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Adventist Church in Ghana joins campaign on Ebola prevention, sanitation awareness

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December 16, 2014 | Accra, Ghana | Yvette Appiah/ANN staff

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Southern Ghana has partnered with local and international organizations in an initiative to combat unsanitary conditions, which have led to a cholera outbreak in the West African nation.
The project, launched at the denomination’s Valley View University in Accra earlier this month, also aims to implement public health initiatives to prevent the potential spread of the Ebola virus, which is still prevalent in nearby countries.

An outbreak of cholera, a disease spread by human waste that causes dehydration, has killed more than 200 people in Ghana this year.

Ebola, which is commonly transmitted via contact with bodily fluids, has reached a peak this year in West Africa since it was first detected in 1976. No reported cases of Ebola in Ghana have been confirmed upon testing.

Nearly 18,000 cases of Ebola in West Africa were reported this year along with nearly 6,400 deaths, according to the World Health Organization. The most affected countries include Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Introduced cases with limited local transmissions have been reported in Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, several countries in Europe and in the United States.

At the project launch ceremony on December 2, officials from the Church, United Nations and World Health Organization announced the campaign, which calls for educating Church members and the public on Ebola and sanitation-related diseases, a change of attitude toward the virus and those affected, and best practices of hygienic and sanitary behaviors. Officials said of prevention of diseases is more effective and cheaper than curative measures.

Samuel Adama Larmie, president of the Adventist Church’s Southern Ghana Union Conference, said the campaign was a “wake-up” call for citizens to be aware of Ebola and the need for sanitary practices.

“Today we show solidarity with victims of Ebola and cholera and hope that we shall overcome this challenge,” Larmie said. “We strongly advocate that there should be no stigma and or discrimination. No one is free or safe, but we can all do something about the situation.”

Church officials said the initiative’s message of sanitary practices and other preventative measures will be delivered to Adventists throughout the country. There are more than 400,000 Adventists in Ghana.

Larmie said Adventists would join the National Sanitation Day, which will be held the last Saturday of the month. Adventists, who observe Saturday as the biblical Sabbath and day of rest, will join the initiative on the last Sunday of the month.

William Kpakpo Brown, director for the Adventist Development and Relief Agency in Ghana, said nearly 20 percent of Ghanians lack latrines, which has led to unsanitary conditions in certain regions. The agency, he said, had recently completed a three-year project that constructed more than 5,500 household latrines and more than 140 latrines in hospitals.

Margaret Lamunu, a medical epidemiologist of the United Nation’s Mission for Ebola Emergency Response, said her organization had been working with local health partners and agencies to strengthen national Ebola prevention. She said measures had been established in several nearby countries to identify and designate Ebola isolation facilities, train health workers in treating Ebola, and to screen travellers for Ebola at entry points along national boarders.

Lamunu also thanked the Adventist Church for its contribution in addressing the regional epidemic.
“I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in providing this forum through which the general public can be sensitized and informed about what is happening to stop the Ebola outbreak, and how each of us can individually contribute to these efforts,” Lamunu said.

The World Health Organization’s representative in Ghana, Dr. Magda Robalo, said the organization had contributed to operational planning and offered information on needs for contact tracing, case surveillance, case management, and safe, dignified burials. She called for continuing strong partnerships and a response plan that would lead affected countries to be declared Ebola-free.

“Indeed, the collective response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa is beginning to have some impact with some signs of slowing in some areas,” Robalo said. “However international responders are still urgently required, not only to treat cases but also to find cases, … contacts, and improve our ability to break the chains of transmission which continue to drive this outbreak.”

The Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Dr. Julius Debrah, commended the Adventist Church for being the first church in Ghana to launch an Ebola campaign. Debrah called on other religious organizations to follow the Adventist Church’s lead in educating the public to fight Ebola and cholera and to promote sanitary practices.

**Muslim teens join Adventists in refusing Sabbath exams**

**Teachers speak of a double miracle at Adventist school in former Soviet Union**

*December 16, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Andrew McChesney/Adventist Review*

Muslim students at an Adventist school in the former Soviet Union were so confident that God would intervene to change the day of their state finals from a Sabbath that they stood in solidarity with their Adventist classmates in refusing to take the exams at a public school, even if it meant that they would not graduate.

The teens’ faith paid off.

At the last minute, the government of the predominantly Muslim country authorized the exams to be rescheduled, astonishing Adventist teachers who had spent days agonizing about the situation.

Even more remarkably, the authorization came from the office of a deputy minister who had recently forced the Adventist school to remove the word “Christian” from its name.

“The Muslim students decided to stand firm on the principles of not working and studying on the Sabbath that they had learned at the Adventist school, and this was a wonderful decision,” said
Guillermo Biaggi, president of the Adventist Church’s Euro-Asia Division, whose territory includes most of the former Soviet Union.

“God inspired not only someone in the government to change the day for the exams, but He also inspired the students and awarded their trust in our Creator and Redeemer,” he said Thursday.

The story about the Sabbath exams emerged at recent year-end business meetings conducted by the Euro-Asia Division. The Adventist Review is not identifying the school or its location to avoid complicating its work.

'The Only Hope Left Was God'

The school, which teaches 280 students aged 6 to 17, experienced a difficult 2013-14 academic year as it faced various challenges from the authorities and other people unhappy with the presence of a Christian school in a Muslim country, school and Church leaders said.

But nothing prepared the teachers for a surprise Education Ministry decree saying that final exams for ninth and 11th graders nationwide would be held on Saturday.

The teachers began to pray. A few of the school’s 11th graders came from Adventist families, but the majority were Muslim. None of the ninth graders were Adventist.

Every attempt to delay the exams by a day, to Sunday, seemed to fail. No local education officials wanted to shoulder the responsibility of authorizing the change. The school principal sent a letter to an Education Ministry official who promised to help, but he didn’t reply.

“The only hope left was God,” the principal said in a statement provided by the Euro-Asia Division.

She gathered the students together to explain the situation. She said the school was still trying to reschedule the exams but could not promise success. She also said she had made arrangements with a nearby public school to offer the exams to those who wished to take them.

“This gave each student the opportunity to make his or her own decision, knowing full well the consequences of the decision,” the principal said.

Eleventh graders who failed to take the exam would not graduate. Eleventh grade is the last class before graduation from high school in the former Soviet Union.

'That's Impossible!'

Just two days before the exams, the principal suddenly received a phone call from the Education Ministry. The caller, an administrative assistant to a deputy education minister, said that her boss had written a reply to the principal’s seemingly lost letter and that the school could send someone to pick it up.

The principal said she lost all hope with the phone call because the deputy education minister was the same person who had forced the school to change its name a few weeks earlier.

And that’s not all.
"Before the phone call, we had hoped that maybe we could give the exams on a different day and not be noticed by the education officials," she said. "But now that the government had given an official response, it would be impossible to conduct the exam unnoticed."

The principal was in for a shock. She recalled that when she tore open the letter from the ministry, she exclaimed, "That's impossible! How the Lord is good!"

It turned out that the deputy education minister had left his office on an extended business trip, and the school's request had been passed on to another ministry official who had authorized the exams on Sunday.

The principal eagerly shared the news with the students. But when they showed little emotion, she thought that they had misunderstood her and repeated the story. Then one of the students broke the silence with an explanation that the principal found even more incredible than the government's last-minute permission to reschedule the exams.

The student said: "We never had any doubt that God would help resolve the situation."

The principal found out that none of the students had signed up to take the exams at the public school on Sabbath. As she spoke with them, she learned that they had seen so many manifestations of God's power during the difficult school year that they had decided God would not abandon the school over something as simple as Sabbath exams. The Muslim students had decided to join their Adventist classmates in standing faithful to the biblical Sabbath.

"Children from non-Adventist families saw how God is leading our school and believed with all their hearts that the problem would be resolved," the principal said. "It was only us, the Adventist teachers, who were distraught with worry."

**In Jamaica, local Adventist ministry presents senior citizen with new home**

*Woman lived in dilapidated structure that leaked during rain*

*December 11, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | ANN staff*

A men's group from a Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jamaica brought an early Christmas present to a local resident who lived in a dilapidated home that couldn't keep out the rain, the Jamaica Gleaner reported.

The Men's Fellowship ministry of the Mt. Salem Adventist Church in St. James presented Euphemia Raymond, a senior citizen, the new
home on December 4. Neighbors came out to watch the ceremony in which men from the Mt. Salem church presented Raymond with the keys to her new house, the Gleaner reported.

One nearby resident jokingly remarked to Raymond that “Santa had come early” for her.

Paul Stanton, president of the Men's Fellowship group and a police officer, said the new home had nothing to do with the mythical Santa Claus, but that it was the group’s gift to show that they care.

"[F]rom time to time, members of the fellowship engage themselves in missions of caring and sharing," said Stanton. "We are always looking out for persons who are in need, with a view of coming to their assistance."

Raymond, praised the group for their gift as tears flowed down her face.


Stanton told the Gleaner that fellowship members became aware of Raymond's plight earlier this year when they discovered she was living in a structure that offered no protection from rain. The group determined repairs wouldn’t be sufficient, and instead decided to build her a new house.

Stanton said the project was funded by fellowship members and through their fundraising projects. The project is spurring the group to find other service initiatives.

"With more assistance from corporate Jamaica, we can do much more for the less fortunate in our midst," Stanton said.

Glen Samuels, president of the Adventist Church’s West Jamaica Conference, attended the presentation ceremony and offered encouragement to Stanton and his group. Samuels said the building of the home was "a true reflection and testimony of what the church is doing—catering to individuals who are in need."