At European Pastor’s Conference, a call for relevant community ministry
Continent-wide pastoral training reignites effort to reach secular society

Essay compilation addresses legal, theological issues of homosexuality
Book from Andrews University draws from 2009 conference

Euro-Asia youth congress held in Ukraine for first time
Many come from countries with limited religious freedom

In Papua New Guinea, thousands of new Adventists baptized in one day
Port Moresby campaign draws crowds in excess of 100,000
Seventh-day Adventist pastors in Europe say a renewed emphasis on relevant, relational outreach will connect with communities there, despite the region's growing secularism.

The enthusiasm for simple, creative approaches to evangelism came during the European Pastors Conference last week in Rogaska Slatina, Slovenia. Sponsored by the Adventist Church's Trans-European Division, the conference is held every five years and highlights spiritual growth, continuing education and fellowship.

Some 1,200 pastors, their spouses and lay workers rallied around the theme, "Making God Known in Europe" during four days of lectures, workshops and worship. Thousands more followed the conference via livestream and social media.

In his keynote address, Trans-European Division President Bertil Wiklander told attendees that while many Europeans deny their need for God, such a lifestyle is ultimately "dysfunctional."

"To make God known in Europe is our great challenge and calling," he said.

Other presenters urged pastors not to confine their ministry to the pews. Dennis Meier, a pastor from Hamburg, Germany, referenced metaphors from Matthew 5 in his presentation. "As Adventists, we tend to be more comfortable with the metaphor of the light on the hill than the salt of the Earth," Meier said.

"With our established buildings and our structured worship times there is a danger of us becoming isolated," he added.

When pastors minister outside church walls, they need to be aware that their efforts and motivation will likely face scrutiny, said Adventist world church Vice President Lowell Cooper.

"A trustworthy God will never be made known by untrustworthy people," Cooper said in a presentation that highlighted the significance of humility, integrity, respect and accountability in pastoral ministry.
Derek Morris, editor of the church’s Ministry Magazine, said he found a lecture by Biblical Research Institute Director Artur Stele particularly compelling.

“I grew up in Europe, so I am aware of some of the challenges they are facing with postmodern, post-Christian people,” Morris said.

“[Stele] talked about how the New Testament uses more than forty words to describe sharing the good news about Jesus and mentions fifteen different places, such as the market place, cafe, temple, by the river, someone’s house. So the message is to share Jesus in every way and in every place,” he said.

Secular Europe is not unlike the environment the Apostle Paul faced ministering to Greco-Roman culture in the 1st Century, said Adventist recording artist and Pastor Wintley Phipps.

“I think Paul left us a theological heritage that we have lost sight of – that revealing Christ to the world around us, in us, is the true purpose of the church,” Phipps said.

Veteran Adventist evangelist Mark Finley challenged church members not to let fear of failure hinder efforts to share Jesus. “I'd rather try and do something great for God and fail, than do nothing for God and succeed,” he said.

European Adventists launched at least two new pilot outreach projects this year. In February, Bible stories came alive for community members who visited a three-dimensional exhibit in Reykjavik, Iceland. The church’s display traced Biblical history from Creation to Jesus’ resurrection.

Later, in Hungary, Adventists launched a health club and Bible university to respond to basic physical and spiritual needs. Leaders in the country also hosted “Jesus7,” an outreach series broadcast on television nationwide that they say offered lasting answers amid financial instability in the country.

Now, pastors in the region are calling for increased support for more such innovative approaches to evangelism.

“Those who try new methods need confidence and trust and a platform where they can share their experiences,” said Janos Kovacs-Biro, Trans-European Division Ministerial Association director.

“We need a lot of encouragement from church leadership,” Kovacs-Biro said, adding that health, the Sabbath rest and social justice issues such as human trafficking and domestic violence can be effective ways of connecting with a secular audience.

Training seminars for pastors to learn these new methods of outreach and service should be among church administrators' top priorities, he said.

--with reporting from TEDnews

Essay compilation addresses legal, theological issues of homosexuality
A new book of essays and testimonies addressing homosexuality is the first of its kind from an Adventist publishing house.


Niels-Erik Andreasen, president of Andrews University and chair of the University Press board, said the topic of this book is timely and needed.

"Recent developments in our faith community, religious organizations, American politics and secular society require careful thought on this sensitive subject," Andreasen said. "Andrews University is pleased to help sort out some of these issues by bringing together a range of perspectives on this subject within our church."

The book, released earlier this month, is a collection of 14 essays and six testimonies from individuals who have personally struggled with homosexuality.

"Much as it might like to, the church can no longer evade questions about homosexuality and same-sex marriage," says Nicholas P. Miller, lead editor of the work, along with Roy E. Gane and H. Peter Swanson, all of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews. "Society, with increasing stridency, is forcing Christians to confront these topics," Miller says.

Miller points to the several states whose legislatures have recently enacted same-sex marriage provisions. He notes that this November, at least two states, Maryland and Washington, will have referendums on election ballots, initiated by citizens seeking to overturn the same-sex marriage laws recently enacted.

"Consider the strange controversy and apparent outrage that erupted when the owner of a national fast-food chain recently expressed his support for traditional marriage," Miller said. "It was the same position held until very recently by the president of the United States. And the media-driven reaction is an indication of how efforts are being made to shift public sentiment on this issue."

Some in the church are trying to reshape attitudes on homosexuality as well. Recently, some
Adventists have promoted a documentary film affirming the gay lifestyle among Adventists, Miller said.

“Through all of this, Adventists must have a clear understanding of all the issues at stake, and they are significant,” he said.

Ronald Knott, director of Andrews University Press, notes that along with the biblical and religious liberty issues, the book makes a passionate case for the highest level of pastoral love and support for those Christians who, he said, “may have been lured down a dangerous spiritual path by charming but false arguments from scripture and political history, coming from outside and inside the church.”

The book is divided into four sections: biblical material on homosexuality, legal issues, counseling, and testimonies. An appendix reproduces the various official statements relevant to homosexuality issued through the years by the Adventist Church.

In addition to his teaching responsibility as associate professor of church history at Andrews, Miller is also director of the university’s International Religious Liberty Institute. The institute is sponsoring an October 6 forum on the political, religious and social issues surrounding same-sex marriage. The event will be held at the Spencerville Seventh-day Adventist Church in Spencerville, Maryland.

The forum, planned to coincide with Maryland’s ballot referendum to overturn the state’s same-sex marriage law, will draw attention to the issues, to the new book, and will feature panel discussions and a sermon on Adventists and social action by Bill Knott, editor and executive publisher of Adventist Review/Adventist World.

For more information, visit universitypress.andrews.edu.

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Euro-Asia youth congress held in Ukraine for first time

A Ukrainian singing group performs at the Euro-Asia Division Youth Congress in Kiev last week. About 2,000 youth from 13 countries met at the Ukrainian Adventist Center of Higher Education for the five-day event. [photos courtesy ESD]
Top church leaders said a youth congress held last week in Ukraine was an inspiration for those who live in free societies. It also showcased Seventh-day Adventist youth living out their faith in new, meaningful ways.

Many of the 2,000 attendees came from countries that still face challenges to religious freedom.

“They inspired us with their vibrancy, joy and freedom in repackaging their faith in the most relevant and meaningful way for their generation,” said Gilbert Cangy, Youth Ministries director for the Adventist world church.

The Euro-Asia Division Youth Congress, held every five years, convened outside of Russia for the first time. This year’s congress met on the campus of Ukrainian Adventist Center of Higher Education in Kiev from August 21 to 25.

“We wanted to inspire young people in their spiritual growth. Hundreds experienced spiritual renewal at the congress,” said Gennady Kasap, the division’s Youth Ministries director.

Adventist world church President Ted N. C. Wilson greeted the group in Russian in his address. He previously served as president of the division from 1992 to 1996. Wilson later said, “It thrills my heart to see so many young people on fire for Jesus and who are anxious for God to give them the power to serve him.”

Attendees participated in educational workshops on campus and community service throughout Kiev and nearby cities. Twenty bus-loads of youth and young adults helped clean parks, streets and railways.

Winners of a Bible trivia competition were awarded trips to upcoming denominational spiritual gatherings: the third place winner received a trip to the European Youth Congress in Serbia; second place won a trip to the 2013 World Youth Congress in South Africa; and the first place winner won the opportunity to attend the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas, United States.

The Euro-Asia Division is comprised of 13 countries: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

The division reports a membership of approximately 138,000.

In Papua New Guinea, thousands of new Adventists baptized in one day
An evangelistic campaign in the South Pacific nation of Papua New Guinea has baptized between 4,500 and 5,000 people. Almost all of these are new to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Attendance on the final night of the series in Port Moresby was well in excess of 100,000 people, reports indicate. The high turnout may have amounted to nearly half the population of the city.

Organizers say this is the largest community audience to listen to an English-language Adventist evangelistic meeting in history. The preacher was veteran Adventist evangelist John Carter. It was by far the largest audience he has addressed in his 50-year career as a public evangelist. The crowd was so large they couldn’t all fit in the giant Sir John Guise Stadium, a soccer (football) venue. Fortunately, the public address system was so powerful that many thousands were able to listen while sitting in their cars or standing outside.

A large group sat on the grass listening in the dark at another soccer field down the road. On the only night the people at this second football field were counted, there were 5,000 sitting there. The local conference hastily erected a giant screen so those at the second field could see the pictures that those inside could see. This effectively meant the program ran at two venues simultaneously. When altar calls were made, people ran from the second football field to the main stadium to make a commitment.

It was difficult to find enough pastors to baptize all these new converts. Ordained Adventist ministers who didn’t work for the local conference were called in to help. Fifty pastors stood in a line in waist-deep water about 200 feet off-shore at a shallow South Pacific beach. Then lines of baptismal candidates dressed in white walked out toward them. About 5,000 people stood in the water together.

Just as it was difficult to know how many were at the meetings, it was difficult to know how many were actually baptized. Pastors who reported so far say they baptized 100 people each. That suggests a figure of 5,000 when all reports are in.

The final program in the Carter Report series was held six hours after this baptism. At that meeting another 3,000 people requested baptism, and will be baptized later.

On August 18 the Seventh-day Adventist churches of Port Moresby could barely contain the crowds as new members attended their first Sabbath services, reports indicate.
"We had a wonderful, blessed Sabbath," said Cameron Wari, coordinator of follow-up activities. "All the newly baptized members were welcomed by the churches as part of a big family."

He added, "Most of the church leaders realized that there was not going to be enough room in their churches to accommodate the influx."

The new members were given their baptismal certificates and the gift of a Bible.

—with information from the Carter Report ministry

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