Adventists part of response in Bangladesh factory collapse disaster
Trained youth were some of first on scene, rescued four survivors

Church Chat: Former Adventist Church president reflects on ‘Let’s Talk’ conversations
Those asking ‘difficult questions’ today are tomorrow’s leaders, Paulsen says

Adventists in Cuba use baseball as outreach tool
Popular sport draws notice as players pray before games
Seventh-day Adventists were some of the first responders to a commercial factory building collapse in Savar, Bangladesh, that has captured international media attention and sparked debate over building standards.

Ten Adventist youth trained in earthquake preparedness and potential building collapse situations were some of the first onsite after the Wednesday, April 24 collapse and helped bring out 30 victims, four of whom were still alive.

Another group of 125 Adventist young people went to the disaster site on Saturday, April 27 to assist rescue teams. The group helped recover three women as well as several bodies. They also provided food and water to survivors.

The eight-story commercial building is known as Rana Plaza and is located approximately 45 kilometers from the capital city of Dhaka.

The building housed five garment factories, production lines, banks and hundreds of shops. An estimated 3,500 people were in the building at the time of the collapse, the majority of whom were female factory workers under the age of 25. To date, approximately 400 bodies have been recovered and 2,444 injured people have been rescued, but hundreds are still unaccounted for.

ADRA Bangladesh also responded promptly by providing oxygen tanks, masks, flashlights, hammers, shovels and other tools as preliminary assistance. According to director Serpa Santana Landerson, ADRA Bangladesh is planning to donate cash to the Prime Minister’s Relief Fund after committee approval is received.

During an April 26 Adventist Youth evening meeting, young people spontaneously collected Taka 12,100 (approximately USD$160) for the victims.

Reports have confirmed that at least one Adventist, a boy named Bitu Baroi, who was working in one of the garment factories, is still missing. His mother works at Pollywog, an Adventist-sponsored handicraft industry located on the Adventist Church’s Bangladesh Adventist Union Mission campus.

The disaster area is about 20 kilometers from the union office.

The garment industry is a major foreign currency earner in Bangladesh and the biggest industry in the country. Bangladesh is the second largest garment exporter country in the world after China. There are more than 5,000 such factories in Bangladesh, mainly in Dhaka and Chittagong regions. And that number only counts factories registered with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporting Association. There are hundreds more not under this umbrella.
There are about six million factory workers, mostly women, employed directly in this industry.

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### Church Chat: Former Adventist Church president reflects on ‘Let’s Talk’ conversations

A new book by retired Seventh-day Adventist world church President Jan Paulsen amplifies the questions, concerns and best hopes of hundreds of young people.

Paulsen, who prioritized ministry to youth and young adults during his administration, is widely known for the “Let’s Talk” television broadcasts — a series of some 30 live, unscripted discussions that spanned seven years and a dozen countries.

“Let’s Talk: Conversations With Young Adventists About Their Church” reflects on the ideas sparked by those conversations, but more importantly, Paulsen says, the book is meant to kindle a lasting dialogue between generations of Adventists.

Each chapter begins with edited samples of questions young people asked Paulsen, either during the “Let’s Talk” broadcasts or on the accompanying website. Reflection on the issues and ideas raised follows; then comes “conversation starters” designed to spur further discussion. Paulsen says he envisions groups of Adventists — young and old alike — gathering regularly to have these conversations, carving out a space to move forward together as a church.

Paulsen, who served as Adventist world church president from 1999 to 2010, made appeals early in his administration to officials from all the church’s world divisions, calling on them to “change the pattern” of church leadership and elect a quota of young delegates. Later on, Paulsen spearheaded efforts to include more young adults on the church’s highest decision-making body, the 300-member Executive Committee.

In a recent interview, Paulsen reflected on these efforts, the “Let’s Talk” conversations, and shared the lessons he hopes the church will continue to embrace in the coming years. Edited excerpts:

**Adventist News Network:** What struck you most when you began this series of conversations with young people?

**Jan Paulsen:** I learned very quickly that although some of their questions may seem frivolous, or
superficial, in their hearts they cared very deeply for the church. It was clear to me that they were concerned with big issues as well. They want their church to look good and to be effective.

**ANN:** What is the single most important thing older Adventists can do to engage young believers?

**Paulsen:** Talk to them. And keep the conversation going. When people do not talk to each other, what happens? They walk away from each other. And a second thought—the church needs to find ways to trust its young adults. They are bright, they are full of energy, they have spiritual gifts, they would like for that to flow into the life of the church. They are not reluctant; they’re just frustrated that it doesn’t happen. I say, trust them enough to give them space to make mistakes.

**ANN:** Are there steps young people should take to encourage this relationship of trust?

**Paulsen:** When people do not communicate, caricatures appear. And yes, that goes both ways. Older members have a number of very legitimate concerns that it’s helpful for the young people to understand. So they need to be drawn into that sense of conversation, the sharing of time, the sharing of agenda, the sharing of concerns. Because it is very much a two-way process.

**ANN:** What’s one of the key areas you were regularly questioned about?

**Paulsen:** One of the issues which young people find hard to understand is by what criteria do we maintain standards—say, jewelry, makeup, dress, you name it. So if I buy something that I hang around my neck, many older ones will say, “That’s wrong,” not only because it’s decorative, but because I have wasted money on it. But some older ones will go out and buy much more expensive clothes and cars, and the young person asks, “Who wasted more money here? Is there a consistent standard?” It’s not that they are probing so much to find fault with the older ones, but that they would like to see consistency that they can then demonstrate themselves. It’s a difficult one.

**ANN:** In your book, you call the rate at which young people are leaving the church “catastrophic.” Other Adventists might say the rate of evangelism in some parts of the world is equally troubling. How do you convince a church with limited time and resources that the youth are a valid mission field?

**Paulsen:** First of all, they’re part of our family. To me, that is a huge factor. If they’re part of my family, God has told us—and our prophet [church co-founder Ellen G. White] has reminded us many times—of the huge responsibility we have to our families. So I’ve got to make it a priority to look after the children and young people in my church. They are my family. We’ll do everything we can [in other mission fields], but if we do not attend to this one, we will be judged harshly, I fear. And furthermore, young people make up 50 percent of our church. Sometimes I ask myself, “What’s this church going to look like if we’re still here 30, 40 years from now?” Those who ask me the difficult questions today are going to be the senior members of our church then.

**ANN:** During a year in which the church is observing 150 years of ministry, we’re reminded of just how young many of our pioneers were. Why aren’t we seeing this many prominent young leaders today?

**Paulsen:** I think you can go back even further. The disciples and our Lord himself were under 30. I say in my book that the stumbling block is that young people don’t have experience. But experience is an overrated value. I would value higher than experience, the right attitude, the makeup of the person, her basic personality, is he a kind person? Kindness is a huge value. Some people are by nature difficult, even argumentative. It’s difficult to come across consideration and generosity. These are qualities, which to me are of critical importance to the function of the church. Experience you will
always gain along the way as you do the job. There is no other way of getting it. I would urge our leaders to find a young person who is willing, who cares for the church, who loves the Lord, who would like to be engaged, and let them loose. After all, we believe, do we not, that the Holy Spirit has been poured out on them. What does Acts two say? That in the last days, the Holy Spirit would be poured out on your sons and daughters.

**ANN:** The church has recently made some efforts to include more young people in top decision-making roles. I’m thinking specifically of the young adult delegates that represented the church at the 2005 and 2010 General Conference sessions. Do you see this as the way forward?

**Paulsen:** I think it is important, but it’s more like the church is sending a signal through this. I think it is much more important to see this level of engagement at the local church level. I would like to see enough trust present that those who are more advanced in years are willing to vote for young adults to carry elected responsibilities in the local church. Furthermore, I think that at certain local boards, such as conference executive committees or the board of a school or institution, that efforts be made to hand pick young professionals—people who are in their mid-20s to mid-30s, people who are already working professionals, and who have a perspective and insight that they can bring to the benefit of the institution.

**ANN:** What about the “Let’s Talk” series do you think most connected with Adventist young people worldwide?

**Paulsen:** I discovered that the important thing was not necessarily the answers. Yes, young people expected some answers, but of greater importance was the fact that they could talk to a church leader about these things. And there were times where I said, “I don’t know.” Or when they would ask, and I would answer, “What do you think?” and gain a new perspective. So it was the dynamics of that conversation, which I think was important for them. I think also there was a certain appeal in the medium of television. This was an opportunity to talk to the wider church. And it was wonderfully fulfilling for me. It was a joy to be with them, a joy to see how they think and what they are able to engage in. So many times, I would at the end of a conversation sit back and think, “What an incredible family we have.” And I vowed to myself that I would address rights and wrongs, but I would never sit in judgment of them.

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Adventists in Cuba use baseball as outreach tool
What would you do to attract young people to church, particularly in a nation where overt witnessing is difficult?

How about a game of baseball?

That’s the recent experience of Seventh-day Adventists in Cuba, where baseball has long been a popular sport. Starting, and growing, a league of baseball teams is bringing newcomers to the church, local leaders say.

In Cuba, baseball is a highly regarded sport: the country has its own amateur league, and a Cuban national team was a finalist in the 2006 World Baseball Classic competition, losing to Japan in a game played in San Diego, California.

“The program began in 2009, as a way to help young Adventists enjoy sports without harming their Christian witness,” said Dayami Rodriguez, Communication director for the church's Cuban Union Conference.

Shirts and caps may not always match, and there are other challenges to be met, but Cuban Adventists have found that baseball is an ideal outreach tool. In fact, the peaceful nature of the games even attracted a local government official, who offered words of welcome.

“Games are conducted with respect for all sides; team members pray before games. The fighting and rough language sometimes associated with other leagues is absent from the Adventist practices and competitions,” Rodriguez said.

The peaceful atmosphere also attracted non-Adventists, who wanted to participate. Church leaders agreed, but with conditions: players must demonstrate good behavior, their speech and attitudes would be in line with Adventist standards, and all players would attend daily, morning Bible studies and evening seminars.

According to Rodriguez, “It worked! Onlookers – ranging from local umpires, professional baseball players, and members of the public who happened upon the games — were all absorbed to see men in the heat of the game praying for each other before a game, holding hands, embracing and congratulating each other after the game.”

Some spectators approached the teams, asking to learn more. The youngsters identified themselves as Seventh-day Adventists, and invited those interested to the evening meetings. In the first year, 28 people gave their hearts to the Lord as a result of the effort. Last year, 100 people made a Christian commitment as the games and outreach took place in Palmarito, Holguin, in the eastern part of Cuba.

Rodriguez said, “Each night the little town was paralyzed by what was happening in the humble
Adventist church atop the valley. Everyone was running to hear the preacher, carrying their own chairs to find a little place in the midst of so many people who crowded the windows and doors of the sanctuary. And at the end of the week of an evangelism series titled, 'Jesus the Conqueror of All Time,' the church rejoiced to receive within it many who decided to cast their lot with Christ forever."

Local authorities – at first reluctant to permit a religious group to use local facilities – finally relented, and volunteers cleared the designated area for play. In fact, the local Communist Party first secretary attended the opening, giving a welcome. The president of the Adventist Church in Cuba and other pastors joined him.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been active in Cuba since 1905. According to world church statistics, more than 31,000 baptized members worship in 297 congregations across the island nation.

—with reporting by Dayami Rodriguez