This Week: Students Changing Lives; ASI Convention in Florida This Weekend; and more!

This week's enewsletter is sponsored by Positive Life Radio!

Students Changing Lives
This summer, 20 young people are spending their vacation knocking on doors in Eastern Washington as part of Upper Columbia Conference's Youth Rush program. The students have been selling books door-to-door in cities throughout the conference, knocking on more than 100,000 doors and distributing more than 12,500 books. Each student looks forward to divine appointments. Near the end of a long, hot day, Cassie Mason, a Walla Walla Valley Academy student, was greeted abruptly at the door by a woman who was obviously not interested. She kept making excuses while Mason kept offering other books. Finally the woman began crying and said “I'm so glad you came here right now. I really need these materials.” Read more about Upper Columbia’s Youth Rush program at UCCsda.org.

ASI National Convention in Florida This Weekend
This weekend lay-leaders from around North America and the world gather in Orlando, Fla., for the annual Adventist-Laymen's Services & Industries (ASI) convention. This year's theme, "It's Time ...", highlights how prophecies are being fulfilled. Speakers for the convention included Ted N.C. Wilson, Mark Finley, Justin Kim, Ty Gibson, as well as others. If you can't attend in person, plan on watching the general sessions live on 3ABN. For more information about this year's convention, visit ASIministries.org.

Pakistan Adventist Receives Life Sentence for Alleged Blasphemy
Sajjad Masih, a 29-year-old Pakistani man, was sentenced last month to life in prison for blasphemy. The man, a Seventh-day Adventist, was accused of sending text-messages that defamed the prophet Muhammad, but even his accuser has recanted his testimony. Masih's defense attorney says the judge buckled to pressure from extremist groups that dominate the area. John Graz, Adventist church director of public affairs and religious liberty, says...
"Members of religious minorities in Pakistan live with the constant threat of being accused of blasphemy," Masih is planning to appeal the ruling. Read more from the Washington Post and Adventist News Network.

**Keeping your Church Website Useful**

Many churches have websites, and those websites are a great tool for reaching your community online. But does your church have the basics covered? In this Adventist News Network video, Jesse Johnson, NetAserve president, talks about some of the basic, but often overlooked, features any church website should have. Watch this short video and see what you can do to improve your church's website.

**Culmore Re-Elected in British Columbia**

Former Oregon Conference pastor Wayne Culmore was recently reelected to serve as president of the British Columbia Conference (BCC). Before joining BCC, Culmore was the pastor of the Vancouver Adventist Community Church, in Vancouver, Wash.

Do you enjoy the GleanerNOW emails? Why not share it with someone else? Hit the "Forward to Friend" link below and help keep others in the loop!

**WWU History Professor Publishes White Book**

A new book, *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet* is being published by Oxford University Press. The book, a biography of the co-founder of the Adventist church, is a history book meant to introduce White to general readers as well as history students. Co-edited by Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Walla Walla University (WWU) history professor, the book examines White's public writing career. "Scholars have identified Ellen White with Anne Hutchinson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mary Baker Eddy, and Aimee Semple McPherson as one of the most prominent women in American religious history," said Aamodt, "yet she is one of the least studied and understood." Learn more about this book at WallaWalla.edu.
Former Model Starts Christian-inspired Clothing Line

Kylie Bisutti, a former Victoria’s Secret model, has launched a new Christian-inspired clothing line. Bisutti quit modeling, a career she had dreamed about, after becoming convicted that it conflicted with her faith. The clothing, God Inspired Fashion, features Bible verses and motivational phrases on the articles of clothing. Bisutti, who wrote a book, *I'm No Angel*, which shares her story and convictions about the fashion industry. [Watch her recent interview on the *Today* show.](http://us6.campaign-archive2.com/?u=08d79fe6ae01ad05827cf29bb&id=b970fb88fa&c=e=b5a60611a1)

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A story of healing

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Looking Ahead

**August**

6–Sept. 28: Distraction Dilemma-Exposing Distractions & Dangers in Music Seminar
7–11: NW Adventist Amateur Radio Association Annual Retreat
11: CAA Car Show & Movie Night
23–25: Alumni Rosario Weekend

More Events

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by Robert Koorenny

Melina Maniscalco (left) and Cassie Dhole (right) enjoy their time in the field.

Alina Pilipchuk, an Upper Columbia Academy student, continues working on her street.

Helen Maijub, an Upper Columbia Academy student, smiles as she continues working door-to-door in Richland, Wash.

Kenenwick, Wash., August 5, 2013 - “I don’t even know what’s in this book, but I know I agree with it,” remarked Roy as he flipped through a copy of The Great Controversy. Roy lives in Kenenwick, Wash., and is one of thousands of people the Upper Columbia Conference Youth Rush team have visited with this summer.

This year, 20 young people participated in the annual Youth Rush student literature evangelism program, knocking on more than 100,000 doors throughout the conference territory. “Everybody in my church just believes in whatever they want to believe,” Roy said in frustration. He ended up donating, selecting a copy of The Great Controversy and signing up for Bible studies.

“Roy’s basically already an Adventist,” said Ron Kelly, Kenenwick Church outreach coordinator, who made a follow-up visit to Roy. Roy is evidence of what Acts of the Apostles says, that “many are on the verge of the kingdom, waiting only to be gathered in” (p. 109).

Youth Rush students distributed more than 12,500 books this summer and received more than $110,000 in donations, providing more than $70,000 in matching scholarship funds for Adventist education. Beyond money, these books represent a deep sense of mission found at Youth Rush.

“I was praying and praying that God would show me why He called me here,” said Cassie Mason, a student at Walla Walla Valley Academy in College Place, Wash. “I was getting books into people’s homes, but I wanted to experience a divine appointment.”

After a hot day on the streets at one of the last doors, Mason met a woman who abruptly said that she wasn’t interested because she had had a bad day at work. Mason handed her a devotional book anyway. The lady again said she didn’t have time due to her bad day. Mason showed her two more devotional books and talked about how they could help her with what she really needed.

“She started crying and crying,” says Mason. “She told me, ‘I’m so glad you came here right now. I really need these materials.’”

Youth Rush members look forward to divine appointments like this. Just as these students have experienced this summer, God has powerful experiences waiting as you reach out to those around you.
For more great stories and statistics of how God worked this summer through Upper Columbia Conference’s Youth Rush team, visit uccsda.org/YouthRush/2013report. Next year's Youth Rush program runs June 8 to Aug. 14 and is open to students ages 16 and up.
Imagine being hung upside down by your feet. Electric wires are tied around your ankles and you're threatened repeatedly with electrocution. In addition, you are frequently pulled from your cell so that the police can beat you viciously.

Why?

Because someone accused you of making inflammatory statements about God. And even though your accuser later recanted his allegation, you were still “tried” for the crime of blasphemy, convicted and then sentenced to life imprisonment. Think about that: spending the rest of your life in prison for the “crime” of speaking your mind.

It’s absolutely incomprehensible. Especially for those of us privileged to live in America where we too often take our First Amendment-guaranteed rights to free speech and freedom of religion for granted. As an American, you can be excused for asking how someone could be imprisoned — or worse — just for something he or she has said or written.

For anyone who is unfamiliar with the term, blasphemy essentially means showing disrespect or contempt for a deity. While you’d likely offend a number of people by engaging in blasphemy, your right to do so in the U.S. is nevertheless protected by the previously mentioned First Amendment.

Yet in far too many countries (even one would be too many), blasphemy is illegal and the consequences are often severe. In many of those countries, being hauled off to jail for expressing a minority view about religion is a shockingly common occurrence. And the level of “proof” for such a crime can be astonishingly low.

In the United States, there’s guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. In too many other countries, when it comes to blasphemy there’s guilt based on nothing but doubt if you happen to be a member of a religious minority … like a Christian in Pakistan.

Recently the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom released a report detailing Pakistan’s history of violence against religious freedom. The findings are deeply troubling — in just the last 18 months, the commission documented 203 incidents of violence in the name of religion, resulting in some 1,800 casualties and more than 700 deaths.

One of those cases involves a Seventh-day Adventist whose situation is recounted above to us from his lawyer (although the alleged insults involved the Prophet Muhammad). Accused of blasphemy by authorities in Pakistan despite the accuser both recanting his testimony and stating that the police forced him to level the allegation in the first place, Sajjid Masih was convicted of blasphemy and this month was sentenced to life in prison. There remains zero evidence supporting the charges.

Sad to say, a conviction based on no evidence is not rare in a case like this, not in a country like Pakistan where torture of Christians and other religious minorities is all too common. And while Masih’s sentence of lifetime incarceration is deeply disturbing, it’s not the most pressing problem.

Blasphemy laws themselves are the key issue. No matter what god the majority population in a country chooses to worship, making dissent by minority faiths a criminal offense is a terrible idea, for all kinds of reasons. To suggest that your god is happy to rule by coercion, happy to attempt to force people to follow through any means necessary — even torture or death — is beyond folly.

While Sajjid Masih is a deeply troubling current example of abusive enforcement of blasphemy laws — and I would encourage all people of faith to pray that his sentence is reversed and that Masih be released — there is a bigger picture to keep in focus. Laws restricting religious freedom are a scourge anywhere they exist, and on that point, the world’s citizens (even those who profess no faith at all) — must make their voices heard, and increase the pressure on governments that seek to restrict religious liberty around the world.

Dwayne Leslie is Director of Legislative Affairs, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
In Pakistan, Adventist sentenced to life imprisonment for alleged blasphemy

Jul 30, 2013 Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN

A court in Pakistan this month sentenced a Seventh-day Adventist man to life in prison for allegedly defaming the Prophet Muhammad in a case that falls under the country’s controversial blasphemy laws.

Members of religious minorities in Pakistan face arbitrary detention due to the country’s blasphemy laws. A court in Gojra recently sentenced a Seventh-day Adventist man to life imprisonment for allegedly sending blasphemous text messages. [map: Amber Sarno]

Sajjad Masih, 29, was convicted of sending blasphemous text messages to a member of a religious extremist group in 2011, despite his accuser’s subsequent retraction and prosecutors’ failure to produce any evidence of his involvement. Javed Sahotra, Masih’s defense attorney and fellow Adventist Church member, said the judge buckled under pressure from extremists who dominate the local religious and political landscape.

John Graz, director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty for the Adventist world church, said Masih’s case is not unusual.

“Members of religious minorities in Pakistan live with the constant threat of being accused of blasphemy,” Graz said. “They know that if they are accused, they cannot count on a serious investigation.”

According to news reports, Masih was framed by Donald Bhatti, who in May 2011 forcibly married Masih’s then fiancée, coercing her parents with promises of work visas. Bhatti had dated the young woman before moving to the United Kingdom, and is said to have still been jealous of her relationship with Masih. After the ceremony, Bhatti immediately returned to the U.K., taking his new wife with him. Masih and his former fiancée, however, maintained a close friendship, frequently calling each other.

In late December, the Gojra police ransacked Masih’s house, looking for evidence and intending to arrest him, Sahotra said. His accuser, Tariq Saleem, had informed local police of the text messages and urged them to track the mobile number and arrest its owner, he said.

The number was later found to be registered in Bhatti’s wife’s name. She told Masih that Bhatti had purchased a SIM using her ID card and arranged for an accomplice to send the messages, hoping to muddy their relationship, Sahotra said.

Gojra police arrested Masih on December 28, 2011. His lawyer accompanied him to the Gojra City Police Station, where he hoped Masih could record a statement and clear his name, church leaders said.

But the case was registered under Pakistan’s blasphemy laws, which call for death or life imprisonment for any person found guilty of blaspheming Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam.

Michael Ditta, president of the Adventist Church’s Pakistan Union, said the laws are notoriously used to take revenge on Christians and other religious minorities. Pakistan is 96 percent Muslim, with only 2 percent of the country’s population identifying itself as Christian.

“We as a minority faith are concerned about the misuse of this law and growing intolerance toward Christians in the country,” Ditta said.

Earlier this year, Pakistan was categorized as a “tier 1” country by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom for “systemic, ongoing and egregious” intolerance toward minority faith groups.

At the police station, Masih said he was forced, under duress, to “confess” to sending the text messages, Sahotra said. He was subsequently sent to prison to await trial.
After more than a year and a half in District Jail Toba Take Singh, Masih has been sentenced to life in prison, despite the fact that under cross-examination, his accuser admitted he had not received any blasphemous text messages as he originally claimed.

Furthermore, affidavits from Masih’s co-workers confirm that he was at work in Pakpattan at the time prosecutors claim he sent the text messages from his former fiancé’s cell phone.

Sahotra said he is planning to appeal the ruling in early August.

At world church headquarters in the U.S. state of Maryland, Graz and other members of the newly-formed Defense of Members Persecuted for Religious Reasons Committee are monitoring Masih’s case. The committee is also advocating on behalf of Antonio Monteiro, another Adventist Church member arbitrarily detained.

“We want our members and government leaders to know that the Seventh-day Adventist Church takes these cases very seriously,” Graz said.

“What is happening to Sajjad Masih is another tragic example of the abuse of blasphemy laws in some parts of Pakistan. Oppressing people on behalf of a religion contradicts the message of peace and justice to all religions that we advocate.”

**Religious Liberty**

Adventists believe that religious liberty is a God-given universal human right, and they work to make the free expression and practice of religion a universal reality. Adventist religious liberty advocates are active in promoting and protecting religious freedom through the church’s department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty. They represent the church’s priorities to national leaders and policy-makers worldwide.

**Areas of representation:**

- United States Government in Washington, D.C.
- United Nations in New York City and Geneva

**Recent Photos**
Ellen White Volume to Be Published by Oxford University Press

Book Includes Contributions by 20 Authors

Ellen Gould Harmon White

In early July Oxford University Press announced that it would publish a new biography of Ellen Gould Harmon White (1827-1915), cofounder of the Seventh-day Adventist church. In 18 chapters prepared by 20 authors Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet examines her ideas and the impact she has made on the Seventh-day Adventist church and American religion generally.

The new book will introduce the Adventist prophet to general readers as well as to history students and teachers. “Scholars have identified Ellen White with Anne Hutchinson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mary Baker Eddy, and Aimee Semple McPherson as one of the most prominent women in American religious history,” said co-editor Terrie Dopp Aamodt, professor of history at Walla Walla University, “yet she is one of the least studied and understood.”

The volume began to take shape at an October 2009 conference in Portland, Maine, the site of Ellen Harmon’s early upbringing. Chapter authors and respondents sought to examine the breadth of Ellen White’s 70-year public career while avoiding extremes of iconoclasm or hagiography. Two scholars, one familiar with Adventist studies and the other a specialist in an area of the chapter’s historical context, reviewed each chapter in detail. All of the 67 conference participants also read the chapters and applied a rubric to identify gaps and potential biases in the material. “Collaborative research, writing, and editing shaped the book,” said co-editor Gary Land, professor of history emeritus at Andrews University. “This project’s scholarly exchange between Ellen White specialists and students of her broader contexts would take decades to achieve in occasional meetings at professional conferences.”

The Seventh-day Adventist church is the largest of four innovative denominations founded in the United States in the nineteenth century, along with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; the Church of Christ, Scientist; and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. “Scholars have extensively examined the Mormon and Christian Science faiths,” said Ronald L. Numbers, Hilldale Professor of the History of Science and Medicine Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin, “but the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Adventists are not as well understood. Wider scholarly discussions on Ellen White are long overdue.”

Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet invites further conversation about White’s place in history. “Taken together, these chapters show how White was both a product and a producer of her age,” said Grant Wacker, professor of Christian history at Duke University, in the book’s foreword. “They also show that however one judges the role of supernatural inspiration, White ranked as one of the most gifted and influential religious leaders in American history, male or female. Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet tells her story in a new and remarkably informative way.”

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