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July 30, 2015 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Andrew McChesney and Marcos Paseggi, Adventist Review
Don’t worry if you happen to walk into a Seventh-day Adventist church in the United States where English is not the first language of choice. Chances are you are worshiping in one of the increasingly typical Adventist congregations across the country.

Seventh-day Adventists are the most racially and ethnically diverse religious group in the United States, according to a report released Monday by the Pew Research Center, a respected non-partisan organization in Washington.

“Thirty-seven percent of adults who identify as Seventh-day Adventists are white, while 32 percent are black, 15 percent are Hispanic, 8 percent are Asian, and another 8 percent are another race or mixed race,” Michael Lipka, a Pew editor who focuses on religion, wrote in the report.

The analysis, based on data provided by the 2014 Religious Landscape Study, looked at the racial and ethnic composition of 29 major religious groups. Racial and ethnic groups were broken down into five categories: whites, blacks, Hispanics of all races, Asians, and other races and mixed-race Americans.

After collating the data, Pew gave Seventh-day Adventists a score of 9.1 in the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index, well above the national average of 6.6, where 66 percent of church membership is white. The least diverse religious group in the United States, according to the report, is the National Baptist Convention, a traditionally black denomination that received a score of 0.2.

Gary Krause, director of the Office of Adventist Mission for the Adventist world church, said the church’s very mission of preparing all people for Jesus’ Second Coming called for diversity.

“We’re not an American church. We’re not an African or Asian church. We’re not a European church,” Krause said. “We’re a worldwide movement with a mission to all people groups.”

He noted that the Adventist Church operates in 215 countries and territories. “But we’re not happy about it because the United Nations lists 22 more where we don’t have established work,” said Krause, whose office coordinates and provides funding for the church’s global mission work. “We’re all God’s children, and we love to welcome people from all races into our family.”

In the United States, the Adventist Church has grown more diverse since 2007, according to a similar Pew report carried out that year. In just seven years, the number of white Adventists has decreased by 6 percentage points, from 43 percent to 37 percent, while the number of black Adventists has increased by 11 points, from 21 percent to 32 percent. Asian members grew by 3 percentage points, from 5 percent to 8 percent, and Adventists in the other/mixed-races category doubled from 4 percent to 8 percent.

The margin of error for both the 2007 report and the new report is less than one percentage point, Katherine E. Ritchey, communications manager for the Pew Research Center, told the Adventist Review.

Daniel Weber, communication director for the Adventist Church’s North American Division, said the 1.2 million Adventists in the United States are a direct reflection of the church’s worldwide membership of 18.5 million people and growing.

“As our church has grown overseas and is represented in almost every culture, race and language group, this same diversity has also changed in North America because our experiences with different cultures overseas has allowed us to be more effective in reaching the diverse growing
populations here,” Weber said. “The Gospel Commission calls for us to reach all people of all cultures.”

The Adventist world church has not conducted research solely on its diversity. But the findings of an unpublished 2013 general survey of North American church members that included questions on ethnicity fall in line with Pew’s new report, said David Trim, director of the world church’s Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research.

Trim was not surprised by the Pew report, saying the Adventist Church as a whole is very accepting of all people and its message emphasizes commonalities such as a community in Christ and the hope in the Second Coming rather than differences.

“We have an identity that transcends national and ethnic differences — and that is not true for every church,” Trim said.

The Pew report defines a denomination as diverse if no racial or ethnic group amounts to more than 40 percent of its adult membership. Only two other religious groups fit that definition: Muslims (with a score of 8.7) and Jehovah’s Witnesses (8.6), which placed second and third, respectively, after Adventists.

The Herfindahl-Hirschman Index used by Pew is a measurement commonly applied to market share studies, among other fields. It is usually used to contrast monopolies against companies that face less competition.

On the other end of the index’s spectrum, the least religiously diverse groups tend to be denominations where most of their members are either mostly white or mostly black.

The report includes three subsets of people who are unaffiliated religiously: atheists, agnostics, and “nothing in particular.” All three groups are mostly white.

WHO teams up with Adventists in a global first

The effort to reduce infant and maternal mortality rates begins in South Africa.

August 04, 2015 | Pretoria, South Africa | Joanne Ratsara

The World Health Organization and the Seventh-day Adventist Church are kicking off an unprecedented global partnership aimed at reducing infant and maternal mortality rates.

This is the first time that the WHO, the public health agency of the United Nations, has partnered with a faith-based organization on a global scale, said Annette Mwansa Nkowane, WHO’s lead nurse and a main proponent of the five-year project to educate more midwives.
The WHO approached the Adventist Church with the proposal for the project after a major health conference organized by the church in Geneva, Switzerland. The Geneva-based WHO has identified a global lack of qualified midwives as a contributing factor in the deaths of mothers and babies and the church’s global network of educators and hospitals as a way to address the shortfall.

Fifty international nursing leaders and educators from North America, Europe, South America, and Africa are meeting this week in Bloemfontein, South Africa, to implement the project, starting in four African countries. The $1 million project is funded by the OPEC Foundation for International Development through the World Health Organization and was designed by WHO officials, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and the Loma Linda University School of Nursing.

“We are grateful to begin this partnership. We will produce something the world will benefit from,” said Nkowane, a nurse and midwife educated in Zambia whose full title is worldwide technical officer for nursing and midwifery. “I believed and was convinced this would be successful. I believe that with God all things are possible.”

“The persistence of the WHO has led to this historic day,” said Patricia Jones, associate director for nursing with the health ministries department of the Adventist world church. “Thank you for not giving up and for having faith in us in a faith-based group to be trusted to take on such a project.”

Understanding the Challenge
About 280,000 women die in pregnancy or childbirth every year worldwide, according to WHO statistics. Complicating matters, Africa has about 12 percent as many physicians as the global average and 30 percent as many nurses. The gap is widening as Africa’s population grows rapidly and schools in various countries are only able to educate 10 percent to 30 percent of the needed healthcare professionals.

Nkowane said the project would improve the quantity and quality of midwives and help close a gap in the ratio between faculty and students, which she put at 1:45 in developing countries and 1:12 in developed countries.

The project focuses on four institutions in Africa where the maternal mortality ratio is 14 times higher than in the world’s developed regions: Malamulo College of Health Sciences at Malamulo Hospital in Malawi, Maluti College of Nursing at Maluti Hospital in Lesotho, Kanye Adventist College of Nursing at Kanye Hospital in Botswana, and the at hospital Adventist University of Cosendai in Cameroon.

The WHO expects the project to contribute toward the achievement of United Nations Millennium Development Goals to reduce maternal and child mortality and recognize the universal truth that there cannot be health without a workforce.

The Beginnings
Seeds for the collaboration were sown in 2009 in Geneva during the first global health conference hosted by the health ministries department of the General Conference, the administrative body of the Adventist world church.

Health Ministries director Allan Handysides and his successor, Peter Landless, established a close association with the WHO during this conference.
Immediately before the event, Adventist nursing educators met in Geneva for a pre-conference organized by Jones, director of global nursing at the Loma Linda University School of Nursing. One of the pre-conference’s speakers, Jean Yan, WHO’s lead nurse at the time, was impressed with what she observed.

“Dr. Yan saw our group as a powerful network for change in nursing education and health care because we are an organized global system,” Jones said. “She reasoned that if there is such a global system of nurse educators within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, why couldn’t there be a project that could enlist the talents of such a team to make a difference in health care?”

The idea began to incubate. Yan pursued the matter with Jones in the following months.

“At first I was afraid to accept the challenge,” Jones said. “Senior leaders at Loma Linda University School of Nursing were cognizant of that fact that we don’t teach midwifery, nor do we have an army of midwifery experts.”

Despite this, the WHO continued to pursue the matter with the church.

Adventist Church leaders voted to accept the WHO’s proposal during a 2010 Spring Meeting at world church headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland.

That same year, Yan retired and Nkowane was appointed as the lead nurse. She followed Yan’s vision and worked further to develop the project with Jones. Nkowane also sought funding, a length process that delayed the project until 2014.

“WHO persisted in writing grants to create funds for this project until they succeeded,” Jones said.

The WHO proposed various project sites, and the donor selected the four participating institutions. The project will be implemented by the midwifery educators at the colleges, WHO-associated consultants, local WHO collaborating centers, practicing midwives in the hospitals, and a task force from the Loma Linda School of Nursing.

Three of the sites receiving the primary focus of the project are within the Adventist Church’s Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division.

“We take this as a sacred trust from God to be able to contribute to the achievement of these specific United Nations Millennium Goals in cooperation with the World Health Organization,” division president Paul Ratsara told this week’s conference.

He said the project was in harmony with the mission of the global church.

“Mothers lives will be saved. Babies will be saved,” he said. “We will strive to improve always and continue to set the bar higher as we find innovative ways to improve the health of the communities we serve, thereby being the hands and heart of Jesus.”

In Saint Kitts, Adventist youth march against crime-ridden community
Hundreds of Seventh-day Adventists joined government officials in the Caribbean island of St. Kitts last month to march against the escalating crime wave in the Cayon Community.

August 04, 2015 | Cayon, St. Kitts and Nevis | Inter-American Division Staff

More than 300 church members from nine Adventist congregations denounced crime by encouraging onlookers to have love for each other, put away guns, keep the Ten Commandments, and join together in the fight against violence. Other groups also took part in the march and rally that was organized by the Island Council.

Parliament Representative the Honorable Eugene Hamilton praised the Adventist Church on the island for its commitment to crime reduction and "to the saving of our misguided younger's lives," reported the St. Kitts and Nevis News on www.sknis.info of the July 19, 2015, event.

"This gathering demonstrates that crime produces social solidarity...let us therefore embrace the ideas of all sectors, groups, organizations and people, recognizing that we all have something valuable to contribute to nation building," said Hamilton.

Hamilton urged churches in the community to continue to work together against crime in the community of some 3,000 people in Cayon.

Acting commissioner of Police and other leaders spoke during the rally.

Sherwin AE White, island coordinator for the church in St. Kitts, said the Cayon Adventist Church took the lead in sending messages to their communities with pathfinders and master guides, drum core, and young and old.

"Participating in marches against crime becomes imperative because church members are a part of the communities that are challenged with social ills and vices that bring about negative effects," said White.

For nearly four years the Adventist Church has sought to create community visibility demonstrating that "the church is the community for the community," explained White. Programs targeting single fathers, drug awareness, end violence against women (Enditnow), and prayer walks in crime prone areas on the island have been ongoing, he added.

Church members across the island also get involved in community based activities on the third Sabbath of the second month of the quarter to provide breakfast to police officers and prison officers, and offer free medical screenings in the independence square, among other activities, added White.

"Involvement in community based activities has proven to be positive reinforcements that crime should not be an option," White said.

The islands of St. Kitts and Nevis constitute one country and belongs to the Leeward Islands in the Lesser Antilles. The Seventh-day Adventist Church there has more than 1,600 church
Myanmar floods damage 32 Adventist churches; Adventists assist flood victims

August 04, 2015 | Myo Chan/Teresa Costello with additional reporting by Brendon Irvine

This week Adventists in Myanmar continue their assessment and relief activities in the flood-affected western areas of the country. Six weeks of heavy rainfall combined with high winds and rain from a recent cyclone have caused flooding and some landslides in four western areas, leaving 46 dead and more than 150,000 affected according to current news reports.

Although at least 32 churches have been damaged with the majority still flooded, members and leaders are focused on helping their communities. Adventist Community Services (ACS) volunteers distributed needed items to approximately 500 disaster victims in the area. ACS is also organizing a food distribution plan for approximately 2,000 people displaced by earlier flooding in the southeast.

Tha Tun Aye, Central Myanmar Mission treasurer, reports that church leaders “are coordinating with the ACS coordinator in Myanmar Union to send medical doctors and health workers to the disaster-affected area.”

In conjunction with government teams and non-government groups, ADRA Myanmar will provide a joint emergency response to unmet needs and/or gaps in support in the northwestern region. Initially, the response plan will include food and water for victims. Brendon Irvine, ADRA Myanmar country director, notes that “a larger ADRA International Network response of up to USD 50,000 is also planned once clearer details emerge of ongoing needs, which [could] possibly include [the other] areas.”

With more monsoon rains predicted this month, the Adventist church in Myanmar is prepared to continue its relief work and bring the comfort of Christ to those in crisis.