It worked—U.S. city reverses ordinance after Adventist Church’s complaint

Textico Conference last year filed suit on religious liberty grounds

Adventist leaders host Mormon leaders, highlighting religious freedom commitment

Both denominations view media tools for encouraging faith

ADRA International participates in One Day Without Shoes

April 29 event raises awareness for children’s health, education

It worked—U.S. city reverses ordinance after Adventist Church’s complaint

Textico Conference last year filed suit on religious liberty grounds

April 22, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Elizabeth Lechleitner and Ansel Oliver/ANN

Seventh-day Adventist Church legal counsel said they’re pleased by a United States city’s reversal of an ordinance they said violated religious expression and unfairly targeted pastor-led faith groups, especially Latino churches.
Las Cruces, New Mexico last month changed an ordinance that required churches to register with the city and pay fees, a move that came six months after the Adventist Church filed suit against the city.

A city spokesman last year said the ordinance aimed to provide information for the city’s obligation to provide citizens with fire and police protection. Adventist Church officials alleged that it violated the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

The city changed the ordinance on March 17 to no longer require non-profit organizations to pay registration fees, and the Adventist Church subsequently dismissed its lawsuit from the U.S. District Court of New Mexico.

“We’re very happy that the new ordinance addresses both the city’s legitimate fire and safety concerns and our concerns about governmental interference with churches,” said Todd McFarland, associate general counsel for the Adventist Church.

The original Las Cruces Ordinance No. 16-131, passed in 1997, defined a business as “any profession, trade or occupation and all and every kind of calling,” including the work of pastors, priests, rabbis, bishops, imams and other religious leaders.

The ordinance essentially required all pastor-led churches within city limits to register with the city, pay a registration fee and pass a discretionary review process before gaining approval to conduct worship services or provide pastoral care. Faith groups that are lay-led rather than clergy-led were not subject to the requirements, lawyers said.

Early last year, city officials threatened to take legal action against the Las Cruces Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church if it failed to comply with the requirements of the business registration ordinance.

There are more than 100 churches within the Las Cruces city limits, but the ordinance, Adventist lawyers said, had been applied only to a small percentage of these churches and, according to the Adventist Church’s complaint, “disparately applied to single out Hispanic and Latino churches.”

In June, the city first notified the Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church that it had seven days to comply with the requirements or face “court action,” according to a letter from the city’s Codes Enforcement Department. However, the Las Cruces Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, a majority non-Latino congregation, received no such notice, McFarland said.

The Adventist Church filed the lawsuit in September through its Texico Conference, headquartered in the Albuquerque suburb of Corrales.

“I think it was great that we did what we did in challenging it,” said Lee-Roy Chacon, president of the Texico Conference. “Now that it’s overturned we can continue doing ministry instead of having to act as a business.”
The Texico Conference oversees church operations in West Texas and New Mexico, where it maintains approximately 80 churches and supports a membership of 12,000.

**Adventist leaders host Mormon leaders, highlighting religious freedom commitment**

Both denominations view media tools for encouraging faith

_April 29, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Ansel Oliver/ANN_

Top leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints offered a preview of an upcoming social media campaign in a visit last week with leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church headquarters, a meeting that underscored each denomination’s commitment to religious freedom.

The forthcoming “Faith Counts” media campaign of the Latter-day Saints—also known as the Mormon church—is one that encourages people to seek religious faith, leaders of that denomination said. Short, professionally produced videos show how pursuing faith has impacted people across society.

“We’ve got to find a way to keeping faith alive in the 14- to 35-year-olds so that faith will grow with them, so they’ll have a foundation for their life,” said L. Tom Perry, who is a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Mormon church.

A preliminary video for Easter, titled “Because of Him,” was viewed more than 5.3 million times within a few weeks. “The goal is the provide content for our Millennial friends, so they can take it and pass it along,” Perry said.

Perry said the campaign was launched to counter what he sees as a waning of spirituality throughout society. The campaign will launch within a month.

During the meeting, leaders from both denominations pledged to continue promoting religious freedom in the face of what they see is an increasing marginalization of people of faith and the concept of freedom of conscience. The Adventist Church maintains its key sponsorship of the International Religious Liberty Association, and the Mormon church operates the International Center for Law and Religion Studies at Brigham Young University, which is the flagship educational institution of the Mormon church.

“In a world that needs more faith, more focus on family, and now a defense of religious freedom, we are trying to join with people of good faith like you to help fight these very basic battles that are going on in the world,” said Ronald A. Rasband, senior president of the Mormon church’s Presidency of the Seventy.
Adventist Church Vice President Lowell Cooper said Adventists honor the Mormon church for its “public discourse” of its beliefs and values. “We have found that it’s good to have you as neighbors and partners,” he said.

The Mormon church, based in Salt Lake City, Utah, has more than 15 million members. Nearly 6.4 million of its members live in the United States, and approximately 2.6 million live in Mexico and Brazil.

Leaders at the Adventist Church headquarters periodically host national ambassadors and leaders from other religious denominations in order to build on existing relationships.

**ADRA International participates in One Day Without Shoes**

April 29 event raises awareness for children’s health, education

April 29, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | ADRA/ANN staff

In honor of TOMS One Day Without Shoes global event, ADRA International is asking friends and supporters to go shoeless today.

The day, created by ADRA partner TOMS Shoes, is meant to raise awareness for children’s health and education. Last year, people in 50 countries participated in One Day Without Shoes.

“One Day Without Shoes is a great opportunity for ADRA to help raise awareness about the people we serve around the world,” said Jonathan Duffy, President of ADRA International. “Many of the kids we help don’t have access to this simple, but crucial piece of clothing.”

ADRA received its first shipment of TOMS Shoes in Gambia in 2012. Since then, TOMS has given brand new shoes to ADRA beneficiaries in Argentina, Madagascar, Rwanda, Albania, Togo, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Gambia, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ukraine and Zambia.

“I didn’t have any shoes before,” said ADRA beneficiary Rova who lives in Madagascar. “When the teacher told us we would receive new pairs of shoes from TOMS through ADRA I didn’t really believe it. My friends and I were very happy because it was the first time most of us received new shoes. We danced in the rain. It was indeed a great day for me.”

A pair of shoes can help prevent diseases like podoconiosis, a debilitating illness that causes the painful swelling of feet and legs. This disease affects more than 4 million people in approximately 15 countries, according to the World Health Organization. Shoes also help prevent cuts, scrapes, and infections that could be deadly, but millions of children do not own a pair.

“Children who are healthy are more likely to be at school,” said David Holdsworth, ADRA International Associate Director for Material Acquisitions. “Giving kids uniforms and shoes can
increase their attendance at school by 62 percent. Getting an education really empowers families to rise out of poverty.”

ADRA International is present in 125 countries, providing community development and emergency management.