Headlines

Nigeria Adventist leader says Boko Haram destroyed Adventist church
Insurgents burned building in Northeast after members fled

Pastor abducted during church service in East Ukraine
Church leaders call for prayer while seeking to learn Litovchenko’s whereabouts

Adventist Church President calls for day of prayer for Ebola victims
West Africa confronting rapidly expanding Ebola epidemic

Adventists urged to study women’s ordination for themselves
President Wilson and TOSC chair Stele also ask for prayers for Holy Spirit to guide proceedings

Internal commission report dispels claim of forced reconversions in India
Adventist Church’s report details facts, misconceptions about case in Asro

Producer Begle appointed as Hope Channel’s newest vice president
Argentina native has produced network’s key programs

Nigeria Adventist leader says Boko Haram destroyed Adventist church
Insurgents burned building in Northeast after members fled

September 23, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Ansel Oliver/ANN

A Seventh-day Adventist Church official in Northern Nigeria said the terrorist group Boko Haram destroyed an Adventist Church last month after members fled the area.

The Magar Adventist Church in the Northeastern state of Borno was burned on Saturday, August 23, said Stephen H. Bindas, president of the Northern Nigeria Union Conference, based in Abuja. The incident happened after the congregation’s 67 members left the area to escape Boko Haram’s threats, Bindas said.

Magar is a village near Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state. The Adventist congregation there is one of seven rural churches built in 2009 with funds provided by the denomination’s Global Mission, Bindas said.

Bindas said the whereabouts of many members are unknown. Some went as far as the city of Jos in the middle of the country and are now staying at the headquarters of the North East Nigeria Conference.

“At the moment, the insurgents have taken over their homes, foodstuffs and beddings,” Bindas said in an email. Though none of the Adventist churches in the region had previously been threatened, many other Christian groups are facing the same fate, he said.

“We ask the world church to remember Northern Nigeria in prayers and to assist in whatever means to restore hope to these fleeing members and their families,” he said.

Pastor abducted during church service in East Ukraine
Church leaders call for prayer while seeking to learn Litovchenko’s whereabouts

September 30, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Andrew McChesney/Adventist Review

A Seventh-day Adventist pastor is missing after being abducted by gunmen during a communion service last Sabbath at a church in separatist-controlled eastern Ukraine, local church leaders said.

Unidentified men carrying machine guns and wearing camouflage burst into the church in the city of Horlivka on September 27 and seized Pastor Sergei Litovchenko, the Ukrainian Union Conference said.

“They interrupted the worship service and forced the worshipers to disperse,” it said in a statement. “They ordered Pastor Sergei Litovchenko to close the church, forced him into a car, and drove away in an unknown direction.”

The incident occurred as the pastor was leading the congregation in a communion service in the small, rectangular church located at 1 Ulitsa Horlovskoi Divizii. Adventist churches around the world commemorated Jesus’ Last Supper on September 27 as is customary on the last Sabbath of each quarter.

The Horlivka gunmen justified their actions by saying that “this is Orthodox land and there is no place for various sects here,” the conference statement said.

They refused to say who they were and what right that had to disrupt the church’s activities, replying bluntly to church members’ questions, “It’s none of your business.”

The Ukrainian Union Conference was trying to establish the whereabouts of the pastor.

“Where he is and what has happened to him is unknown,” said Vassily Nichik, director of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department of the West Russian Union Conference, which borders eastern Ukraine.

“Please pray for him,” he said on his Facebook page.

The abduction is a troubling development for the Adventist Church in eastern Ukraine, where clashes between pro-Russia separatists and Ukrainian government forces have killed more than 3,500 people since April. Separatists, who support the Orthodox faith and have spoken critically of Protestantism as a sect, have detained several church members in the past but always released them quickly.
No Seventh-day Adventists have been injured or killed in eastern Ukraine, where the conflict de-
escalated into an uneasy ceasefire on September 5. Only one church building has suffered major
damage.

John Graz, director of the Adventist world church’s Public Affairs and Religious Liberty
department, expressed deep concern over the kidnapping and said he was puzzled over why
anyone would target the pastor.

“Our church is officially recognized in Russia and Ukraine, and we expect our members and
pastors to be respected by the authorities on the territory of eastern Ukraine,” Graz said Monday.
“The Seventh-day Adventist Church is not involved in politics, and we don’t understand why it
should be attacked.”

Adventist Church President calls for day of prayer for Ebola victims

West Africa confronting rapidly expanding Ebola epidemic

September 26, 2014 | Silver Spring,
Maryland, United States | ANN staff

Seventh-day Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson issued the following statement today:

On behalf of the leadership and membership of the Seventh-day Adventist
Church in its 13 world divisions, and indeed
the more than 18 million members in 215
countries, I would like to express my deep
concern for the people in West Africa who
are living under the threat of the Ebola virus—particularly in the countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone,
Liberia, Senegal and Nigeria.

I am urgently imploring all Seventh-day Adventists around this globe to make Sabbath, October
11, 2014 a special Day of Prayer for our brothers and sisters in West Africa and for the entire
population in that region as they face this virtually unprecedented tragedy. Let us pray that God
will put a halt to the spread of this virulent virus.

Having had the wonderful privilege of living and serving in West Africa with my wife and family for
nine years, our hearts go out to the families of the more than 2,800 people who have already died
from the epidemic. After news from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, which projects that by
January cases could number between 550,000 to as high as 1.4 million, coupled with a 71 percent
fatality rate according to the World Health Organization, we are devastated by the potential of this
outbreak to destroy lives.

I especially want the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide and specifically the church
members of the West-Central Africa Division to know that we who serve at the Church
headquarters are praying for you, and we are joined by a global family of hope in God’s power to save.

There are many initiatives that are taking place on the part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its entities to assist in this extremely challenging crisis in West Africa. You will see or hear about these through ANN, Adventist Review, Adventist World, Hope Channel, Adventist World Radio and elsewhere.

On Thursday, September 25, 2014, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency hosted a prayer event in the Atrium of the General Conference building and were joined by many others via Google Hangout.

On October 1, 2014, the General Conference Ministerial Association will launch a global prayer campaign for those impacted by the Ebola virus. People around the world are expressing their support via social media through the hashtag #UnitedinPrayer.

On October 11, during 2014 Annual Council, there will be a live connection between the many world leaders who will meet at the General Conference headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, and Pastor James Golay, the president of the West African Union in Monrovia, Liberia. He will be staying in Liberia with our church members to encourage and support them during this very traumatic time instead of attending the Annual Council but will be connected electronically with the meetings. He will share with the world leadership a first-hand report about the critical situation in his territory of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia where we have 33,000 Seventh-day Adventists. After the report from Pastor Golay there will be a special prayer emphasis for those living facing this devastating situation.

Please remember the special Day of Prayer on Sabbath, October 11, 2014, for West Africa as the population confronts the rapidly expanding Ebola challenge.

In all of this we want those in West Africa to know that, not only during the Sabbath prayer emphasis, but day-by-day, hour-by-hour, the people affected by this crisis will be lifted up in prayer to our Creator, Savior and Master Physician. Let us earnestly pray for the latter rain of the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the three angels’ messages, which will point people to Christ’s soon coming when illness, diseases, the Ebola virus, fear and death will be conquered through God’s almighty power to save for eternity. Even so, come Lord Jesus!

With kind Christian regards and sincerely yours,

Ted N. C. Wilson
President
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Adventists urged to study women’s ordination for themselves
Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, appealed to church members worldwide to earnestly read what the Bible says about women’s ordination and to pray that he and other church leaders humbly follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance on the matter.

Church members wishing to understand what the Bible teaches on women’s ordination have no reason to worry about where to start, said Artur A. Stele, who oversaw an unprecedented, two-year study on women’s ordination as chair of the church-commissioned Theology of Ordination Study Committee.

Stele, who echoed Wilson’s call for church members to read the Bible and pray on the issue, recommended reading the study’s three brief “Way Forward Statements,” which cite Bible texts and Adventist Church co-founder Ellen G. White to support each of the three positions on women’s ordination that emerged during the committee’s research.

The results of the study will be discussed in October at the Annual Council, a major business meeting of church leaders. The Annual Council will then decide whether to ask the nearly 2,600 delegates of the world church to make a final call on women’s ordination in a vote at the General Conference Session next July.

Wilson, speaking in an interview, urged each of the church’s 18 million members to prayerfully read the study materials, available on the website of the church’s Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research.

"Look to see how the papers and presentations were based on an understanding of a clear reading of Scripture," Wilson said in his office at General Conference headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland.

“The Spirit of Prophecy tells us that we are to take the Bible just as it reads," he said. "And I would encourage each church member, and certainly each representative at the Annual Council and those who will be delegates to the General Conference Session, to prayerfully review those presentations and then ask the Holy Spirit to help them know God’s will.”

The Spirit of Prophecy refers to the writings of White, who among her statements on how to read the Bible wrote in The Great Controversy (p. 598), “The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed.”

“We don’t have the luxury of having the Urim and the Thummim," Wilson said, in a nod to the stones that the Israelite high priest used in Old Testament times to learn God’s will. “Nor do we have a living prophet with us. So we must rely upon the Holy Spirit’s leading in our own Bible study as we review the plain teachings of Scripture.”
He said world church leadership was committed to “a very open, fair, and careful process” on the issue of women’s ordination.

Wilson added that the crucial question facing the church wasn’t whether women should be ordained but whether church members who disagreed with the final decision on ordination, whatever it might be, would be willing to set aside their differences to focus on the church’s 151-year mission: proclaiming Revelation 14 and the three angels’ messages that Jesus is coming soon.

3 Views on Women’s Ordination

In an effort to better understand the Bible’s teaching on ordination, the church established the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, a group of 106 members commonly referred to by church leaders as TOSC. It was not organized to be proportionately representative of the world church but simply to carry out the two-year study. In a first, special Biblical Research Committees in each of the church’s 13 world divisions contributed to the study process and were represented on TOSC.

A main goal of TOSC, which finished its work in June, was to determine whether it could find a consensus on women’s ordination, which it did not. Members split into three camps, known as Position Numbers 1, 2 and 3:

**Position 1** emphasizes the biblical qualifications for ordination as found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 and the fact that never in the Bible were women ordained as priests, apostles or elders. Therefore, it says, the Adventist Church has no biblical basis to ordain women.

**Position 2** emphasizes the leadership roles of Old and New Testament women such as Deborah, Huldah, and Junia, and biblical passages in Genesis 1, 2 and Galatians 3:26-28 that stress all people are equal in God’s eyes. Therefore, it says, the biblical principle of equality allows the Adventist Church to ordain women to positions of church leadership wherever possible.

**Position 3** supports Position 1 in recognizing a biblical pattern of male leadership in Israel and the early Christian church. But it also emphasizes that God made exceptions, such as the case of granting Israel’s desire for a king. It says women’s ordination is a matter of church policy and not a moral imperative and, therefore, the Adventist Church should allow each field to decide whether or not to ordain women.

Wilson urged church members to examine all three positions, which are presented in the final TOSC report.

“Be sure to look at all presentations and to understand how God is speaking to you from the Word and your daily walk with Him,” he said.

Although TOSC did not reach a consensus on women’s ordination, its members did approve a consensus statement on the theology of ordination and, in a separate statement, affirmed that they remain “committed to the message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as expressed through the 28 Fundamental Beliefs.”

Wilson said he hoped that all church members would embrace a similar willingness.
“If we’re not careful, the devil will sidetrack us into controversy that will create a diversion from what God intends for his last-day remnant church to accomplish, and that is to proclaim the three angels’ messages and gladly share about Christ’s soon coming,” he said. “The bigger question is how will we relate to the ongoing mission of the church.”

What Church Members Should Read

Stele, the TOSC chair and director of the church’s Biblical Research Institute, said that if church members looked at nothing else, they should read the committee’s short “Way Forward Statements.”

“If people want a very quick snapshot, they can go to the ‘Way Forward Statements,’” he said in an interview. “Then when they get interested, they can go to the ‘Position Summaries.’”

The longer summaries are part of the 127-page final report, which also includes the TOSC-approved one-page definition of the theology of ordination, the history of TOSC, and a list of the many scholarly papers drafted for the study.

The study was initiated at the request of a delegate at the last General Conference Session, in 2010, and its necessity has been underscored by a growing chorus of calls for women’s ordination from some regional church leaders. Complicating matters, three of the church’s 124 unions — two in the U.S. and one in Germany — authorized women’s ordination in 2012 despite an appeal from church administrators to wait for the results of the study and the possible General Conference Session vote next year. The world church does not recognize the three unions’ decisions.

Stele urged church members not to be influenced by other people’s viewpoints on women’s ordination and to reach their own conclusions through prayerful study of the Bible.

“These position statements could really help because all of the key passages are interpreted from different angles here,” he said, holding a copy of the final TOSC report in his hand.

Stele said church members could influence the women’s ordination discussion in several ways, including by speaking with the delegates who will represent them at the next General Conference Session, which will be held in San Antonio, Texas.

Wilson likewise said church members could share their convictions with their pastors and conference presidents, but he asked that any conversations or letters be respectful and Christ-like.

“But most importantly,” he said, “we covet your prayers that we would humble ourselves as leaders and listen to the direct interventional voice of the Holy Spirit and God’s will as revealed in Scripture.”

Stele concurred, saying: “I think the more significant way to participate would be if every church member prayed. Pray for the process and pray for the Session so that it isn’t human wisdom that prevails but God’s will.”

See links to presentations, reports and study materials on the Web version of this story by clicking HERE.
Internal commission report dispels claim of forced reconversions in India

Adventist Church’s report details facts, misconceptions about case in Asroi

September 26, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | ANN staff

A newly released report by a Seventh-day Adventist Church internal commission said claims of forced reconversion to Hinduism in northern India last month are untrue and that members reconverted of their own will because of little support from leadership.

The report states: “There seems very little attention paid to these laity since the inception of the church in 2005,” and “the Hindu activists had been in constant touch with these people.” The church is located in Asroi in India’s northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

Church leaders at the division said better discipling of new members could lessen the likelihood of a similar incident taking place.

T. P. Kurian, the division Communication director said, “We have to carefully nurture the new comers and help them to be rooted in the word. We also need to help them come out of social stigma also,” he said referring to the caste system.

Several news agencies previously reported on the incident, but the new report, produced by a commission from the Adventist Church’s Southern Asia Division and made available this week, dispelled misconceptions and corrected some details of the news articles, including the number of people involved.

The Adventist Review previously reported the case—one of declining membership over the years among members who felt they were unable to shake their caste system by belonging to a Christian denomination.

Media reports stated 72 former Adventists reconverted, but the church has only had a maximum number 33 of members since it was founded in 2005, the report stated. Membership has declined over the years, Church leaders said.

Still, a havan [purification by fire] ceremony performed on August 26 inside the church building with a few of the initially baptized members had raised fears in the Christian community that hardline Hindus were compelling people to switch faiths.

“This is not an issue about leaving the faith, but about maintaining the sanctity of a place of worship,” Osmond Charles, a local lawyer, told the Times of India.
It was later discovered, the report stated, that entrance to the church was gained by one of the church members having a key. The church has since been relocked and remains unused. Police guarded the building for at least four days after the incident, the report stated.

The church is listed in the Adventist Region Director's churches’ list as an inactive church, the report said.

**Producer Begle appointed as Hope Channel’s newest vice president**

*Argentina native has produced network’s key programs*

*September 24, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | ANN staff*

Hope Channel, Inc.’s Board of Directors this week appointed producer Gabriel Begle as its new Vice President for Programming, Production and Broadcast.

Begle will provide leadership in the development, production, acquisition, and broadcast of Hope Channel’s television programs, a release stated.

Hope Channel is the official television network of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Begle will become one of four vice presidents.

In delivering the announcement, board chair Pardon Mwansa expressed his confidence that “Gabriel will continue Hope Channel’s tradition of developing quality television programs that appeal to viewers, even a secular audience as they take their first steps toward God.”

Begle, 36, is originally from Argentina, and his educational pursuits include ministry, healthcare, and broadcast media. For the past three years Begle has produced one of Hope Channel’s flagship programs “Go Healthy for Good,” as well as the upcoming “Compassion” series, which highlights stories of how Adventists are changing their communities. He has worked most of his career as a director of television production for ministries in North and South America and has pastored several churches.

“We welcome Gabriel to his new responsibilities,” said Brad Thorp, Hope Channel president. “With this level of skill and experience and having worked with media ministries around the world, Gabriel is just the right person to continue leading Hope Channel in its quest to become the premiere Christian television network.”

Begle described his vision for Hope Channel’s future as one of telling stories to help people find a connection with God. “Modern TV is all about stories, and we’ll work diligently to make Hope
Channel the best storyteller in Christian media,” he said. “It’s about making a connection with a world of people who are looking to God for a better life.”

For more information about Hope Channel, visit hopetv.org.