This is ANN's final weekly email news bulletin of 2012. Thanks to readers and contributors for a great year. Our next bulletin will be on Tuesday, January 8, 2013. As always, you can see stories as they are posted on our website, news.adventist.org.

- President's Christmas message includes international musicians, native instruments
  Wilson’s appeal tells of God’s love for humanity

- Wilson offers message of condolence for Connecticut shooting victims, community
  Gunman killed 26 people, himself at elementary school

- In Mongolia, this year’s land acquisitions position church for growth
  New properties to help fledgling outreach; building before the boom

- In Brazil, church diplomat promotes religious freedom with state governor
  World Religious Freedom Festival set for São Paulo in May

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President’s Christmas message includes international musicians, native instruments
Seventh-day Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson offers a message of reconciliation between God and humanity during his Christmas appeal to church and community members worldwide.

In the half-hour “Revival for Mission: Christmas Special” video – available HERE – Wilson tells of a loving God pursuing a relationship with humanity.

Wilson is also joined by his wife Nancy, who tells the original Christmas story through the eyes of a young shepherd.

The president's message also features the new music video “God’s Gifts.” The video is a Christmas-music medley with dozens of performers and instruments from around the world. Featured instruments include a Trinidad steel drum, a Peruvian pan flute, a Kenyan choir, an Indian sitar, a Chinese guzhen and an American banjo.

Producer Marcelo Capuchinho says music throughout the president's message was chosen to represent each region of the world church.

“We all have different styles and approaches to Christmas,” Capuchinho said, “but the one language we all speak and understand is music. It's the same songs praising Jesus' birth in every culture.”

The Christmas special is available in multiple languages. It is also available in various formats for personal viewings and public showings.

Wilson offers message of condolence for Connecticut shooting victims, community

Seventh-day Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson last night offered a message of condolence following a mass shooting at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, United States. News agencies reported that a 20-year-old man shot to death 26 children and adults before taking his own life.

"The tragic killing of young children and others in Connecticut fills us with great sympathy and enormous sadness," Wilson said from Germany, where he is attending a youth meeting.
“On behalf of the world family of Seventh-day Adventists, we share our profound sympathy and condolences with the families who suffer such terrible loss,” he said. “We are praying for the parents, students, teachers, and the rest of the affected community.”

In Mongolia, this year’s land acquisitions position church for growth

Dec. 13, 2012
Ulan Bator, Mongolia
Sarah Deblois and Ansel Oliver/ANN

The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Mongolia Mission Field acquired five new properties this year, positioning the still fledgling church in the region to expand its community services and church infrastructure.

Only established in Mongolia’s modern era since the early 1990s, the denomination in Mongolia has 24 congregations and close to 2,000 members. Thanks to international support, recent capital investments in land, church buildings, and plans for community centers, the church is poised for more significant outreach and, church officials hope, membership growth.

And not a moment too soon, they say. The cost of living is beginning to rise as the nation embarks upon a mining boom of its untapped natural resources.

“Mongolia has a bright future, but we believe if we don’t take this opportunity now to establish our school and health centers, later on could be too late,” said Elbert Kuhn, director of the mission field, based in the country’s capital Ulan Bator.

Kuhn said the mission field is planning to build as many as 15 community centers in the country over the next four years.

“The church must be relevant for its members, but for the community as well,” Kuhn said. “We want to make a difference where we are established.”

Evangelism outreach is slowly yielding results. A dedication ceremony of an Adventist church in the Övörkhangai province in October was the first time an Adventist congregation was officially organized in the country in eight years. And next month, the Amazing Grace Adventist Church in Ulan Bator will be completed and dedicated.

This year, the mission field acquired a 600 square-meter plot of land in the Khentii province, east of
the capital, and a 500 square-meter lot in the Arkhangai province, west of the capital. The mission field also purchased a lot and a building in Erdenet City, the second largest city by population with the largest per capita purchasing power. The city is home to several major factories and is a hub for copper mining.

Adventist work among Mongol people began in 1926 by Russian missionaries operating from Manchuria, China, according to the Adventist Encyclopedia. A few years later, an American missionary worked to establish a mission headquarters and a clinic. He returned to the United States in the late 1930s, and World War II prevented further work in the region.

Adventist work wasn’t reestablished in Mongolia until the early 1990s after the end of socialist rule, which opened the country to religious expression. Volunteers from the supporting ministry Adventist Frontier Missions came to Mongolia in 1990, and the Adventist Church’s Mongolia Mission Field was formally organized in 1997 under the Northern Asia-Pacific Division.

Christianity is relatively new in Mongolia. About half of Mongolians are Buddhist and more than a quarter are atheist. Shamanism beliefs are also widespread. Society today, though, is largely secular, Kuhn said. Under earlier Soviet influence, the government conducted campaigns to dissuade young people in the region from participating in religious activities. That influence remains, he said.

Kuhn, 43, worked for the church in Mongolia from 2003 to 2009 before returning to his native Brazil. In January, while working as an associate Ministerial Association secretary for the South American Division, he received a call to return and serve as director of the church in Mongolia.

Much of the recent capital development, Kuhn said, is the result of a partnership between the mission field and the denomination’s Australia Union. The new Munkhinn Geree Church was built largely on the foundation of five years of work by volunteers from the Western Australian Conference. Beginning in 2006, they sent groups who built playgrounds, organized sports for youth, and delivered lectures on health and Bible study.

Weekly church attendance at the Munkhinn Geree Church is about 60, and the sanctuary can hold about 120.

Kuhn said an Australian developer is volunteering to help build the future community centers, with additional funding from donors.

A future step in the development of the field would be to hand over leadership to native Mongolians, said the Brazilian, Kuhn. His predecessor was an Australian.

“We want to try our best to ground our church by preparing local leaders who can take care of the church themselves as soon as possible,” he said.

**In Brazil, church diplomat promotes religious freedom with state governor**
São Paulo state governor Geraldo Alckmin welcomed the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s top public affairs leader Monday, five months ahead of a large-scale celebration of religious liberty the church will sponsor.

John Graz, director of the Adventist world church’s Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department, visited with state and city leaders last week to finalize preparations for the World Festival of Religious Freedom, scheduled for May 25 in São Paulo.

The city of São Paulo’s vice mayor, Nadia Champion, said she welcomed the coming event “with great enthusiasm.”

“São Paulo is the most suitable place to welcome people who bring this message of tolerance and religious freedom as a value important to modern society,” she said.

While Graz and local Adventist Church leaders complimented Brazil on its religious freedom, they also urged Brazil to do more. In a speech to church leaders in Brasilia the previous week, Graz called on national leaders to speak out more on issues of religious freedom in international forums, such as the United Nations. The rise of Brazil politically and economically would give the country more influence in such forums Graz said.

“Today, at least 70 percent of the world’s population lives in countries with serious religious restrictions,” Graz told attendees at the Brasilia Higher Education Institution auditorium.

He also highlighted the Adventist Church’s attempts to support two members imprisoned on unfounded charges in the West African nation of Togo. South America has had a large rate of participation in awareness campaigns for the two men. Graz said Brazil could be even more “politically engaged” on behalf of religious freedom.

Still, Brazil has enacted strong measures supporting religious freedom in the diverse nation. Luigi Braga, general counsel for the Adventist Church’s South American Division, praised existing legal measures, including a dedicated telephone line that allow people to report abuses of religious freedom and other human rights offenses.

Next year’s religious freedom festival is the second such “world” festival. A similar one was held in Peru in 2009. The event’s coordinator, Edson Rosa, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director for the South American Division, said such events help raise awareness about the importance of tolerance for different ways of worship. The large-scale celebrations also offer thanks to countries that protect religious liberty, he said.
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