The Inter-American Division (IAD) celebrated the Year of the Literature Evangelist (LE) during an LE Congress held at the Riviera Maya Hotel in Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico, from May 28-31, 2014. More than 1,000 delegates—administrators, publishing leaders, and literature evangelists—from several countries in the IAD territory convened in Cancun for the historic event.

With the theme Sent to Save, the congress sought to inspire LEs to take hope to each home, business, school, and everywhere in between. “We have come up with plans to show literature evangelists that their work of canvassing goes hand-in-hand with the work of ministers,” said Israel Leito, IAD president, as he addressed the delegates. “The work of our literature evangelists is just as important as that of our ministers, because they carry hope where ministers cannot.”

In his opening remarks, Erwin A. Gonzalez, IAD Publishing director, declared: “It is a new day for church members in Inter-America to spread hope through publications. You are an integral part of fulfilling the mission of the church, for the gospel entered most of our countries in the IAD through publications, and that will continue until the Lord comes.”

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Approximately 7,500 LEs serve in the IAD territory. “Our dream and vision is to have more than 15,000 [literature evangelists],” Gonzalez said. To reach that goal, Gonzalez challenged leaders and LEs to double their efforts in recruiting other members to canvass, and ensure that there is one Publishing Ministry director and one LE at every administrative level, including local congregations. “We seek a new generation of literature evangelists, mission oriented and professional, who will be ministers of the printed page,” challenged Gonzalez.

A meaningful part of the congress was the recognition of literature evangelists’ faithfulness to their calling, their outstanding years of service, and valuable contributions in accomplishing the mission of the church.

Emilio De Leon was one of the LEs honored. With a smile on his lips and a twinkle in his eyes, he wore a medal around his neck. That medal suspended by a blue ribbon represents the 39 years that De Leon has carried a passion for sharing the gospel, bringing more than 80 souls to the church during his ministry. Elva Corina Morales, from the Inter-Oceanic Mexican Union, was honored for her outstanding literature sales. In 2013 she sold literature worth US$240,000. Octavius Saintel of the Haitian Union was recognized for bringing more than 600 new members into the church through his literature evangelism ministry in one year. Sebastian Marquez Luna of the Southeast Mexican Union was recognized for recruiting 36 LEs in a single year.

Hundreds of literature evangelists, ranging from five to 40 years of service, were decorated with medals and pins for their years of service.

Howard F. Faigao, General Conference Publishing director, congratulated the delegates for being part of the 50,000 LEs across the world church. Faigao challenged them “to maintain a constant communion with God, trust in His promises, stay strong and of good courage, and remain committed to God’s calling and mission of spreading hope everywhere you go.”

IAD leaders are confident that literature evangelists will multiply to more than 15,000, ensuring that every congregation across Inter-America becomes active in sharing God’s love and hope.

“We are here as a church because the printed page entered our territory,” said Gonzalez, “and we are here to carry on the Publishing Ministry until the end.”
Administrators and Publishing Ministry directors from the Cameroon Union, Central African Union, and its conferences/missions gathered in Yaounde, Cameroon, June 9 and 10 for an intensive Publishing Administrative Seminar. Howard F. Faigao, General Conference Publishing director, was the primary facilitator, with the assistance of Abraham D. Obaya, West-Central Africa Division (WAD) Publishing director.

Some of the main objectives of the seminar included: 1) the end-time role of the Publishing Ministry in the church; 2) roles and responsibilities of administrators for the success of the Publishing Ministry; and 3) marketing potential of the two unions in spreading the gospel through the printed page.

The 23 administrators and Publishing directors present promised to tackle the challenges faced by the two unions, including a decrease in the number of literature evangelists (LEs) and having Publishing directors posted hundreds of kilometers away from conference/mission offices and cities where LEs work.

The seminar ended with an evaluation of the publishing ministries of the two unions. They were commended in their areas of strength, and recommendations were offered in areas where the ministries have to improve.

At the end of the seminar, the delegates were excited about the wealth of information and orientation they received about the Publishing Ministry. At the same time, they were challenged by the work that remains to be done. After prayer for the administrators of the two unions, they promised to support the Publishing Ministry and pledged to encourage Publishing directors, LEs, and church members to bring hope into every home like never before.

Division-Wide Publishing Summit
Unprecedented massive union reorganization took place in the WAD in 2013, bringing the number of union fields to 10 from the previous six. In addition, there were some changes in the leadership of union Publishing directors. Because of the high number of new directors, as well as the need to address current challenges, WAD organized a division-wide Publishing summit with an emphasis on training and orientation.

The Publishing Strategic Planning Summit took place at the headquarters of the Eastern Sahel Union Mission in Lome, Togo, from June 11-16, 2014. The main presenter was Howard F. Faigao, General Conference Publishing director. The seminar assisted leaders in recognizing the enormous challenges they face, and the great potential for growth.

ABC and HHES coordinators and managers had a separate three-day section led by Isaac Nyabola, Safeliz Publishing House Marketing director for Africa, who formerly served as the ABC/HHES manager in Kenya. Their major goal was learning how to run a profitable, efficient, and successful ABC/HHES operation.

Publishing directors and ABC/HHES coordinators had a combined summit on the last day of the meeting with Faigao. He emphasized the inseparability of publishing and ABC/HHES, and the need for the two facets of Publishing to work together.

The meetings ended with great hope and expectations. All participants accepted the counsel of Ellen G. White to circulate literature “like never before,” and embraced United States President Abraham Lincoln’s profound statement: “I walk slowly, but I never walk backward.”

It has been said that the greatest journey starts with one step. This one step began more than a year ago when the Adventist church in Abu Dhabi voted to have an evangelistic series. Initially, there was great excitement, anticipation, and a little trepidation when the church started planning the event.

Conditions in United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Some of the practices that Adventists in other parts of the world take for granted are prohibited in the Arab states. The church is prohibited by law to hold open air evangelistic meetings. The church is also prohibited from distributing flyers or any printed material that contains a religious message other than Islam. Anyone caught doing so is brought to court and faces banishment from the UAE. All Christian churches would be scrutinized and liable to a fine or suspension of all activities until further notice if these laws are violated.

Door-to-door visits and introducing oneself as a Christian also have serious ramifications. Public baptisms are prohibited by law, whether in a swimming pool, the sea, or in a river (if you can find one).

As in any government, some hard-liners in the UAE wish to see Christianity banned and Christians banished, and they take every opportunity to promote their agenda.

In a word, the church has to be careful in exercising its mission of evangelism. The words of Jesus, “be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16), become extremely significant.

Planning

Planning for this event went smoothly. Every member was called upon to conduct themselves within the rules and regulations of the country. Our church members’ conduct was exemplary. This was the first time any Adventist evangelistic series was held in Abu Dhabi, so in a broader sense every church member faced a new challenge.

The call for a speaker was processed through the Gulf Field administration, then through the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission (MENA), and finally through the General Conference (GC). Howard F. Faigao, GC Publishing director and brother of our local pastor, Darwin Faigao, was assigned by the GC. During planning, the congregation conducted regular prayer sessions in their homes and workplaces.

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In March 2014, the Church Board adopted the modest goal of five or six baptisms, since for the preceding year, the total number of baptisms for the Gulf Field was 29.

The Evangelistic Series

The campaign started on Sabbath, March 29, after sunset. Twelve visitors attended the first night.

Then the transportation director requested that a bus be hired, because many interested people could not attend because of the distance from the church. The committee voted to hire two buses, one for people who lived in the city and one for out-of-town visitors. The number of visitors increased dramatically to 30 the next night, and to more than 48 at the mid-point of the series.

The nightly messages were accompanied by heavenly music and lectures about the health message. At the end of the meetings, a call for baptism was made. We were privileged to witness a modern-day Pentecost: God poured out His Spirit on the hearts of men and women. More than 48 indicated an interest in keeping the Sabbath, 24 desired immediate baptism, and two individuals requested more Bible studies before taking the step to be baptized.

On Sabbath, April 5, 24 people were baptized for God’s honor and glory. In one day the Lord added to His church, far exceeding the wildest dreams of the evangelism committee. Praise His name! 

Some of the 24 baptismal candidates who gave their hearts to God during the evangelistic series in Abu Dhabi.