In Nepal, one small step for Adventist Church
Denomination’s work in Central Asian country becomes official ‘mission’

German Adventist hospital opens center to treat FGM victims
Waldfriede partners with former supermodel Dirie’s Desert Flower Foundation

In Nepal, one small step for Adventist Church

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Banepa, Nepal
Bhaju Ram Shrestha and Ansel Oliver/ANN

The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s work in the Central Asian country of Nepal this month was recognized as a denominational “mission,” a move up from an “attached field” of its parent division.

Though it’s a small milestone, the subtle distinction represents the Adventist Church’s development throughout an entire country. Only a handful of countries still have Adventist work in
The Adventist Church in Nepal has grown to become official “mission” status in the denomination. Here, members of the executive committee pray during the September 6 ceremony in Banepa, which is located 15 miles southeast of the capital of Kathmandu. [photos by Bhaju Ram Shrestha]

Beginning stages. The Adventist Church now officially operates in 208 of the 232 countries recognized by the United Nations.

The Adventist Church in Nepal was formerly classified as an attached field to the Southern Asia Division. It will now be known as the “Nepal Section.” The denomination’s administrative structure unit “mission” sometimes goes by different names in various world regions for the sake of clarity in the local context.

There are nearly 8,600 Adventists in Nepal, up from 212 in 1993, according to the Adventist Yearbook.

At a ceremony on September 6, Southern Asia Division President John Rathinaraj held the first meeting of the Nepal Section, saying the church in Nepal had grown.

Umesh Kumar Pokharel, the first president of the Nepal Section, welcomed church officers and 60 guests from other Adventist churches in the country.

Division Secretary Gordon Christo recalled the role of his father, who came to Nepal in 1958 with missionary Dr. Stanely Sturges to establish Adventist medical work.

Much of the Adventist Church’s infrastructure in Nepal surrounds Scheer Memorial Hospital in Banepa, located 15 miles southeast of the capital city of Kathmandu. The Adventist-operated medical center was established in 1960.

The Nepal Section, in coordination with the division, now has elected administrators, including a president, secretary and treasurer. Future development of the section could promote the unit to a “conference,” which means it would be self-supporting, both in nominating leadership and financial self-sufficiency.

The church in Nepal has made small but steady gains in recent years. Membership has increased, and the denomination’s Adult Bible Study Guide is continually translated into Nepali by the country’s first native convert. In 2011, the Adventist Church held a major youth rally, with many participants walking several days and riding rural, public buses to attend. Also, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency has run several programs to help exploited children.

Nepal’s population is more than 30 million. Formerly a Hindu nation, the Nepalese parliament declared it a secular state in 2006.
German Adventist hospital opens center to treat FGM victims

Sep 12, 2013
Berlin, Germany
Corrado Cozzi/ANN staff

Partnering with a foundation established by a former supermodel, a Seventh-day Adventist hospital in Berlin opened a new center this week to help restore victims of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a cultural ritual in parts of Africa and Asia.

The Krankenhaus Waldfriede (Berlin Hospital) opened the Desert Flower Center in cooperation with the Vienna, Austria-based “Desert Flower Foundation,” which was launched in 2002 by Somali model Waris Dirie.

Dirie, herself a victim of FGM at age five, is an international activist and established the foundation to raise awareness of the ritual. Her 1997 book “Desert Flower” was made into a movie in 2009.

At Wednesday’s opening ceremony, 300 attendees watched a portion of the movie depicting Dirie being mutilated.

“How many little girls are victims of such suffering,” Dirie said at the ceremony. “Even with all these tears, I’m truly happy to sit here. When I see this sign ‘Desert Flower Center,’ I do believe in truth.

Dirie ran away from her home in Somalia as a teenager, surviving a multi-day trek across the desert without food or water. She eventually made her way to London, where she worked at McDonalds and learned English in evening classes. She became a supermodel and was Olay’s first black model. She gave up her modeling career in 1996 and has since authored five books.

FGM is practiced in nearly 30 countries in Africa and Asia. Young girls are subjected to the removal or slicing of some of their sexual organs as a coming-of-age cultural tradition.

FGM is sometimes viewed as a status symbol and some practitioners say it controls sexuality and promotes chastity. Its effects often include infection, chronic pain and infertility. The United Nations banned the practice last year. The World Health Organization estimates that 150 million women are victims.
Dirie, 48, said her foundation is planning to establish other Desert Flower Centers worldwide, especially in Africa.

Another speaker at the event was Dr. Pierre Foldés, the French physician who partnered with Dr. Jean-Antoine Robein to invent a surgical technique to repair damage caused by FGM. To date he has operated on 4,000 women.

Other FGM victims attended the ceremony, including the two women who will soon become the center’s first patients. Hospital officials said the center would likely serve 50 to 100 women per year.

Dr. Gabriele Halder, a gynecologist, said more awareness about FGM is needed even in countries where it isn’t practiced. Women from such a culture are still treated with traditions of their homeland while living in Western countries.

“Women, after the death of their husbands, are often mutilated again so they can remarry,” Halder said. “This needs to be stopped here in Europe, too.”

Denise Hochstrasser, Women’s Ministries director for the Adventist Church’s Inter-European Division, based in Berne, Switzerland, said the new center would help restore victims to how God created them.

“When women have lost parts of their body through misunderstanding, tradition, incomprehensible practices, crime and abuse in the past, then if we can, it is our duty to give them back whatever we can so they can live a normal life, as God has meant it to be from the beginning,” Hochstrasser said.

“We are happy that an Adventist Hospital has taken this step to help on a topic that in so many countries remains silent,” she said. “We have to speak up for these women; we have to inform wherever we can.”