Adventist Communicators Add New Chapter, Sharpen Story

By Heidi Baumgartner, SAC vice president for communication

Photos by Gerry Chudleigh and Dawin Rodriguez

The Society of Adventist Communicators entered a new chapter of its development and growth at its annual convention in October by welcoming the Inter-American Division chapter.

“Our vision is to expand from a regional to a vigorous international organization,” says George Johnson, Jr., SAC executive director. “The addition of an international chapter helps us meet our organizational goal to expand.”

The Society voted to accept the IAD chapter on Friday, October 25, during a lunchtime business session. The following morning, IAD hosted breakfast and introduced society members to their ministry region. In all, IAD brought nine representatives this year.

“We are very happy that SAC has welcomed us as an Inter-American chapter,” says Libna Stevens, IAD chapter liaison. “We attended for years and found inspiration and wished we could take this home.”

Benjamin García, IAD chapter president, spoke through translation. “By establishing this chapter in Inter-America, the vision of SAC is becoming a reality,” he says. “We have a lot of professionals who were waiting for something like this. Now we can begin to fulfill the dream.”

Two more chapters are preparing to launch in the European Union Division and South America Division.

Interfaith Communication

The communication convention, held this year on October 24-26, is structured to include media tours, professional development classes, keynote presentations, networking time, and social activities.

Kurt Kennedy, CEO and executive creative director of Kennedy Communication Global, presented the keynote presentation about aligning an organization behind a brand. He discussed components of internal-external brand alignment.

“Attract and engage the right audiences and inspire them to participate with you,” Kennedy says. Kennedy explained a six-part model of alignment including: 1) brand promise, 2) leader alignment, 3) business results, 4) cultural pillars, 5) business functions, and 6) tools and tactics.

“Content can’t be more powerful than the context allows,” says Bryant Taylor, Allegheny West Conference communication director, after listening to Kennedy’s keynote. “Context opens the ears so the listener can hear the content.”

The three-day convention convened
in Salt Lake City, Utah. This location allowed Adventist communicators to talk about faith-based communication with leaders from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This interfaith interaction included tours of Humanitarian Center, Welfare Square, LDS Conference Center, and Temple Square; attendance at a rehearsal session for the Mormon Tabernacle Choir; and four workshop sessions lead by Mormon communicators on advertising, public affairs, multimedia marketing, and media relations.

Additional workshops on crisis communication, social media, communication education, graphic arts, broadcast media, fundraising, and community relations rounded out the training topics for Adventist communicators.

“Soundbites

“To me, the conference was a well-timed dose of medicine for the generations of yesterday and today. The times have changed, but the edition of our story has remained the same, and today, few have the palate to taste the gospel the way we’ve been telling it. SAC convicted me to fine-tune my faith and share the gospel without fear or dilution.”

Elroy Byam, Hope Channel production assistant

“This conference, in my opinion, was definitely the best. I was inspired by the workshops and I can’t wait to go back and implement things I learned. I enjoyed learning about the Mormon faith and the communication/public relations facet of their church.”

Whitney Jordan, South Atlantic Conference communication assistant

“The Society of Adventist Communicators convention gives me my yearly dose of professional sanity.”

Kortnye Hurst, Indiana Conference communication consultant

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Charles Ed Aguilar, II, British Columbia Conference communication director.

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George Johnson, NAD communication director and SAC executive director, demonstrates the new seeker website developed by NAD called “My Way to Jesus.”

Jennifer Prusse, a representative from the Huntsman Cancer Hospital, accepted the stuffed animals that were made during the Convention. Huntsman Cancer Institute is the premier cancer research and treatment center in Utah. Its only focus is on taking care of people with cancer and improving the quality and level of cancer care. The animals will be given to patients at the hospital.

Kurt Kennedy, CEO, Executive Creative Director for Kennedy Communications Global presented the keynote address for Friday morning on the topic of branding.

The Cadet Sisters of Salt Lake City provided special music for the Sabbath worship service.
From top, left to right: Chris Oberg, pastor of the La Sierra Church, delivered the Sabbath morning message about telling stories and sharing messages.

Kortnye Hurst, communication consultant for the Indiana Conference, shared plans for evangelism in Indianapolis for 2014.

Chip Dizard and Bryant Taylor share with the attendees new technology toys and resources at TechTalk.

Media Productions

Adventist communicators previewed three media productions during the convention. Martin Doblmeier, filmmaker and friend of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, presented a viewing session of The ADVENTISTS 2. This documentary for PBS highlights the medical missionary work of the Adventist church in Haiti, the Amazon, Malawi, China, Peru, and the Dominican Republic.

The six chapters of the documentary feature heart-warming stories, missionary profiles, expert interviews on medical missionary work, and examples of how medical missionaries are seeking to provide preventative care. The documentary’s sound track brings in musical interludes of “We Have This Hope.”

The first documentary, The ADVENTISTS, began airing on PBS four years ago. The two-part series is now often featured back-to-back. Recently, The ADVENTISTS was accepted to the PBS world network for international viewing.

“It’s been a humbling year to document this story,” says Doblmeier. “The stories we tell as communicators have impact and transform lives.”

Doblmeier is working on a third and final documentary about Adventists. The final documentary is called “Blueprint: the story of Adventist Christian Education.” This documentary was just accepted by PBS and will be coming to public television in 2014.

Another production team, led by Jason Satterland and Garrett Caldwell, showed trailers, clips,
and experiences from producing *The Record Keeper*. This multipart web series tells the story of the Great Controversy through a steam-punk filter to reach a new audience with an age-old story.

Satterland and Caldwell placed their presentation in the context of being faithful to God. They discussed three threats to faithfulness: fear, pride and disbelief.

“Producing *The Record Keeper* from beginning to end has been a spiritual journey,” says Caldwell. “We saw God leading us from the beginning. We desire to reach people [with the message of the Great Controversy] who otherwise would not be interested.”

*The Record Keeper* is scheduled to debut in February 2014.

**Awarding Excellence**

The Society of Adventist Communicators convention features awards for “best in class” projects and recognition for communication leaders. The “best in class” projects are eligible for the society’s Award of Excellence. (See website for complete list.)

Ron Quick, Carolina Conference communication director, received the Lifetime Achievement Award for his decades of dedicated, mission-driven service as an army medical photographer, newspaperman, literature evangelists, and church communication leader. Quick accepted the award amid a standing ovation.

“Quickly speaking, thank you,” he says. Quick plans to retire in July 2014.

David Franklin, co-host of the
Hope Channel’s *Let’s Pray* program and assistant pastor of the Berea Temple Adventist church, received the **Young Professional Award** that is designed to recognize the achievements of communication professionals under the age of 35. Franklin is noted for his natural communication abilities and high standard of excellence.

Southern Adventist University student, Rebecca Anderson, received the **Student Award**. Anderson is a proactive student who pursued two internships in religious and corporate communication. She plans to work in corporate communication for the Volkswagen plant in Chattanooga, Tenn.

“I encourage all students to pursue internships,” Anderson said in her acceptance speech.

Cassie Martsching, communication director of *AdventSource*, received the **President’s Award** for appreciation of service to communication ministry.

The project-based awards were rounded out with the **Award of Excellence** picked up by Oakwood University for their social media campaign to “Retool Your School,” a grant competition funded by Home Depot.

**Electing Leaders**

The Society of Adventist Communicators transitioned to a new group of leaders during the Salt Lake convention. Kimberly Maran, outgoing SAC president and *Adventist Review* assistant editor, welcomed Kevin Krueger as the new president. Krueger is the general manager of WGTS radio...
station in Takoma Park, Md.

Additional leaders joining the team are: Tamara Fisher, general vice president; Brian Weed, vice president for web and membership services; and Heidi Baumgartner, vice president for communication.

Representatives are elected in alternating years to give continuity. New representatives this year are: Victoria Miller, broadcast/radio representative; Costin Jordache, broadcast/TV representative; Beth Michaels, print media representative; and Jimmy Phillips, social media representative. Suzanne Ocsai was appointed as assistant to the vice president of communication.

Three creative and passionate student reps are also joining the team (versus the traditional two student reps). Steven Foster from Union College, Carlton Hanks, from Walla Walla University, and David Rumsey from Southern Adventist University will be contributing their creative ideas to the board.

**Sharpening the Story**

“Communicating Christ in the Chaos,” the theme of this year’s Society of Adventist Communicators convention, addressed the chaos of our communication culture.

Chris Oberg, La Sierra University church senior pastor, brought clarity to this challenge during the church service and called communicators to sharpen the story in today’s cultural context.

“Let me be clear: the gospel does not need sharpening. It is clear,” Oberg says. “We need to sharpen the telling of the story. We need to be residents of our communities and united in sharing the gospel.”

The next convention of the Society of Adventist Communicators is planned for October 16-18, 2014, in Jacksonville, Fla. It will mark the 25th anniversary of the society.

“The convention is a great opportunity to connect with fellow Adventist professionals,” says Natalia Lopez-Thismon, ADRA communication specialist. “It is a good way for all of us to be inspired to continue to move in unison toward best practices in communication.”

Follow the Society of Adventist Communicators on Facebook and Twitter (@AdventistComm), and visit the redesigned www.adventistcommunicator.org.

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*Suzanne Ocsai, SAC assistant vice president of communication, contributed to this report.*