The doctor is in

The Seventh-day Adventist Church now has more opportunities than ever to promote its message of health – one that has made Adventists the longest-living people group ever studied, says Dr. Peter Landless.

For the 63-year-old South African native, promoting that message should include a “balanced” and “grace-filled” approach, he says during an interview in his office.

The cardiologist, former university lecturer and longtime missionary recounts his career, which was nearly cut short during a landmine accident while serving as a drafted, non-combatant physician in the South African Army in 1979. A few scars and finger damage remain. He says he’s been “saved to serve.”

Landless becomes director of the Adventist Church’s Health Ministries department this month, succeeding Dr. Allan Handysides, who announced his retirement in April. The job is one that includes charting the course of health promotion for the international, Protestant denomination, and, increasingly, public health agencies and governments through the church’s growing number of collaborations. The department also oversees and provides consulting for the development and operations of Adventist hospitals and clinics worldwide.

The denomination’s healthy lifestyle – including a vegetarian diet, abstaining from alcohol and tobacco, and Sabbath rest – has been documented extensively in magazines and books. Many
organizations over the years have adopted Adventist health curriculum as their official health training.

Landless says the Adventist Church now has new openings to publicly promote its message on health and gain behind-the-scenes chances to serve more governments. He won’t name some of the countries on the record, but confides, “There are opportunities that are opening up in certain parts of the world that are mind-boggling.”

He adds, “It’s an amazing privilege and a very humbling one to be here at a time like this.” The reasons to be grateful, he says, are many:

—The Adventist Health Study 2, conducted by the denomination’s flagship medical school, Loma Linda University, and funded partly by the National Institutes of Health, continues to gain more publicity. Its most recent findings were reported in top news agencies worldwide.

—Next year, the church will open its sixth medical school – in the Philippines. The denomination recently opened two other medical schools in emerging economy countries – Nigeria and Peru. Another is likely on the horizon in Africa.

—Next week, the church’s Health Ministries department and Ministerial Association will unveil church Presidential initiative for comprehensive health ministry at Annual Council, the world church’s Executive Committee meeting here at the world headquarters.

—The church next year will release its latest version of “Breathe Free,” which is update of the first smoking cessation program that was launched by the church in the 1950s. The updated version was rewritten in collaboration with the University of the United Arab Emirates and the Adventist Church’s Loma Linda University.

—Next year, the church will again meet with the World Health Organization in Geneva, continuing an official collaboration to help implement the UN Millennium Development Goals. In 2009, the Adventist Church became the first denomination to collaborate with the WHO when the UN agency began seeking faith-based partnerships.

Landless says the church’s message on health should continue to be biblical, evidence-based and in tune with the writings of church co-founder Ellen G. White, who died in 1915. It was White who first urged the church to make health part of its practice and public ministry.

"We need to keep in the forefront of the vision of the church the grace-filled, balanced health message, which reveals the love of God for a broken world,” he says.

Landless attended medical school at the University of Witwatersrand and was editor of the school journal, The Leech. He and his wife, Ros, served as missionaries near Lesotho, a country within South Africa, from 1976 to 1987.

In 1977 he was drafted into South Africa’s National Service as a non-combatant and refused to carry a weapon or work on Saturday, which Adventists observe as the biblical Sabbath. He ran a clinic six days a week for the underserved in South-West Africa, along what is now the border between Angola and Namibia.

On a rainy day, prime conditions for an ambush, the vehicle he was riding in encountered freshly planted landmines while he traveled back from a follow-up visit to an infant patient. With Landless
were his driver, bodyguard and two engineers. They were thrown 100 feet from the vehicle. His driver died 11 days later.

"Being saved like that stands out in my mind as a compelling reason to serve," Landless says. "People often say, ‘What’s a highly-trained cardiologist, who could be earning millions, doing here?’ I say it's because we’re saved to serve, and it’s the greatest privilege in life to do that.”

In 1980 he was awarded the military’s Southern Cross Medal, the first time it was awarded to a National Service medical officer.

Later that same year he was ordained as an Adventist minister, a “direction-setting” event, he says. “Once you accept ordination, it doesn’t make you special. It just commits you totally to God’s service.”

Over the years he has worked as the principal of a family practice, a specialist in cardiology, and the deputy director of the Cardiology Department at Johannesburg Hospital. He had the privilege of being part of President Nelson Mandela’s cardiology team from 1993 to 1995. He is certified in the U.S. in nuclear cardiology and is a fellow of the American College of Cardiology.

In 2000 he was elected associate Health Ministries director at the Adventist Church headquarters. Since then he has co-authored hundreds of papers and columns with Handysides and has lobbied governments on behalf of the church’s International Commission on the Prevention of Alcohol.

Landless makes a point to speak of Handysides’ longtime lobbying for the Adventist Church to launch a ministry to those affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa, where now nearly 40 percent of the denomination’s membership reside. The Adventist AIDS International Ministry turned 10 years old this year.

“‘The world church really owes him a debt of gratitude,’” he says. “‘I mean that much more than just speaking well of one’s predecessor. For so long he urged the church to establish a ministry that has helped change the lives of tens of thousands of vulnerable people. They would otherwise be living as outcasts and some might not even be living at all.”

Landless says he’ll continue Handyside’s call for balanced health ministry and for collaborations with organizations, through which Adventists can further spread their message of healthful living.

**Business consultant Hamel to present at Annual Council**

A leading expert on business strategy will join Seventh-day Adventist Church officials at the denomination’s world headquarters this week for the church’s October business session.

Author, speaker and business consultant Gary Hamel is slated to present on organizational change at this year’s Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) training program. The program brings church administrators worldwide up to speed on current innovations and best practices in management.

Annual Council, set for October 10 to 16, is the yearly meeting of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Executive Committee, a group of more than 350 world church leaders. Annual Council is
the church’s top business meeting other than General Conference Session, which is held every five years.

Hamel is a founder of Strategos, an international management consulting firm based in Chicago. The Wall Street Journal recently ranked Hamel as the “world’s most influential business thinker.” His books include “What Matters Now,” a guide to building organizations that thrive amid uncertainty and shifting priorities.

Annual Council delegates will also receive updates from the church’s Treasury and Secretariat departments. Adventist world church Executive Secretary G. T. Ng is expected to report on 10 of the church’s fastest-growing unions and 10 that are declining in membership.

Along with year-end statistical and financial reviews, this year’s agenda also contains proposed amendments to the church’s Fundamental Beliefs, including clarification of the denomination’s biblical understanding of origins. Delegates will decide whether to move forward with a version of Fundamental Belief Number 6 that merges the current belief with a reaffirmation of a “literal, recent, six-day creation.” Other beliefs may see “minor editorial changes,” said Myron Iseminger, undersecretary for the Adventist world church.

Also on the docket next week is a recommendation to approve administrative status updates for several “union missions,” or local church administrative units that receive appropriations. Delegates are expected to accept the regions’ bid for “union conference” status. Such updates reflect a region’s spiritual maturity and financial stability. As a “union conference,” a region is fully self-sufficient and responsible for electing its own church officers. These officers will be included among delegates to the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas.

This year’s Annual Council will also feature, for the first time, an electronic version of the agenda to replace the bulky binders delegates typically receive at church business meetings. The church’s department of International Personnel Resources and Services pioneered the system and recently used it during a meeting at headquarters, saving upwards of $500 on printing costs for the agenda.

“That would buy an iPad,” Iseminger said. “This paperless system is much more efficient and will save us a significant amount of time, effort and money.”

In Inter-America, Adventist elders authorized to baptize during historic event

Thousands of Seventh-day Adventist elders—or lay pastors—across the church’s Inter-America Division were temporarily authorized to baptize new believers this week during the culmination of nine months of lay-led evangelism across the region.
The initiative, called “Year of the Laity,” has empowered lay members and promoted their contributions to church life and growth.

“We rejoice with our laypeople across the Inter-American Division for their committed efforts during this historic event,” said Israel Leito, president for the church in Inter-America. “It just reaffirms the value the church places on our laypeople, especially our church elders who are crucial in assisting pastors every week in thousands of congregations.”

With more than 15,000 Adventist congregations in Inter-America and fewer than 3,200 pastors, an average pastor in the region oversees about five churches. Inter-America’s 50,000 Adventist elders are essential to church life and growth as pastors juggle multiple churches, said Hector Sanchez, ministerial secretary for the church in Inter-America.

“We are thankful for the men and women church elders who faithfully work alongside our pastors every week,” Sanchez said.

Elders invited to baptize new believers on September 28 were required to meet four conditions, Sanchez said. Each elder was first appointed by the church, ordained, authorized to baptize, and have a baptismal candidate or candidates that he or she introduced to the Adventist Church through Bible studies.

Clara Davidson, 62, an ordained elder from Harry Watch Seventh-day Adventist Church in central Jamaica, grew excited as she waited her turn to baptize at Camp Verley, where over 4,000 people gathered to witness dozens of baptisms.

“It is a joy of a different kind to be in the place of a pastor baptizing someone,” Davidson said.

Dany Santos, head elder of the 15 Avenida Adventist Church in Guatemala City, was among the 248 church elders in Guatemala who baptized 1,662 new members on Saturday. Santos leads the Orion Rehabilitation Home operated by the church to help people with drug and alcohol addictions. The opportunity to baptize 31 people from the home was moving, he said.

“To be able to baptize those brothers and sisters who have struggled with addictions brings great joy in my heart today,” Santos said.

“This experience is something that motivates us as elders and drives us to continue investing time and resources in the work of the Lord and continue joint efforts with pastors preparing a people for the soon coming of the Lord,” he added.

For decades, church leaders in Inter-America have encouraged close partnership between laypeople and pastors to better nurture churches and conduct outreach. The thousands of baptisms conducted by elders this week—while for now a one-time event—came as no surprise, they said.
According to reports from church administrators in Inter-America, nearly 2,000 people were baptized by church elders in Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and El Salvador. Another 600 were baptized in Cuba and hundreds joined the church in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Elders baptized new members in the Bahamas, St. Vincent, West Venezuela and Jamaica, among other countries.

The Inter-American Division reports a membership of more than 3.6 million. The region includes the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America and the five northernmost countries of South America.

—additional reporting by Nigel Coke, Gustavo Menendez and Shirley Rueda

ADRA assisting flood victims in Mexico, Cambodia

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency is assisting those affected by flooding in Latin America and Southeast Asia by providing food and shelter in coordination with local government agencies and other NGOs.

In Mexico last month, two tropical storms triggered flooding that affected more than 400,000 people and left 139 dead, according to a country official. In Cambodia, flooding has disrupted the lives of 80,000 families and killed 30 people, a disaster management official said.

ADRA Mexico has assisted nearly 8,000 people. Agency workers are collaborating with the Mexican Red Cross and municipal agencies to provide food, hygiene kits and shelter for those who have been evacuated. ADRA is working in the states of Guerrero, Veracruz, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosi.

ADRA Mexico Director Cesar Hernandez Mercado said the agency has focused on the needs of the most vulnerable people, but many communities are still awaiting assistance.

“We greatly appreciate the immediate response we’ve received; however, there is suffering everywhere and we continue to need additional support,” Hernandez said.

Financial support has been offered by ADRA International and ADRA Inter-American Division.

In Cambodia, ADRA has created distribution sites for flood victims to obtain emergency supplies. Victims are receiving food kits containing rice, fish and cooking oil. Tarps are being distributed as makeshift shelters for families displaced from their homes. ADRA is working in collaboration with the Cambodian Red Cross, Humanitarian Response Forum and the Provincial Committees on Disaster Management.
ADRA staff took supplies from the distribution center to the homes of some elderly residents who couldn't travel to the site. Chea Soeun of the Krokor village in Kratie province said she was not expecting to receive any aid. “I am surprised and so thankful for this food,” she said.

Emanuel da Costa, ADRA International’s director for Emergency Management, said the agency would continue to help local victims now as well as when the flooding subsides.

“We ask our ADRA and church community for their continued prayers and support as we bring aid to Mexico and Cambodia and help in the rebuilding in the coming weeks and months,” da Costa said.