Newly released footage shows family of imprisoned pastor in Togo
Video part of ongoing diplomatic efforts to gain petition signatures for release

In Romania, Adventists launch 'Freedom Caravan' to defend religious liberty
Eyes on potential constitutional changes later this year

U.S. court gives green light for Adventist's workplace discrimination trial
Bus driver was terminated for Sabbath absences despite notification

Publishing work was central to early Adventist Church
Magazine, cut with penknife, united Sabbatarian Adventists
A new video featuring the family of a Seventh-day Adventist pastor imprisoned in Togo was published on YouTube by the church’s world headquarters last week, the latest step effort to obtain signatures petitioning the government for his release.

The move is part of ongoing diplomatic efforts to secure the release of Antonio Monteiro from detention on unsupported charges, church leaders said.

Church leaders said they are hoping to obtain 1 million signatures to the petition, which will be brought to government officials.

The Adventist Church for the first time is showing the pictures of his wife and family to help church and community members worldwide understand the importance of signing the online petition, said Williams Costa Jr., Communication director for the Adventist world church.

“They are part of our family and we want people to understand how much they are suffering by missing a husband and father,” Costa said. “We’re asking all members and those who support justice to join the petition.”

The petition and the video are at the website pray4togo.com.

Monteiro has been in prison for more than one year. Togolese government officials last month rejected the Adventist Church’s fifth request for Monteiro’s release, according to a lawyer from the church’s Sahel Union Mission working closely on the case.

Monteiro was detained for conspiracy to commit murder after a Togolese man implicated him and two other Christians, one an Adventist, as conspirators in an alleged criminal ring that trafficked human blood. The witness had earlier confessed to the murder of some 20 young girls, claiming he was only carrying out orders.

However, the witness has a documented history of mental instability and his statement is widely considered unreliable, a representative from the National Commission of Human Rights in Togo said.

Evidence and testimony additionally suggest that the statement implicating Monteiro was obtained under duress.

Church leaders said the witness met Monteiro when the pastor previously ministered to him.

A native of Cape Verde, Monteiro had since 2009 served as the church’s Sabbath School and Personal Ministries director for the Sahel Union Mission, headquartered in Lomé. A police search of Monteiro’s home and local church headquarters shortly after his arrest failed to produce any evidence
of his connection to the case.

Public pressure to solve the string of murders last year likely thwarted his release and exoneration, church officials said. Prior to Monteiro’s arrest, human rights groups and a local women’s coalition accused Togolese police of not doing enough to solve the crimes.

Previous appeals coordinated by the church have included the mailing of hundreds of Christmas cards to Monteiro, a worldwide day of prayer and a press conference in Lomé, as well as ongoing diplomatic efforts.

In Romania, Adventists launch ‘Freedom Caravan’ to defend religious liberty

*Religious freedom proponents from six faith groups, along with government officials, met in Lugoj, Romania, last month as part of the Freedom Caravan 2013, an initiative to promote greater understanding of the need for freedom of conscience. The group met with delegations and addressed university classes in more than 20 cities. [photos courtesy RUC]*
As Romanian legislators consider changes to the national constitution, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is sponsoring a mass promotion of religious liberty with a marathon of town hall meetings, university lectures and inter-faith consultations.

In the Eastern European nation, where more than 85 percent of the population identifies with the Eastern Orthodox faith, Adventists are aiming to promote to key audiences the importance of religious liberty. The self-titled “Freedom Caravan 2013” of church and legal experts held events in more than 20 cities last month.

“Even though Romania has taken important steps in promoting religious liberty, we must stay alert to make sure that the principles of religious liberty stay untainted,” said Nelu Burcea, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director for the Adventist Church’s Romania Union Conference.

Main changes to the constitution could include revising the president’s role and the prime minister’s method for nominating the president.

But a few activists are also calling for the Orthodox Church to become the national religion. Though experts say this proposal isn’t likely to become law, Romania’s constitution up until 1923 did mentioned the Orthodox Church as the country’s official church. Various attempts over the years to reinstate the church as the state religion were rejected by parliament.

Media reports indicate that a national referendum on constitutional changes won’t take place until autumn.

“We are now analyzing each proposal and we are monitoring the situation so that we can have a prompt reaction and appropriate action if necessary,” Burcea said.

At one stop during the caravan initiative – at the University of Craiova Law School – representatives of the International Religious Liberty Association presented the organization’s latest “Fides et Libertas” translated into Romanian. The book is a collection of articles from experts promoting mutual understanding among the world’s various faith groups.

For two years, the book has spearheaded the Adventist Church’s religious liberty efforts and has been presented in universities and libraries.

Some participants of the initiative said the country could further strengthen freedom of conscience with the upcoming constitutional change and called on the country to affirm freedom of belief for all religions.

“Romania should give a serious thought to introducing a comprehensive religious liberty law which
would guarantee religious liberty for all people, all denominations, so that no church could be underprivileged,” said Greg Hamilton, president of the United States’ Northwest Religious Liberty Association, based in Ridgefield, Washington.

Romania has approximately 21 million people. There are about 67,000 Adventist Church members in Romania.

Romania has one of the Adventist world church’s highest broadcast penetrations through the outreach of Hope Channel subsidiary Speranta TV, which is viewable in approximately 80 percent of Romanian households. Adventist radio is also widely available throughout the country.

The International Religious Liberty Association is scheduled to hold a Freedom of Conscience conference in June to coincide with the release of the “Journal for Freedom of Conscience,” an 800-page publication with input from Romanian legal and political experts. The publication, Burcea said, is the first broad-reaching local attempt to focus on freedom of religion and belief from various perspectives.

U.S. court gives green light for Adventist’s workplace discrimination trial

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Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
Ansel Oliver/ANN

A Seventh-day Adventist school bus driver in the U.S. state of Louisiana has won the right from a federal appeals court to proceed with a workplace discrimination case over his observance of Sabbath.

Robert Antoine last week was granted a unanimous decision from a three-judge panel at the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in New Orleans against his former employer First Student Inc., the largest school bus company in North America.

Though he had informed his supervisors of his request to not work on Friday nights, the court found that First Student had not followed up on its offer of swapping his shift. He gave proper notice for his Friday night absences, but was later terminated for absenteeism.

A district court dismissed the case, in which Antoine filed suit in January of 2010, in November of 2011. Last week’s ruling by the higher appeals court means the case can now move forward.
“This demonstrates how hard it can be for a person to just get a trial,” said Todd McFarland, who serves as an associate general counsel for the Adventist Church’s world headquarters and argued the case for Antoine in September. “A lot of times just getting a trial is half the battle.”

Seventh-day Adventists observe the biblical Sabbath from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday.

Federal employment law in the United States says an employer must make “reasonable accommodations” for the religious observances of employees, as long as it doesn’t have to “incur undue hardship.”

First Student did not respond to a request for comment.

The Fifth Circuit, one of 13 U.S. federal appeals courts, is located in New Orleans and has jurisdiction for the states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

McFarland says the church’s Office of General Counsel routinely assists with workplace discrimination cases regarding Sabbath observance and files friend of the court briefs in support of people of other faiths.

Publishing work was central to early Adventist Church

Uriah Smith, right, and other Adventist publishing leaders reenact in the 1890s the early days of the church’s publishing ministry. [photos courtesy Office of Archives, Statistics and Research]
The first edition of “The Present Truth” published in July of 1849. The magazine was instrumental in uniting early Sabbatarian Adventists and is today known as the “Adventist Review.”
April 10, 2013
Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN

Editor’s note: This story is part of a series of historical articles published this year marking the 150th anniversary of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In July of 1849, James White packed copies of “The Present Truth” into a borrowed carpetbag and trekked eight miles to the post office in Middletown, Connecticut, United States. He was taking the first steps toward what would become a global publishing ministry.

Weeks before, the young, penniless Seventh-day Adventist Church pioneer had persuaded a local publisher to print 1,000 copies of the first issue of what is known today as “Adventist Review” magazine. White convinced the publisher that donations from Sabbatarian Adventists scattered across the U.S. Northeast would trickle in to cover the $64.50 printing costs. He was right.

“When God is behind something, what seems impossible is really only an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to work a miracle,” said Wilmar Hirle, current associate director for the world church’s Publishing Ministries.

That magazine grew into what Adventist historian George Knight called “probably the most effective instrument in both gathering and uniting the body of believers who would become the Seventh-day Adventists in the 1860s.”

In the 1840s, there were only a few hundred Sabbatarian Adventists, but that number grew to 3,500 by 1863 when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was officially established. Early church periodicals not only spurred evangelism, but they also provided a sense of spiritual community among early believers. Later on, publishing extended to lay ministry opportunities traditionally limited to pastors.

By 1844, when the Millerites wrongly expected the Second Coming of Christ, early believers had already distributed an “astonishing” 8 million pieces of literature, Hirle said. Boston, Massachusetts publisher Joshua Himes printed the Sabbath tracts and charts illustrating the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation that accompanied William Miller’s sermons in small churches throughout the U.S. Northeast.

An early Washington hand press. The machine took three days to produce one copy of “The Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald.”

Adventist missionary Arthur Carscallen established African Herald Publishing in 1913. Carscallen was one of dozens of church leaders who helped expand Adventism worldwide through publishing ministries.
But it wasn’t until 1848, after early church pioneer and prophet Ellen White was shown in vision that her husband, James, should launch a magazine that the Adventist publishing ministry began in earnest.

In the vision, White said God instructed James to “print a little paper and send it out to the people.” Despite the couple’s financial struggles, White said she had been assured that, with faith, the paper would eventually be “like streams of light that went clear round the world” (“Life Sketches”, pg. 125).

Early issues of “The Present Truth” were a platform for church leaders to clarify what had happened in 1844, discuss emerging doctrines such as the Three Angels Messages and, above all, unpack the Sabbath truth. Indeed, it was the seventh-day Sabbath that prompted the church to launch its first publishing house.

James and Ellen White, among other early church founders, grew increasingly concerned that a magazine proclaiming the Sabbath was being printed by a publisher who often worked on Saturday, Hirle said.

So, in 1853, early Adventists voted to establish a publishing house in New York. It was a house in the truest sense — early publishing leaders lived and worked together in a rented home in Rochester. Adventist pioneer Hiram Edson, who had recently sold his farm, lent the proceeds to purchase a Washington hand press. The machine took three days to produce one copy of what was then called “The Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald.”

With no money to buy a paper cutter, Adventist pioneer Uriah Smith is said to have trimmed the edges of magazines with his penknife. Years later, Smith wrote, “We blistered our hands in the operation, and often the tracts in form were not half so true and square as the doctrines they taught.”

By 1855, the church’s publishing ministry had moved to Battle Creek, Michigan, and Smith, at age 23, was serving as editor, a role he would maintain in some capacity throughout his life.

As the church’s publishing ministry continued to grow in the mid-1800s, young Canadian immigrant George King developed the idea of subscription sale of Adventist publications. He was looking for a new ministry outlet after James White urged him to explore a career beyond the traditional role of pastor.

“James asked him to preach a sermon. It was a disaster,” said Hirle. “So he started literature evangelism.”

George King’s efforts to preach from house to house, rather than from the pulpit, in the U.S. and Canada helped grow Adventism into a global denomination. By the late 1870s, King was selling books and subscriptions to magazines such as “Signs of the Times.”

By 1903, the Adventist Church had reached 70 of the world’s countries. “In many of those places, [the church] established a presence because a literature evangelist was leading,” Hirle said.

Later, the church’s literature evangelism ministry would expand to include the first student literature evangelists in the early 1900s. Today, more than 20,000 Adventist students worldwide still spend their school breaks selling books to help cover tuition costs and share the Adventist message of hope.

Just as literature evangelism has grown, so has the church’s publishing ministry, which still remains at
the “core” of Adventism, Hirle said.

Most recently, the Adventist Church embarked on a massive worldwide distribution of a modern adaptation of “The Great Controversy,” a book by Ellen White that highlights small groups of people who preserved an authentic form of Christianity throughout history. Church members worldwide distributed 100 million copies in 12 months.

Hirle said early church publisher James White, who, during thirty years of writing, printing and establishing publishing houses worldwide, often struggled to find support and overcome financial challenges, would likely be surprised to see how publishing is now widely supported in the church.

“If he could see publishing houses that print in a day what he was spending a year to print, I think he would be very happy,” he said.

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