Community service kicks off Adventist world youth conference in South Africa

3,100 youth, young adults attend opening ceremony in Pretoria

Global Unity Summit urges cooperation between established Youth Ministries, supporting ministries

Youth leaders pledge to increased ‘trust and openness’ going forward

Community service kicks off Adventist world youth conference in South Africa

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Pretoria, South Africa
Ansel Oliver/ANN

Australian Samantha Lee spent last week here in South Africa working in a home for orphaned and homeless kids, saying the week of service was her treat to herself – a trip to celebrate her 21st birthday.

“I wanted to go somewhere to help someone, not just have a holiday for myself,” she said.
Lee, who spent the week with friends working at the Christian Crisis Centre in Kameeldrift, is one of more than 1,000 Adventist young people who came here from around the world for the opening week of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s world youth conference.

The “Impact South Africa: 3rd World Conference on Youth and Community Service” runs from July 8 to 13 and features a week of service projects, followed by this week of general sessions and evening devotionals.

Last week, volunteers served in 60 different projects throughout Capetown, Soweto and here in the capital, Pretoria.

“People had a wonderful time serving and making a real impact throughout the country,” said Adventist Youth Ministries Director Gilbert Cangy.

Simone Thiel, 18, from Germany, described the experience as the “best week of my life.” She said she and a group from Germany painted a church in Dobsonville, Soweto, and worked in an orphanage. The best part, she said, was staying in the home of church members. “In Germany it’s impossible that 50 people would eat in one room. It’s too small there and we usually like our space.”

Lindsay Foolchand, a 30-year-old tour guide from Mauritius, worked in Soweto to cook and wash clothes at a home for the disabled. He especially enjoyed the local Adventist style of worship songs. “It was so intense, from the heart. Very different from what we are used to,” he said.

Stefania Sandoval, a 25-year-old engineer from Venezuela gathered clothes and food for needy families and repaired floors in a school dorm in Heidelberg. “It was our first time,” she said of laying tile flooring. “We had to learn. But everyone was happy.”

Tapuwa Taps Mathiba, 16, from South Africa, worked with a group to produce a Vacation Bible School for 30 kids in the city of Tembisa. He also helped to remodel a decaying home in Mamelodi. “I don’t think anyone could live inside such a home,” he said of a two-room home that housed a family of eight.
Armando Miranda, an Adventist world church vice president, supervised 11 projects in Capetown. He said a group of Australians, Canadians and Russians worked together to clean up a poor area of town and teach kids how to keep the area clean. "It was really important because they involved the community," Miranda said. "It was a wonderful experience for everyone and they made a lot of friends."

Tonight's opening ceremony brought together some 3,100 youth from 97 countries to the Saint George Hotel & Convention Centre. The evening opened with a parade of nations, with each country represented by a flag bearer wearing national dress. Attendees in the packed auditorium strained to see, many holding up cameras and tablets to capture the action on the stage.

In the back of the hall, as an African choir performed “Amen” with rhythmic movements, 32-year-old Jania Betinski, from Oregon, United States, watched from a ledge. “I’m very amazed,” she said, “because I didn’t think it would be quite like this – all the colors and music. It’s wonderful.”

Attendees were greeted by Irvin Khoza, chair of the Premier Soccer League in South Africa, who expressed his gratitude to the Adventist Church for his upbringing. Former Youth Ministries Director Baraka Muganda, originally from Tanzania, was honored for his service. And Mayor Kgosientso Ramokgopa of the city of Tshwane invited attendees to keep in their prayers former president Nelson Mandela, whom he said is in a hospital 10 kilometers away.

Cangy, the Youth Ministries director, addressed attendees, citing the meeting’s theme: “Jesus is in the city because you are in the city,” he said, before declaring the conference officially open.

Global Unity Summit urges cooperation between established Youth Ministries, supporting ministries

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Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
ANN staff

Seventh-day Adventist youth leaders say a recent meeting shed light on their working relationship with supporting ministries, which, for years, in some cases was marked by misunderstandings and a measure of tension.

The Global Unity Summit signals a major shift in communication between established Adventist youth ministry and supporting ministries, youth leaders said. Though methodology differs, various ministries
of the church and supporting groups share the same vision, objectives and service opportunities for young people, they said.

“This meeting brought together truly supportive ministries that addressed some of the operational or theological differences that had crept in over the years,” said Gilbert Cangy, Youth Ministries director for the Adventist world church.

“We felt there was sufficient goodwill and common ground for us to come together and sort it out,” he said.

Representatives from church Youth Ministries and leaders from supporting ministries vowed to redefine their common mission and “identify sources of conflict that have, in some places, divided us and could continue to be disruptive,” a report released after the summit stated.

The meeting grew out of Cangy’s commitment to “work together cooperatively rather than competitively.” Upon his 2010 appointment as Youth Ministries director, Cangy pledged to increase dialogue between church youth leadership and supporting ministries. Leaders from top supporting ministries are welcoming the move from words to action.

Amy Sheppard, general vice president for the Michigan-based Generation of Youth for Christ (GYC), said she’s encouraged that church leaders are taking the step to involve supporting ministries.

As the conversation continues, she said she hopes church leaders ultimately “find it essential to include the grassroots level of our church, particularly young adults, in its vision casting, strategizing and implementation of mission for the Adventist Church.”

The Global Unity Summit also addressed misunderstandings about communication between supporting ministries and local church youth leaders, Sheppard said.

“GYC has always striven to be in regular and consistent communication with [local] church
leadership when we host our annual event, but the perception that this communication does not happen unfortunately persists,” she said.

Angel Duo, president of Adventist-laymen’s Services and Industries in Europe, agreed. “The real problems you find are at the conference [level] and in the churches. This is a question of trust. You have to know each other and exchange information,” he said.

Ty Gibson, co-director for Light Bearers, a media production ministry and resource center based in the U.S. State of Oregon, said ongoing dialogue will bring further clarity and cooperation.

“Our ministry went through a similar process years ago and we [now enjoy] a positive working relationship with church leadership at all levels,” said Gibson, who attended the summit as an advocate for supporting ministry youth work.

The resolutions that came out of the Global Youth Summit don’t impose new requirements on supporting ministries or mainstream youth ministry; rather, they invite both parties to maintain conversation and address differences candidly.

One persistent point of contention, Cangy said, is the perception that some supporting ministries are fringe movements touting dubious theology.

“Within the church, there is a wide spectrum of theological understandings, from the sinless perfectionists who want to see individuals be sinless before Jesus comes … to the rabidly liberal who see no need for obedience or accountability,” Cangy said. “The perception was that even the centered [supporting ministries] were professing a performance-driven Christian lifestyle that would earn them salvation,” he said.

“We discovered through our meetings that this was not the view that was embraced. It’s unfortunate that some extreme groups have tended to see some supporting ministries from that perspective,” he added.

Going forward, Cangy said he hopes both mainstream and supporting youth ministries will work together to address “extreme elements.”

Cangy envisions that similar summits will be held worldwide, “particularly where tensions exist” and there’s “a desire to bring together people of goodwill to address issues constructively.”

One such place is Europe, said Paul Tompkins, Youth Ministries director for the church’s Trans-European Division. Church leaders there face mounting secularism and outreach must be carefully handled, he said. Still, youth ministry leaders are optimistic.

Tompkins said a unified approach to youth ministries would go far toward accomplishing the church’s mission.

“We’re too small to complete the work [alone],” he said.
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**ANN staff:** Williams Costa Jr., director; Ansel Oliver, assistant director; Elizabeth Lechleitner, editorial coordinator. Portuguese translations by Azenilto Brito, Spanish translations by Marcos Paseggi and French translations by Wenda Ozone-Mourandee.

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Adventist News Network
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904
United States of America
RESOLUTIONS

Having reviewed our common heritage and mission and canvassed the various sources of misunderstanding and conflict between the supporting ministries and the Youth Ministries department, the participants of the Global Unity Summit affirmed the following resolutions:

1. To embrace God’s being and doing as a model for the unity of those involved in ministry.

2. To foster congenial relationships in a spirit of trust and openness between the Youth Ministries department and supporting ministries.

3. To commit to work together in mutual affirmation and support of the church’s youth ministry and supportive ministries, while pursuing our common goal of discipling and mobilizing our young people for action and leadership in mission.

4. To initiate an ongoing process of open communication with the view of addressing areas of confusion and divisiveness in the context of mutual accountability, humility and trust under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

5. To reaffirm our mutual commitment to keep Jesus at the center of our faith and to embrace afresh our prophetic calling to a unique message destined to prepare the world for His soon coming.

6. To affirm the essence of biblical Seventh-day Adventist identity and fundamental beliefs and to encourage an appreciation for diversity in its communication.

7. To value our calling to serve young people as a priority over personal ambition, politics and self-interest.

8. To honor our Savior’s call to unity.