world church regarding ordination. Unilateral actions contrary to the voted decisions of the global church seriously threaten the unity of the church.

The world church recognizes the vital role that women play in the life, ministry and leadership of the church and encourages their active involvement. Because the General Conference Administrative Committee has already voted and commenced the most comprehensive study in our history on the subject of ordination, which will include the study of the ordination of women, the action of the Pacific Union to grant Ministerial Ordination “without respect to gender” preempts the process voted for the current study of ordination theology and practices by committing the Pacific Union Conference to a particular outcome before the study-and-discussion process is completed. It also expresses a lack of trust in the integrity of the general process accepted and voted by General Conference administrators and personnel, division officers, and pastors and lay members from all the world divisions who serve on the General Conference Executive Committee, which includes the presidents of the 125 unions representing the world church, regarding how we approach common challenges.
Further, the action is contrary to General Conference Working Policy and sets aside the 1990 and 1995 decisions of the General Conference in Session respecting the practice of ordination. The action taken by the Pacific Union Conference represents a serious threat to the unity of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church, and thus, at its next meeting in October 2012, as indicated in another recent public statement by General Conference officers and division presidents, the General Conference Executive Committee will carefully review the situation and determine how to respond. In the spirit of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the officers of the General Conference appeal to all entities, organizations, and individuals, including the Pacific Union Conference, to refrain from independent and unilateral decisions and from implementing any such actions.

It is our prayer that the “oneness” Jesus prayed for in His great intercessory prayer in John 17, and that which the disciples experienced in Acts 2, will be manifest in His church today. We pray that the result of this “oneness” will be lives transformed by His grace, united in His love, and empowered by His Spirit to proclaim His last-day message in all of its fullness to a perishing planet, hastening the glorious return of our Lord.

Ted N. C. Wilson, President
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

G. T. Ng, Secretary
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Robert E. Lemon, Treasurer
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Church Chat: Adventist study abroad program turns 50, adds Lebanon
In its 50th year of operation, the Adventist Colleges Abroad study program is gearing up for a record-breaking year. Officials say about 400 students are enrolled for the coming school year at international sister colleges, the highest annual enrollment since the program launched in the early 1960s.

Students often report that a year of college in another country was their favorite time in school; so says ACA Director Odette Ferreira, who makes a career of sending Adventist students in North America overseas.

Ferreira said that in half a century, some 18,000 students have participated in the consortium program of Adventist schools in the U.S. loaning their students abroad for a year. Colleges in France and Spain remain popular programs, the schools that first attracted California-based La Sierra University and Pacific Union College students in 1961. ACA launched the following year.

ACA is operated by the North American Division department of Education. Its 13 international programs offer instruction in 14 languages and help boost enrollment of the receiving schools. In recent years, ACA has expanded outside of North America to include students from schools in Australia and Puerto Rico. Now, recruiters in Europe are increasingly marketing the program to students in South America and Asia.

This year also saw the launch of the newest program – Arabic language instruction at Middle East University in Lebanon. Additionally, all programs now offer internships in addition to their academic programs.

In an interview, Ferreira spoke of a behind-the-scenes challenge of adding Lebanon, discussed ACA’s 50-year legacy, and highlighted new and popular programs.

Ferreira, who also serves as the language interpreting coordinator for General Conference Sessions, is fluent in several languages: English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. She also speaks some German, Italian and Hebrew.

Edited excerpts:

**Adventist News Network**: How would you describe why the church continues to invest in ACA?

**Odette Ferreira**: We need the new generation to be more aware of the need for cross-cultural adaptation, of accepting differences. This is important if you want to work in a globalized world and serve a world church, as our church is. It’s important to pick up not just the language but the cross cultural differences. I always tell students, differences aren’t bad, they’re just differences.

**ANN**: What’s the most popular language U.S. students want to study?

**Ferreira**: Spanish. Being fluent in Spanish has helped many students find good jobs after graduation. In Sagunto in Spain this year we had to stop the admission process one month in advance of the deadline. We had already accepted more than 100 students, and it’s a small school. This was the first
time we had to do this for a European school. We also had to put a cap once on River Plate University in Argentina. This is a good problem we’re having – too many students for Spanish, but it’s still a problem. We had to temporarily close the program at Montemorelos University in Mexico for safety. Even the university thought it wasn’t a good place for Americans. Safety is our main concern in the program.

**ANN:** You previously said that Middle East University in Lebanon has asked to join ACA for many years. Why didn’t the program there begin earlier?

**Ferreira:** Our main reticence for launching there was safety of the students. I lived in Jerusalem for nine years, so I know the Middle East. We’ve taken all kinds of security measures. Students have to sign a document that they can’t do tourism in the traditional sense. The ACA tours there had to be discussed on both sides and approved. The university is very aware of concerns for safety and we trust our students are safe.

**ANN:** Why did ACA choose to start an Arabic program?

**Ferreira:** Arabic is becoming one of the most important languages for Americans. The government needs interpreters, for example, and the church, as you know, last year established the Greater Middle East Union to focus on that region. This program is so new that it was approved after our catalogues for this year were printed, but it’s on our website.

**ANN:** Where do you think you’ll expand next?

**Ferreira:** We prefer to develop what we have already than to open too many. We recently added Newbold College in England. Students could go there before but now they can receive some financial assistance because of the exchange rate. We would like to have something in Mainland China, but at this point we can’t have an Adventist university there. We have a program for Chinese in Thailand, but Chinese isn’t the main language in the country. So we’re trying to see if we can do something, but being ACA we’re not looking to send students to schools that aren’t Adventist. Two years ago we added Japan. We stopped one year because of the tsunami, but we’ve reopened it.

**ANN:** What stands out for you at this 50-year anniversary of the program?

**Ferreira:** We had a booth at the Education department convention this summer and so many people came to us saying how much they enjoyed our program or for their kids. Some were very emotional. Many parents said it was the best year of their kid’s life. We’re also seeing more ACA students who are children and now some grandchildren of students who went through ACA. And many of our leaders and church administrators are ACA alumni.

—for more information, visit www.aca-noborders.org.

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