In Ukraine, Adventists share message of hope amid political crisis

An outreach event hosted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ukraine is continuing despite the deepening political crisis in the Eastern European country.

More than 150 literature evangelists, medical missionaries and pastors are in Kiev to help meet the physical and spiritual needs of residents. “Kiev: City of Hope” offers smoking cessation advice, alcoholism support, diabetes management, postnatal health education and eye care.

Adventists are also hosting Christian music concerts and distributing books and invitations for further study. Thousands of residents visited healthy nutrition kiosks and hundreds have enrolled in Bible studies.

Meanwhile, Viktor Alekseenko, president of the Adventist Church in Ukraine, is reiterating his call for Adventists to pray for their country and avoid provoking hostility—on the streets and on social media, where he urged church members not to leave inflammatory comments.

“Rather, encourage people to resolve conflicts peacefully,” Alekseenko said. Adventists, he added, should find ways to express their civil and political positions within the confines of law and respect for individual rights.

Months of large-scale demonstrations in Ukraine have led to violent clashes between protestors and the police in recent weeks. On Sunday, opposition leaders called for intervention by the international community, the BBC reported.
Protestors continue to call for President Viktor Yanukovych to step down and for closer ties to the European Union. Unrest in Ukraine began in November when Yanukovych shelved a planned trade deal with the European Union in favor of a loan from Russia.

No Seventh-day Adventists have been arrested or injured during the ongoing conflict, local church leaders said. They also reported that worship services have continued uninterrupted at Kiev’s 25 Adventist congregations.

“Kiev: City of Hope” runs through March and culminates in a 10-day evangelism series.

There are nearly 52,000 Adventists in Ukraine worshipping in some 900 congregations and 300 groups.

Adventists join others in opposing Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

February 6 is International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation, and Seventh-day Adventists are among the many faith groups, NGOs and organizations working to end the practice.

FGM/C, often referred to as Female Circumcision, is practiced in nearly 30 countries in Africa and Asia. Young girls are subjected to procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to their genital organs for non-medical reasons, often as part of a coming-of-age cultural tradition or ceremony.

FGM/C 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 in 2012. The World Health Organization estimates that 140 million women are victims.

Many people, especially in Western countries, are not aware of FGM/C and are often shocked to learn about it. Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to the practice, according to a document adopted by the Adventist Church’s Christian View of Human Life Committee in 2000.

“Our Church should continue to seek loving ways to discourage this practice as well as to educate of its dangers,” said Dr. Peter Landless, Health Ministries director for the Adventist world church. “It is our desire that young women may grow in the natural way God created them.”

Landless urged respect for culture and sensitivity for those who are victims of the procedure.

“It is very important that we do not inadvertently add insult to the injury of this mutilating procedure by inferring such patients are irreversibly shamed,” Landless said. “Such an attitude or approach may give them the feeling that they are less than normal people. Plus, there are millions of women
affected and one needs to be concerned lest the issue becomes a face off of cultures, rather than a compassionate concern for the well-being of women and their status in their society.”

Heather-Dawn Small, Women’s Ministries director for the Adventist world church, said her department at the world headquarters and its affiliates in local communities are continuing to bring awareness to the problem in order to end it.

“We’re doing what we can to help and heal our sisters who have suffered FGM/C through setting up homes for the victims, reaching out to communities where the practice is perpetrated on young girls to help stop this practice through education.”

One country where the Adventist Church has worked to combat FGM is Kenya. The Kajiado Rescue Centre is a girls rescue home and education facility that celebrates adolescence with an alternative rite. “It is seen as a blessing by many families in many villages,” said Denise Hochstrasser, Women’s Ministries director for the Adventist Church’s Inter-European Division, which helps sponsor the project.

Already, Kenya’s government has worked to eradicate FGM/C. In 2001 the Children’s Act criminalized the subjection of children to FGM/C, and the new Constitution, which was approved in 2010, offers clauses meant to protect children from any cultural practice that is harmful to their health.

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency has also worked in Kenya with anti-FGM/C projects over the years. One recent project helped educate more than 2,500 people about the issue by young girls performing songs and skits about the issue to their families and government officials. Also, the initiative trained 189 trainers to work with community leaders in bringing awareness to the issue. The program also helped support those who formerly performed FGM/C with other income generating activities.

This year, ADRA is implementing a program called the Girl Child Empowerment Program in Kenya’s western province of Nyanza. The project will offer a 10-week skills course that includes healthy relationships and the dangers of FGM/C.

“Being a part of the church’s efforts in this global initiative to bring awareness to this issue is just one of the many ways in which ADRA is committed to empowering women and girls around the world,” said Jason Brooks, an ADRA senior program manager.

Also, in Germany last year, the Berlin Adventist Hospital opened the Desert Flower Center, an FGM/C reconstruction surgical center in partnership with supermodel Waris Dirie, one of the world’s most prominent advocates against FGM.

“As always, the Adventist Church seeks to restore the image of the Creator and to avoid adding grief and pain to those in suffering,” said Landless, the church’s Health Ministries director.

Remembrance: Running was first female professor at Adventist seminary
Leona Running, who was the first female professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, where she served for nearly six decades, and was an expert in biblical languages, died on January 22. She was 97.

Colleague William Shea said he estimated that Running assisted more students in writing doctoral dissertations than any other faculty member. “She has probably touched the educational lives of more Seventh-day Adventist ministers than any other woman except [Adventist Church co-founder] Ellen White,” he said.

Running began working for the seminary at its location in Takoma Park, Maryland, in 1955, teaching Greek and Hebrew. At the time, the president of the seminary was skeptical about a woman’s ability to teach male students, and male students’ willingness to be taught by a woman. She began teaching on a trial basis, but in 1956 she was granted regular status and, shortly after, full tenure.

Running was the first Adventist woman to earn a doctorate in Ancient Near Eastern Studies, earning the degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1964. Throughout her career she taught nearly 10 languages, including Syriac, Egyptian, Akkadian, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. In 1981 she was appointed as the first female president of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research, a post she held for a year.

“Dr. Running holds a special place in the hearts of her Old Testament and Seminary colleagues and former students, who greatly appreciated her mentoring during their Seminary years,” said Jiří Moskala, dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, which is now located at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Leona Rachel Glidden was born in 1916 in Flint, Michigan, and graduated from Adelphian Academy in Holly, Michigan. She then attended what is now Andrews University—then Emmanuel Missionary College—and graduated as valedictorian in 1937 with a bachelor’s degree in modern languages.

In 1942 she married her husband Leif “Bud” Running. He died four years later at the age of 37 while undergoing his third lung operation.

“She overcame the grief of losing her husband early in life and built her exemplary academic and professional calling,” said Niels-Erik Andreasen, president of Andrews University. “Dr. Running broke new ground in the University and in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

During her early professional years, Running served the Adventist Church from 1944 to 1948 in the Foreign Language Division of the Voice of Prophecy radio program, translating programs and typing scripts in German, Spanish and Portuguese. In 1950 she moved to Washington, D.C. to become the copy editor for Ministry magazine.

In 1955 she graduated with a master’s degree in Greek and Hebrew from the Adventist Theological Seminary.

Running also traveled extensively. In 1951, she traveled with Adventist singer Del Delker to the Paris Youth Congress and to seven countries in Europe. She later recounted the trip in the book
“36 Days and a Dream.” In 1957, she joined seminary professor Siegfried Horn's first guided study tour to Europe and the Middle East. She wrote another travelogue of this trip, published in 1958 as “From Thames to Tigris.” In the 1960s and 70s she traveled throughout Europe, Israel, Iran, Cyprus, and taught a summer session at Newbold College in England.

Running collected articles, journals and books on women in ministry. She donated the collection to the Center for Adventist Research in the James White Library. The most notable of her multiple publications is “William Foxwell Albright: A Twentieth-Century Genius,” published by Morgan Press in 1975, a 436-page biography on the “Dean of Biblical Archaeologists.”

Running retired from teaching at age 65, but for 21 years she continued to teach Egyptian, Akkadian and Syriac in the seminary, finally quitting in May of 2002. Andrews University awarded her an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters at its May 2012 commencement ceremony.

In England, parents whose baby died of malnutrition weren’t practicing recommended Adventist diet

An incident in England in which a baby died of malnutrition has raised media attention over a proper understanding of dietary recommendations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Adventist Church officials responded by saying a balanced diet—which the church recommends—could have prevented the tragedy.

Nkosiyapha Kunene and his wife Virginia pleaded guilty in a court last month to charges of manslaughter after their five-month-old son Ndingeko died of rickets in 2012. Prosecutors alleged that the couple had put their baby on a “strict diet as part of their faith,” according to media reports.

The Adventist Church’s British Union Conference released a statement last week saying that while the couple was registered as members of the denomination at the time of their marriage in 2009 they do “not appear to have attended any specific Adventist church on a regular basis after that time.”

“It would appear that during this period outside influences drew the family away from their spiritual home and the sound counsel and support that would have come to them within a supportive Adventist community,” said Sharon Platt-McDonald, Health Ministries director for the British Union Conference. “Unfortunately this led them to make health choices that were not in the best interests of their child. We were very saddened to hear of this tragedy.”

Platt-McDonald said Adventist health professionals “would always advise church members to seek and listen to medical advice.” She said the denomination also regularly delivers health presentations to both church members and the public.

Rickets is a result of a severe deficiency of Vitamin D, which aids the body in absorbing calcium.

“It’s never been the church’s stance to put people on extreme, unbalanced and non-evidence-based diets,” said Dr. Peter Landless, Health Ministries director for the Adventist world church. “We continue to recommend the best available diet in the geographic territories in which people find themselves.”
One of the recommendations of the Adventist Church, Landless said, is a balanced diet that includes supplementation when it is needed. “This is not uncommon in infancy for all infants,” he said.

Adventists in recent years have become well known as one of the longest living people groups ever studied. Preliminary results from an ongoing study of Adventists in the United States were widely reported by major international news agencies last year. The study, which is sponsored in part by the National Institutes of Health, confirmed the benefits of a vegetarian diet.


Volcanic eruptions cripple mountain communities in North Sumatra

Seventh-day Adventist schools in West Indonesia are among institutions serving as shelters in the wake of a series of major volcanic eruptions that displaced more than 25,000 people and left nearby villages mired in ash and mud.

Mount Sinabung in North Sumatra erupted several times last week, spewing lava, volcanic ash and gases as high as 16,000 feet (5,000 meters) in the air and affecting communities well outside the established danger zone surrounding the volcano.

The mountain has erupted intermittently since September, with activity intensifying this month. Local sources say lava has flowed continuously since mid-January, with more than 200 eruptions reported in one week.

Three of the 37 Adventist churches near Mount Sinabung withstood damage in the latest series of eruptions, local church leaders said.

“With continuing eruptions, damage assessment is not an option, so it’s difficult to determine the extent of the damage to churches and homes,” said Adventist pastor Trisawaty Sinuhaji.

Adventist schools in Sumbul Kaban Jahe are accommodating an estimated 700 displaced people. Medicine, blankets, clothing and clean water are all urgent needs, church leaders said.

Adventist churches in West Indonesia on January 25 collected offerings to assist families displaced by the eruption. Offerings will also go toward those affected by flooding in Jakarta and Manado earlier this month.

Mount Sinabung is one of 130 active volcanoes in Indonesia. Prior to 2010, the volcano had been dormant for centuries.
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