Northwest Crowds Flock to Nativity Pageants
Camels, sheep, horses and people are converging all across the Northwest as several Adventist churches present their annual Nativity programs. Programs in Spokane, Wash., Kelso, Wash., Gladstone, Ore. and beyond are attracting thousands of community neighbors with a chance to travel back in time to experience the drama of Bethlehem and Jesus’ birth. Record crowds in Gladstone, Ore., lined up hours early to be the first to experience Follow the Star sponsored by area churches. View a gallery of photos from this year’s Journey to Bethlehem in Auburn, Wash., HERE. Read more about some of these special seasonal events in the February GLEANER.

Pacific Press Celebrates a Real Treasure
On Dec. 1, Pacific Press Publishing Association celebrated the 25th anniversary of Aileen Sox as editor of Our Little Friend and Primary Treasure. Our Little Friend, first published in 1897, and Primary Treasure, established in 1957, is handed out weekly to thousands of children in Sabbath Schools around the world. Since Mrs. Sox, as she is affectionately known, became editor, Pacific Press has produced 97,664,424 copies of the two magazines, or more than a billion pages. If laid end to end they would reach around the earth more than seven times and would stretch between New York City and Los Angeles 66 times. Read more from the Pacific Press HERE.

Bear Basics Meets Needs in Wrangell
The Adventist Community Services center, an outreach of the Wrangell (Alaska) Church which serves an average of 400 clients each month, is growing. It now includes a thrift store, Bear Basics, the first Adventist-operated thrift store of its kind in Alaska. Officially opened on Sept. 28, the store has the look of an airport duty-free shop, and is popular with mothers toting children. “This is one of the best shops that serve our struggling town folks,” says a native lady. “I will be coming here regularly with my friends.” Read more at the Alaska Conference website HERE.
National Adventist Symposium Urges a Simpler Gospel Message
Top administrators, evangelists and ministerial secretaries of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are reprioritizing the role of God's spirit and simple Bible truths in public evangelism. Rather than complicating the gospel or endlessly repackaging it, leaders are advocating a simpler approach. Speakers such as Ernestine Finley (pictured here) say preaching basic Bible truths is the most compelling way to present the Adventist hope. “This approach requires admitting one’s own vulnerability,” says Shawn Boonstra, North American Division Ministerial Association associate director. “The world is tired of religious know-it-alls,” he says, citing a New Testament story in which the apostle Paul identifies with his audience to make a point. Read more from the Adventist News Network HERE.

Workplace Religious Complaints Double
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) statistics show that religious discrimination complaints in workplace settings across the nation have more than doubled from a little over a decade ago, resulting in roughly $10 million in settlements. Last year, nearly 3,800 were filed. Federal law requires employers to make reasonable accommodations to “sincerely held” religious beliefs of employees as long as doing so poses no undue hardship on the employer, EEOC says. When that doesn't happen, EEOC says it steps in but only after first attempting to reach a pre-litigation settlement with the employer. Read more from the Adventist Review HERE. The Northwest Religious Liberty Association provides support services for both Adventist members and the public throughout the Northwest. Read more HERE.

The Winnings Continue for the GLEANER Christmas Drawings
Congratulations to the Dec. 1 Christmas drawing winners: Janet Rich of Battle Ground, Wash.; Rochelle White of Woodland, Wash.; and Johines Gomez of the Philippines. This week's winners of the GleanerNOW 2011 Christmas drawing have been selected and will be announced in next week's e-newsletter. Each winner will receive a gift pack including two books from the Christmas in My Heart series by Joe Wheeler, two DVDs including 16 of these stories read in person by Wheeler, and a keepsake Christmas in My Heart ornament. A big thank-you goes to both Wheeler and the Pacific Press for providing these special gift packs. Three more winners will be selected on Dec. 15. A grand-prize winner will be chosen on Dec. 22 to receive one of these gift packs, PLUS a new Kindle Fire tablet. All who receive this weekly e-newsletter are automatically entered into each drawing.
Spam
Not spam
Forget previous vote
"Mrs. Sox" Reaches 25th Anniversary

Nampa, Idaho (December 1, 2011) — Today Pacific Press® celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of Aileen Sox as editor of Our Little Friend and Primary Treasure, the Seventh-day Adventist Church's weekly magazines for children aged 0 - 9. Our Little Friend, first published in 1897, and Primary Treasure, established in 1957, are handed out weekly to thousands of children in Sabbath Schools around the world.

Since Mrs. Sox, as she is affectionately known, became editor, Pacific Press® has produced 97,664,424 copies of the two magazines, or more than a billion pages. If laid end to end they would reach around the earth more than seven times and would stretch between New York City and Los Angeles sixty-six times.

During a special chapel service dedicated to honoring Aileen, a congratulatory note was read from Randy Fishell, Editor of Guide and Real Magazines, "I hope that there's no such thing as 'getting tired' in heaven, otherwise you'll be in big trouble meeting all the youngsters you've influenced for Jesus Christ over the past 25 years!"

Lowell Cooper, general vice president of the Adventist world church added, "Aileen, you now join a small and elite group of individuals who have edited a Church periodical for 25 years or more. You have maintained an outstanding ability to connect with the hearts and minds of children."

In response, Aileen noted, "This job really isn't about me. It is about pursuing God's plan for magazines, and eventually books, to reach kids for His kingdom. Only with God's help can my ministry have any meaning at all."

Under Aileen's tenure, several children's books have been published, based on series in the magazines. These include God's Ten Promises, A Child's Steps to Jesus, and What We Believe for Kids. The latest book, We Can Trust the Bible, is scheduled for a spring release. Websites for both Our Little Friend and Primary Treasure include an audio of each week's lesson, stories, and a place for children to correspond with Mrs. Sox.

From Brisbane, Australia, Elder Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists wrote, "God has guided Aileen to choose the right stories and emphasis to influence thousands of youngsters and their parents for 25 years! Her work and influence reach far beyond Pacific Press®. Through her work she has touched the farthest corners of the globe to help point children to Jesus, our Best Friend and Greatest Treasure."

Dale Galusha, president of Pacific Press® summed it up in his closing remarks, "For 25 years, Mrs. Sox has been sharing Christ's love with children. Because of this ministry, many will be in heaven."

Congratulations, Mrs. Sox!

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Nestled on an island at the mouth of the Stikine River, Wrangell, Alaska offers visitors a glimpse of petroglyphs carved by early inhabitants thousands of years ago. This Tlingit city of 2,400 used to be one of the oldest non-native settlements in Alaska’s pristine inner passage wilderness.

Recently, the Adventist Community Services of Alaska and the Wrangell Adventist Church opened the first ACS thrift shop in Alaska. The community services outreach of Wrangell Church is primarily involved in food and commodity distribution in partnership with USDA and Food Bank of Alaska. The food program provides for both families and seniors and has more than 400 clients on an average month. “We like to widen our response not only to food but also to include clothing. Jesus wants us to do this to serve the suffering people around us”. Charleen Howard (ACS Store Manager).

On September 28, 2011, the Bear Basics store was opened to the public with a simple ribbon cutting ceremony officiated by
Dr. Ephraim Palmero, ACS Alaska Executive Director. People from all walks of life enjoyed the unique ambiance of the store that has the look of an airport duty-free shop. Mothers with kids invaded the grocery section with delight and surprise to take advantage of the low-priced grocery items. Used brand name clothing hanging along the racks were emptied and volunteers were astonished with the market response. “This is one of the best shops that serve our struggling town folks,” commented a native lady, “I will be coming here regularly with my friends.”

Sometimes, people cannot see the Bible we are handing to them, but can feel the compassionate presence we share with them at their lowest period in their lives. Victims of disasters are always free to pick what they need from this shop, and we like to have relationships with these suffering people. We will always be ready to lend our help if needed.
Evangelism symposium urges simpler gospel presentation

'My preaching has become more Christ-centered,' Finley says

5 Dec 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN

Top administrators, evangelists and Ministerial secretaries of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are reprioritizing the role of God's spirit and simple Bible truths in public evangelism.

Rather than complicating the gospel or endlessly repackaging it, leaders are advocating a simpler approach. They say preaching basic Bible truths is the most compelling way to present the Adventist hope.

This approach requires admitting one's own vulnerability, said Shawn Boonstra, associate director for the Ministerial Association of the church's North American Division. "The world is tired of religious know-it-alls," he said, citing a New Testament story in which the apostle Paul identifies with his audience to make a point.

"It's OK to be a sinner saved by Christ. If your audience doesn't see that you need Jesus, they'll never listen to your message," Boonstra told members of the world church's Evangelism Symposium last week.

The symposium is a broadening of the church's Council on Evangelism and Witness to include more regional evangelists and Ministerial secretaries in the discussion.

About 40 leaders from each of the church's 13 divisions met at Adventist world headquarters November 28 to 30 to share resources, exchange ideas, address challenges to evangelism and pray together.

"Jesus' mission is to seek and save everyone who is lost, so the number one priority of the church should be to win people to Jesus," said Jerry Page, secretary of the world church's Ministerial Association.

In an increasingly secular world, evangelists can no longer assume their audience is either familiar with Christian principles or Biblically literate, said veteran Adventist evangelist Mark Finley.

"I would say my preaching has become more Christ-centered, more biblically basic, and certainly ministering more to the felt needs of people," Finley told ANN during a symposium break.

This message of simplicity seemed to resonate with church leaders and evangelists who attended.

"I think maybe we'll need to accept the idea of just submitting ourselves to the Lord and just preach the simple gospel truth and leave the rest to Him. I think we need to get out of this trap of always thinking we must invent something new or sophisticated, and just use the Bible," said Mikhail Kaminskiy, director of the Office of Assessment for the church's Euro-Asia Division.

Church leaders said a clear, authentic message of truth can even connect with world's growing postmodern generation -- a group of 1.8 billion people worldwide, according to Miroslav Pujic, communication director for the church's Trans-European Division.

"We are realizing that Jesus' message is exactly what this generation is looking for -- the real truth, transparency and an alternative to the systems and churches they don't trust in," said Robert Costa, an associate secretary for the world church's Ministerial Association.

Fundamentally, postmodernism is despair and disenchantment with humanity's failed attempts to explain, order and better the world through logic and reason, Boonstra said. "Instead of understanding, logic and reason brought some of history's worst disasters -- two world wars, genocide, religious scandal and economic crisis."

Postmoderns are seeking an authentic, meaningful answer to today's unsettled world, Boonstra said. The Adventist truth provides a compelling one, he added. The church's understanding of history and interpretation of the Bible "can offer clarity and set the table for understanding," he said.

"God has put a longing for eternity in the human heart. Somewhere inside they know that they were not meant to be severed from their Creator. They might come at it from a different frame of reference, but it's there," Boonstra said.

Adventist evangelism should focus on people aware of this void, Boonstra said, not those who refuse to "budge spiritually." A close reading of the Bible indicates that there were "no cold conversions in the New Testament," he said.

"The disciples watched for interested hearers, which is a lot different than trying to interest hearers," he said.

Ernestine Finley reminds church evangelists and Ministerial secretaries that baptism is just the beginning. Her "spiritual friendship plan" matches new believers with existing church members who share similar interests and backgrounds. [photo: Ansel Oliver]
This approach requires "doing a lot more homework and a lot more listening," but it's the only method of evangelism modeled in the Bible, Boonstra said. Even during Pentecost, the outpouring of God's spirit on the early Apostolic church, the Bible says "devout men from every nation" (Acts 2:5) were converted. "God has already been there every time. God wakes up the human heart, and then sends us," he said.

A symposium presentation by Ernestine Finley reminded church leaders what to do after they've welcomed new believers to their congregations. Her "spiritual friendship plan" for nurturing fledgling Adventists connected with Johnny and Poppy Lubis from the church's Southern Asia-Pacific Division. "Sometimes we do evangelism and 500 come in, but 500 more go out the back door," Poppy said.

As the church embraces a focus on urban evangelism, nurture will be crucial in ministry to large cities in Indonesia, such as Jakarta, Johnny said.
Simplicity is good. But let's make sure we don't confuse simplicity with shallowness. It sounds like we are ready for the message of 1888 again! This is what people need to hear. This is the clearest presentation of the gospel possible.

Everything we know tells us that the Third Angel's message, together with the first two, is what we will preach to the world right now in these very last days. God in His wisdom knew just what the world would need at this time, and just how to present it. He foresaw the Postmoderns.

Eric Huffman | December 10, 2011 3:06 PM | Reply

"I would say my preaching has become more Christ-centered, more biblically basic, and certainly ministering more to the felt needs of people," Finley told ANN during a symposium break.

I enjoy Pastor Finley's preaching, but was disappointed to hear him talk about catering to "felt needs". I learned from Dr. Walter Veith and Pastor Stephen Bohr's lectures that we must be careful talking about things like this. Are we supposed to cater to what people think they need (like promoting rock music, jewelry and coffee in our churches) and ignoring the specific counsel given us by God through Mrs. White in these areas just so we can get people into church?

I agree we need seminars that cover salvation as well as prophecy and most of the ones I have seen do just that. I also agree we need to meet the needs of fallen humanity, but REAL needs, not FELT needs. Otherwise we are just busy filling selfish needs of folks who really have little interest in truth, sacrifice and devotion to the 3 angels' messages.

Kennan | December 10, 2011 8:27 PM | Reply
Workplace Religious Complaints Double Over 10 Years

BY MARCIA PLEDGER

Northeast Ohio native Suhad Hasan says neither her Muslim faith nor her headscarf should be an issue where she works.

But she said they were while she was a sales associate at the Old Navy clothing store in Santa Clara, California, three years ago. Hasan said she was assigned to work in the fitting room and was never offered training for other positions, despite her repeated requests.

After several months, Hasan moved back to Ohio, only to be denied what she said was supposed to be an automatic transfer to a job in another Old Navy store. She found herself without a job.

"I was born and raised in the United States and I pay taxes like everybody else," said Hasan, 39, now a Parma, Ohio, resident who has sued Gap Inc., the parent company of Old Navy. "What I wear on my head and the God that I believe in should not be an issue in the workplace."

The number of complaints like Hasan’s is steadily rising. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission statistics show that religious discrimination complaints in workplace settings have more than doubled from a little over a decade ago, resulting in roughly $10 million in settlements. Last year, nearly 3,800 were filed.

"Religion has increasingly moved into the private sphere, so when it does pop up in the workplace, we're less equipped to deal with it in a rational and even-handed manner," said John Gordon, chairman of the religion department at Baldwin-Wallace College in Ohio.

In an email on November 17, Gap spokeswoman Debbie Mesloh said the company denies allegations raised by Hasan in her complaint. "We are an equal opportunity employer with robust anti-discrimination policies and programs, and we strive to ensure a welcoming and inclusive environment for all employees," Mesloh said.

Many of the complaints from employees involve wearing head garb or those who say they work for companies that refuse to accommodate their requests for religious days off.

Cynthia Stankiewicz, enforcement manager for the EEOC Cleveland field office, said not allowing time off for religious observances is a common issue. She said many cases come about when employers aren’t aware of employees’ rights or when employers don’t attempt to accommodate requests that do not pose a hardship on the business.

"In most cases, employers don’t have a good valid job-related reason for religious discrimination," she said. "It’s often based on fears, myths and stereotypes."

The law requires employers to make reasonable accommodations to "sincerely held" religious beliefs of employees as long as doing so poses no undue hardship on the employer, EEOC says. When that doesn’t happen, EEOC said it steps in but only after first attempting to reach a pre-litigation settlement with the employer.

Still, an employer can turn down a request if that means training someone else, at a substantial cost, to cover for the worker who doesn’t want to work for religious reasons, Stankiewicz said.

Also, employers are not required to pay premium or overtime costs in order to accommodate religious needs. Or undue hardships could become an issue if a collective bargaining agreement includes rules regarding seniority and assignments.

"It’s a complex thing. Almost every case is unique," said Gordon. "A particular employer may really have a bias or an employee might be unreasonable."
Civil rights attorney and law professor Avery Friedman, who has represented employees for the last four decades, said he's not surprised about the increase in EEOC complaints about religious workplace issues.

"The rise relates to how certain groups are perceived, coupled with people who carry their faith-based precepts and act as missionaries in the workplace," he said.

Since returning to Ohio, Hasan has landed a job as a home health aide. She said she is still shaken by her experience with Old Navy.

"I was raised to respect all religions. But when you attack my hijab, you're demeaning my beliefs and my religion," she said.