Adventist Heritage Center

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Headlines

Adventist Church to begin 10 Days of Prayer
This year’s prayer meetings take on a special significance because of the upcoming General Conference Session

Adventist Church offers condolences after terrorist attack in Paris
The Church also thanks France for protecting religious freedom

U.S. Supreme Court to hear oral argument on religious signage, content discrimination
Adventist Church filed amicus brief on behalf of petitioner

2015 Adventist World Budget funds mission, administrative support
Highlights of headquarters budget of $184 million; full budget upon request

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January 07, 2015 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Andrew McChesney/Adventist Review

Adventists around the world begin 10 days of prayer on Wednesday for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a relatively young initiative that takes on special significance this year because of the upcoming General Conference session.

Modeled after biblical account of Pentecost, when Jesus’ disciples gathered in an upper room for 10 days to wait and pray for the Holy Spirit, Adventists will meet daily in churches as part of the Ten Days of Prayer program from Jan. 7 to 17. In many countries, the meetings take place in the evening and last an hour.

People who have participated in previous Ten Days of Prayer programs have spoken of strengthened faith, physical and spiritual healing, and renewed unity within their congregations.

“It’s not just an unleashing of God’s power amid the great controversy, but we are also hearing testimonies over and over again about lives that have been turned around,” said Jerry Page, head of the Adventist world church’s Ministerial Association, which organizes the Ten Days program.

Page said the program, which enters its fourth year in 2015, seeks the Holy Spirit’s blessing on the Church at the start of every year. But this year, he said, is particularly important because it marks the culmination of a number of gospel-sharing initiatives, especially the Mission to the Cities project to reach residents of the world’s largest cities, ahead of the quinquennial General Conference session in July.

A separate 100 Days of Prayer that specially focuses on the General Conference Session, a major business meeting of the world church, will begin on March 25 and continue through the end of the session in San Antonio, Texas, on July 11.

“We need to pray for unity and the Lord’s presence, that the latter rain be poured out at GC session,” Page said.

The Ministerial Association has prepared resources that churches—and even individuals or small groups—can use during the Ten Days of Prayer. The materials are available for download on the TenDaysOfPrayer.org website.

The plan for Day One, for example, is called “Abiding in Christ” and consists of a main Bible passage, suggested hymns such as “I Surrender All” and “I Need Thee Every Hour,” and a collection of Ellen White quotes on abiding in Christ. The centerpiece of the plan is a list of 16 prayer topics, including praise to God for the ways He is teaching prayer participants to abide in Him, prayer that General Conference session delegates abide in Christ, and prayer for each of the cities that the East-Central African Division has targeted in Mission to the Cities. Each prayer is accompanied by a promise from the Bible.

“It is good to read and pray through the materials,” said Raluca Ril, who with her husband,
Roman, wrote the plan for this year’s 10 Days of Prayer. “But it is even more important that we earnestly seek a deeper relationship with Christ, that we seek to apply what we read in our daily lives.”

Ril said a main goal of the 2015 plan was to strength people’s faith by coupling the Bible promises with each prayer topic.

“We should learn to claim God's promises and continue to do so even after the end of the Ten Days of Prayer,” she said.

Ril, 33, who was born in Romania, and her 32-year-old husband, born in Kazakhstan, met at an Adventist youth congress in Germany two years ago and have since worked together at prayer-themed conferences in Europe and Africa.

An e-mailed request from the Ministerial Association that they write the materials for this year’s Ten Days of Prayer was itself an answer to prayer, Ril said.

“A little bit more than a year ago we started praying that God would use us more than He had done it so far,” she said. “We had in mind some congresses where we could help organize prayer rooms or mission schools where we could go and teach about prayer. But God's plans were bigger than ours.”

People who participated in last year’s prayer meetings spoke about an outpouring of blessings.

“Unity was like before the day of Pentecost in the upper room,” said Emmanuel Amey Azameti of Dunkwa Central, Ghana, according to an account provided by the Ministerial Association.

He said the church members were so inspired with the experience that they repeated the January 2014 program on July 2-12.

“Miracles happened, healings took place, many long-time unanswered prayers were answered,” said Buhire Elie Brown, a missionary to the Guadalupe islands in the Caribbean Sea. “A lady who was invited by a colleague sister was healed of lung cancer and traveled to France for a checkup, and it was confirmed by a doctor over there. I believe no church can afford to miss next year’s 10 Days of Prayer.”

Adventist Church offers condolences after terrorist attack in Paris

The Church also thanks France for protecting religious freedom

January 09, 2015 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Adventist Review staff

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has sent condolences to France and praised its government for supporting religious freedom after a terrorist attack on a satirical magazine killed 12 people in Paris.

“On behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist world church and its president, allow me to convey to you our deepest sympathy in connection with the terrorist attack on the Charlie Hebdo office in Paris on Jan. 7,” the Church said Thursday in a letter sent by John Graz, director of its public affairs and religious liberty department, to French Ambassador Gérard Araud in Washington.
"We join in the pain of victims’ families," it said. "We pray for them and for those who were seriously injured. We also pray for the beautiful country of France, which we love; for her people; and for you, who are representing her in the United States."

Three gunmen opened fire in the office of the Charlie Hebdo magazine on Wednesday, killing the editor and top cartoonists. The magazine had been denounced by Muslim fundamentalists for its publication of depictions of the Prophet Muhammad.

In Washington, U.S. President Barack Obama paid his respects to the victims during a meeting with Ambassador Araud at the French Embassy.

The letter noted that Adventists have long been defenders of freedom of conscience and religion, and underscored that those freedoms were the foundation of all freedoms, including the freedom of expression.

"We thank France for these fundamental freedoms and its authorities for the freedom of expression and religion that they protect," the letter said.

One suspect in the attack has turned himself over to police, while a search operation for the other two suspects has been mounted across France.

**U.S. Supreme Court to hear oral argument on religious signage, content discrimination**

**Adventist Church filed amicus brief on behalf of petitioner**

*January 12, 2015 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Ansel Oliver/ANN*

Can a United States city mandate that a sign announcing a religious event must be smaller than a sign promoting a political candidate?

That’s the issue the U.S. Supreme Court will examine in oral argument today in a case addressing content-based speech restrictions of a city ordinance. Critics say the ordinance conflicts with freedom of speech protections offered by the U.S. Constitution.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in September filed an *amicus brief*, or “friend of the court” brief, on behalf of the petitioner in the case, “Reed v. Town of Gilbert.” Church legal counselors said local municipalities could unfairly restrict religious speech on signs or in door-to-door book sales if the Supreme Court doesn’t overrule a lower court’s decision on the matter.

The case stems from an incident in which Clyde Reed, pastor of the Good News Community Church in Gilbert, Arizona, placed temporary signs announcing worship services at an elementary school, where the congregation rented space.
Reed received notice from town officials saying his signs violated a local ordinance stating that temporary signs must be no larger than six square feet and stand no longer than 14 hours. Other types of signs, including political and ideological signs, can be up to 32 square feet in size and stand for many months.

In 2007, Reed filed a lawsuit claiming the ordinance was unconstitutional, but the ordinance was upheld by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, California.

Todd McFarland, an associate general counsel for the Adventist Church, said speech on religious matters is entitled to as much constitutional protection as any other kind of speech under the U.S. Constitution.

“If a local government wants to implement speech restrictions on time, place and manner, those can be acceptable, but they need to treat all kinds of speech the same,” he said.

“We were concerned about the Ninth Circuit interpretation about what is and is not a content-based restriction,” McFarland added. “It could limit religious speech in favor of other types of speech, such as political speech and public service announcements.”

Church leaders say the legal precedent, if not challenged, could embolden more cities to limit religious speech. In some cities, religious groups, such as Adventists, are required to obtain a permit to sell religious books door-to-door, while other groups, such as the Boy Scouts of America, are under no such obligation when soliciting donations.

The Adventist Church is one of numerous organizations that filed an amicus brief noting that restricting religious speech is a violation of the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment and the Equal Protection clause in the 14th Amendment.

A decision on the case is expected by the end of June.

**2015 Adventist World Budget funds mission, administrative support**

**Highlights of headquarters budget of $184 million; full budget upon request**

*January 07, 2015 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Ansel Oliver/ANN*

The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s 2015 General Conference World Budget funds mission work and administrative support, as well as funding operation of the denomination’s world headquarters building.

The 2015 General Conference World Budget this year of more than $184 million allocates:

- $47.6 million for operating costs, salaries and programs of the world headquarters building.
$45.1 million in appropriations to the fields outside of North America.
$30.2 million for missionaries and employees serving in other divisions other than their own.
$23.8 million in subsidies to institutions.
$14.5 million in headquarters administered funds for programs in divisions.
$10.5 million in subsidies for institutional services.
$12.4 million for General Conference Auditing Service.

An Adventist Church finance officer underscored that the 2015 General Conference World Budget only includes items relating to the denomination’s world headquarters and appropriations to world fields. The World Budget does not include the reported incomes or budgets for its 13 divisions or respective local administrative units and congregations (The Adventist world church receives more than $2 billion in tithe annually). Many local administrative units may choose to report their own budget in a similar way.

Operating costs for the denomination’s headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States, is limited to 2 percent of world tithe, and it is again expected to operate significantly under that cap.

“We have been running under that cap for decades, making more resources available for world fields,” said Juan R. Prestol-Puesán, undertreasurer for the Adventist world church.

Prestol said this year’s World Budget highlights the continuing adjustment in tithe percentages from North America, a decision that was approved by the denomination’s Executive Committee in 2012.

Until 2012, the North American Division contributed 8 percent of its tithe to the World Budget, while the other 12 divisions each contributed 2 percent. The 2012 vote reduced North America’s tithe percentage contribution down to 6 percent, which would be implemented over several years. North America’s tithe is approximately $1 billion, and the 2015 continuing adjustment means a reduction of $10 million to the World Budget from North America, Prestol said.

“We are carefully threading through the process of the time of reduction without affecting existing programs,” Prestol said.

Recipient divisions other than North America are allocated appropriations between $1.3 million and $5 million.

More than one-third of appropriations to divisions are located in the 10/40 Window, a geographical rectangle in the eastern hemisphere between the 10 and 40 northern lines of latitude. The region is home to more than 60 percent of the world's population and less than 2 percent are Christian.

This year, for the second year in a row, the North American Division will receive an appropriation—$295,000, mostly to help administrate the Guam-Micronesia Mission, which until three years ago was part of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division.

Prestol also said the Adventist Church this year will spend most of the funds allocated for the 2015 General Conference Session. Church finance officers have set aside $1.4 million each year for the past five years for the 2015 GC Session. Prestol said the GC Session fund from 2010 ended with nearly $1.5 million in unspent funds.

Other appropriations over $1 million identified in the 2015 General Conference World Budget are:

$7.8 million for Loma Linda University
$5.5 million for Adventist World magazine
$5.4 million for Andrews University
$5 million for Hope Channel
$2.6 million for the Ellen G. White Estate
$2.6 million for Adventist World Radio
$1.6 million for subsidies to publications
$1.4 million for the 2015 General Conference Session
$1.3 million for Adventist Mission
$1.2 million for the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies
$1.2 million for the Geoscience Research Institute
$1.1 million for the Adventist University of Africa

To see a complete copy of the 2015 General Conference World Budget, please send a request to the ANN editor at adventistnews@gc.adventist.org.

In Liberia, ADRA distributing $110,000 worth of supplies to Ebola survivors, victims

Holiday project is expected to assist 600 people

January 08, 2015 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | ANN staff

The Adventist Development Relief Agency is collaborating with a local church in Monrovia, Liberia, to distribute supplies to some 600 Ebola survivors as part of a holiday project, the Daily Observer reported.

The Liberian news agency said the distribution of food, chloride and mattresses amounted to approximately $110,000 worth of supplies.

Hester Curry, a local ADRA project coordinator, said the ADRA Network Ebola Christmas and New Year’s project was launched to identify and assist Ebola survivors and others affected by the outbreak.

The Daily Observer reported that the Lathal Diason Church was assisting with the distribution of items across Montserrado County.

Curry said the project was developed after the ADRA country director visited the region and saw the need to assist Ebola survivors.

ADRA Liberia Director Anthony Zaizay vowed to continue working with Ebola survivors, and he emphasized that combating the Ebola virus needs to continue as a collective effort.

Zaizay encouraged Liberians to report themselves to the health center whenever they experience any signs of the virus.
Patrick Farley, chair of the Ebola Survivors Association of Liberia, thanked ADRA for the gesture, and he added that Ebola survivors face other challenges, such as stigmatization and discrimination.

Farley also appealed to ADRA and other NGOs to provide additional medicine for Ebola survivors. “We need more medicines because most Ebola survivors leave the Ebola Treatment Centers with different kinds of sicknesses,” he said.

The Ebola virus has infected nearly 21,000 people and killed more than 8,200 people in West Africa since the outbreak began in March, according to the World Health Organization. This includes nearly 8,200 cases in Liberia that led to nearly 3,500 deaths.

In response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa, ADRA has also distributed personal protective equipment, disinfectants and emergency food supplies, according to an ADRA news release. ADRA has been providing educational materials and engaging congregations and communities in awareness activities.