Happy New Year!

Welcome to 2014—the year of the horse, the XXII Olympic Winter Games, the 20th FIFA World Cup, and . . . well, who knows?

Nobody can predict what sort of big, world-changing news and events will take place this year. However, you can be sure Adventist Record—yes, Adventist Record—will be here to keep you updated with the latest Adventist news and views.

Before we dive too far into 2014, we thought we'd look back at some of the biggest stories of the past year. So, here it is: the top 10 news stories of 2013.

Be sure to also check out this week's edition of Record eNews—the first for the year!
Lightning kills eight church members in Malawi

The last Saturday of the 2013 was a tragic day for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Southern African nation of Malawi when lightning struck a congregation, killing eight parishioners and injuring scores of others.

Fire damages Adventist church at Inverell

Insurance assessors have been called in to examine significant damage caused by a fire at Inverell Seventh-day Adventist church in New South Wales.

We are conscientious objectors

Read Adventist World

The world is no longer as it was 50 years ago, or even five years ago.

Watch/download InFocus

Where is God when your heart is broken from grief and loss? Watch this week's episode of InFocus for inspirational interviews with Jean Gersbach, who is reflecting on her husband's violent death, ten years on; and Sheridan Voysey, who is learning to let go of his dreams. Also, some post-hangover advice from nutritionist Sue Radd.
Desmond Doss was a Seventh-day Adventist who took the sixth commandment both seriously and literally, refusing to carry a gun or take a life even in the heat of battle. It’s an attitude each of us is called to embrace today.

Easy as 1, 2, 3

“Are you planning an evangelistic series? Stop,” writes James Standish. “Granted, that is counter-intuitive advice, but hear me out. In Australia over the past 25 years, another church has put us to shame. And it’s worth asking ourselves the hard questions before we continue business as usual.”
Spam
Not spam
Forget previous vote
Happy 2014!

We’re 10 days into the New Year, and we’ve already seen some dramatic Adventist stories make headlines, such as a cyber theft in America and a lightning tragedy in Africa.

But before we dive too far into 2014, we thought we’d take a look back at some of the biggest stories of the past year.

So, here it is: the top 10 news stories of 2013 (based on number of website views).

10. New president for trans-pacific

2013 saw a lot of leadership changes for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific, such as Pastor Glenn Townend’s appointment as president of the Trans-Pacific Union Mission.

9. Church issues statement on Sabbath in Samoa

Much has been said over the past couple of years about the Sabbath situation in Samoa. In late 2013, the General Conference of the Adventist Church joined in on the discussion.

8. US conference elects woman president

Women’s ordination was without question the biggest topic of 2013. The issue was brought into a global spotlight in October, when Pastor Sandra Roberts was named president of the Southeastern California Conference.

7. TED president talks ordination

Perhaps the most striking comments on women’s ordination came from Dr Bertil Wiklander. At a seminar in September, the president of
the Trans-European Division voiced his total support for the ordination of women, saying he “would die for it”.

6. Adventist pastor loses home in NSW bushfires

Summer is natural disaster season in Australia. Tragedy struck a little earlier last year, however, when fires ripped across NSW in October, destroying dozens of homes.

5. Adventist evangelist Leo Schreven dies at 51

News of Leo Schreven’s death broke in December 2012, but readers were still coming to terms with his tragic passing in 2013.

4. Publishing director’s daughter in coma

Last year’s holiday season got off to a disastrous start, when Lani Brereton’s vehicle was hit head on by an unregistered, speeding car driven by a drunk driver.

3. SPD affirms report on ordination

“Ordination fever” took hold of the Adventist Church in the South Pacific in 2013. In November, discussion was replaced by decision, with church delegates unanimously affirming a report from its Biblical Research Committee that “does not see any scriptural principle which would be an impediment to women being ordained”.

2. Adventist engineer burnt in fuel fire

It’s almost been a year since Linden Millist’s terrible accident, which burnt up to 50 per cent of his body. Since then, his story and incredible fighting spirit has touched the lives of thousands of people around the world.

1. Pope’s brother not an Adventist

When we posted this story in mid-July, hundreds of people flocked to our website to check out the news. A few weeks later, and the Pope’s non-Adventist brother was still a hot topic. In fact, the popularity of the story remained steady for the rest of 2013. Turns out one can never get enough of a good conspiracy theory.

*Early prediction for the most popular story of 2014: Pope’s brother [still] not an Adventist*
The last Saturday of the 2013 was a tragic day for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Southern African nation of Malawi when lightning struck a congregation, killing eight parishioners and injuring scores of others.

Lightning struck the Chisiyo Seventh-day Adventist church in the capital city of Lilongwe shortly after a rainstorm on the afternoon of December 28, knocking most of the 200 parishioners unconscious. Those who suffered injuries were taken to a hospital approximately 10 miles away.

Eight were pronounced dead, including four members of the Dorcas Society and four Adventist Youth members. One was a member of a visiting singing group that had come to conduct a musical program.

Frackson Kuyama, president of the Adventist Church’s Malawi Union Mission, speaks at the December 30 funeral of eight church members who were killed by lightning two days earlier. Hundreds of community members and government officials attended the funeral. Sitting at left in a red chair is Malawi’s vice president Khumbo Kachali. [Photo courtesy: Malawi Union]

The Sabbath service had been extended to include a Lord’s Supper and ceremony for a transfer of leadership.

Adventists in other parts of the city rushed to the scene to offer help, including money and emotional support.

The Malawi Government also responded by providing food, transportation and other supplies for a funeral.

Hundreds of community members and government officials attended the funeral ceremony on December 30.

Adventist women of the Dorcas Society from various Adventist Churches in the Malawi capital of Lilongwe attended the funeral of eight
Adventist who were killed by lightening on December 28.

“Let’s continue praying for the bereaved families and the church members at Chisiyo [Adventist] church,” said M S J Kadyakapita, a professor at Malawi Adventist University. “Pray that the assembly in the church does not provoke painful and frightful memories and association among our members.”

There are approximately 393,000 Adventist church members in Malawi.
Inverell, New South Wales

Insurance assessors have been called in to examine significant damage caused by a fire at Inverell Seventh-day Adventist church.

The fire began at around 8pm last Friday night, starting in the kitchen and quickly spreading to the hall, foyer and main chapel. The roof and internal fittings will need to be rebuilt; however the main structure of the building should be salvageable.

Inverell have set up a building fund for those who wish to donate to the costs of rebuilding the church. While the church is being rebuilt, Sabbath services will be held at the local Uniting church.

Inverell pastor Adam Cinzio would like to thank the Uniting church for their generosity in offering their facilities. He also wishes to acknowledge the efforts and assistance of head deacon and deaconess Cliff and Evelyn Hoey, as well as church members Vic and Merryl Murphy.

“I am grateful that no lives were lost and that the church can be rebuilt,” said Mr Cinzio. “Following Jesus doesn’t guarantee that there will be no problems in life, but it does mean that God is with us in every challenge we face.”

To donate, please visit <egiving.org.au> and select Inverell Church to see the building fund.
I grew up with the story of Desmond Doss, the World War II conscientious objector whose story was told in *The Unlikeliest Hero*, among other books. A few years ago I reconnected with his story in the form of *The Conscientious Objector* and, earlier this year, I was privileged to again see the film with Terry Benedict, producer and director of this award-winning documentary.*

Doss was a Seventh-day Adventist who took the sixth commandment—“Thou shalt not kill”—both seriously and literally, at the same time as serving his country in the midst of World War II. Both in military training and in combat, he would not carry a gun and refused to take life, even in the heat of battle. Under heavy fire on the Pacific island of Okinawa, medic Doss rescued 75 injured men, treating their injuries, and lowering them to safety at great risk to his own life, for which he became the first conscientious objector to receive the United States’ Medal of Honor.

Desmond Doss was a true Adventist hero and—as evidenced by the success of Benedict’s excellent documentary—his story is one that can connect with people beyond our church. But the real value of such stories is not only to offer us a hero or role model, or even a reflection of what our faith can look like at its best, they should also prompt and guide us toward living with similar courage, principles, and faithfulness in our time and place.

One year on from the Sandy Hook school shooting that shocked the world, it is a puzzle to many outside the United States—and to many within—how such an horrific outrage has not prompted more than arguments about restrictions on the production, sale, and possession of automatic assault weapons. This is not only an American issue, gun crimes play out in so many places that they have to be particularly shocking or uncomfortably close to home to claim some media coverage and get our attention.

Yet we should never take such violence for granted. Apart from the political, constitutional, and cultural debates, perhaps these looping headlines and ensuing discussions about the place of violence in our societies should call us as a church to live out the kingdom of God in ways we might not have previously imagined, even when we are prompted toward this by the best of our history and heroes.

Imagine if, amid the ongoing debates and tragedies, we remembered that historically we are conscientious objectors. Imagine if we as a church stood up and spoke out, calling on our church members, and all other people of good will, to live as conscientious objectors today. And imagine if we were not only talking militarily, that in the face of ongoing social and cultural violence we chose to be civilian conscientious objectors, disarming ourselves, our homes, and our churches.

Imagine the attention and impact this kind of moral leadership could have in societies that seem unable to make progress toward curbing violence and its tragic results. Imagine if Adventists again became known as members of a “peace church,” creatively and conscientiously objecting to and resisting the culture of violence and fear that threatens to infect even our own attitudes and responses.
In saying this, I quite understand that I write from a relatively secure society, one in which I am rarely overtly threatened physically or otherwise. But I am reminded in the story of Desmond Doss of how we Adventists act at our best, resisting terrible pressures toward conformity and self-preservation, at the same time seeking to help and heal those who are most hurt by the evils around us. If Doss could live this out on the Pacific battlefields of World War II, surely it is applicable to even the worst of circumstances today.

Even in many Christian discussions, peacemaking is too often painted as some kind of flower-loving, daydreaming, disconnected approach to life. But Desmond Doss-type conscientious objection might well be regarded as the most courageous and counter-intuitive way of living, especially when done so in such difficult and dangerous situations.

Courageous and counter-intuitive except when we consider the alternative: that we lose our souls in the tragic spiral of violence and fear. As Jesus warned, “All who draw the sword will die by the sword” (Matt. 26:52). How much more so, the automatic assault rifle or concealed handgun, possession of which implies their use is somehow justifiable?

Of course, Jesus also said this in a much more positive way: Those who work for peace will live as children of God (see Matt. 5:9). Courageous and counterintuitive as it might be, this is the way of faithfulness and true security. And in a dark and tragically violent world, what better way to shine a light of courageous hope and transforming love?

Let’s say it again: We are conscientious objectors.


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Nathan Brown is book editor at Signs Publishing Company, based near Melbourne Australia.
Are you planning an evangelistic series? Stop.

Granted, that is counter-intuitive advice, but hear me out. In Australia over the past 25 years, another church has put us to shame. And it’s worth asking ourselves the hard questions before we continue business as usual.

According to the Australian census, in 1986 there were 26 per cent more Adventists in Australia than there were Mormons. By 2011, Mormons had managed to close the gap to just 6.7 per cent. Put another way, they were three-quarters of the way to closing the gap in total. I suspect the numbers would be similar in many other Pacific nations.

That’s humbling when we remember Mormons don’t run a single school, don’t have a solitary hospital, they have no media centre, health food company, territory institutions, aged care facilities, camps or TV networks in Australia. They do no large-scale public evangelism and, wait for it, they have no professional clergy.

From 1986–2006, Mormons grew in Australia a staggering 326 per cent more than Adventists. While recent trends have reversed,¹ the disproportionate success of Mormons should force us to ask what we can do better.

The good news is, we don’t have to guess. Ellen White reminded us that the only way to grow the Adventist Church is to follow Christ’s three-step process:

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’” Reflecting on Christ’s example, Ellen White calls for more time spent in one-on-one ministry and helping people in practical ways, and less time “sermonising”.²

Which goes to the success of the Mormons. They get out of the church and into the community. Door-to-door works just as well, if not better, for us too. North NSW Conference president Justin Lawman recently told me about 72-year-old Stanley Nelson going door-to-door in Kyogle. Kyogle Adventist Church had an average attendance of 10 people in 2012. As a direct result of Stanley’s six months of door-to-door ministry, he now has eight people in Bible studies and 19 people receiving Beyond DVDs. Little Kyogle’s church’s mid-week prophecy seminar is attracting 36 people. That’s the power of following Christ’s example. If we want to do evangelism, the first step isn’t designing a poster; it’s meeting our neighbours.

The second step is to give people something of value. Jesus did this through healing. We can too.
Today, the health message God gave our Church is more relevant than ever. And others are starting to catch up. US mega-church pastor Rick Warren has made global headlines with his “Daniel Diet”. What is it? The good old Adventist health message. I’m glad evangelicals are finally on board—for generations they’ve castigated Adventists as legalistic for taking care of our health—but I’m ashamed how little we’ve done with what we’ve been given.

Today as our region is bloated with obesity and all the ills that go with it—heart disease, cancer, diabetes, stroke, etc—we have something priceless to give to our community. It’s something people want and desperately need. And we have a modern, engaging, scientifically proven program that makes it easy to promote our health message today—the revamped Complete Health Improvement Program (CHIP). It makes the perfect second step in evangelism.

But running CHIP programs, depression recovery seminars, providing education, or any of the 101 other wonderful things Adventists do, isn’t enough. We need to engage in Christ’s third step—inviting those we help to follow Jesus.

A friend recently gave her heart to Christ because of the influence of an Adventist school. I was delighted until she told me she wished I’d invited her to follow Christ earlier. I felt a pang of guilt. I fear I am hardly alone. We have become a community afraid to explain that the great things we do are inspired by the great One we follow. We need to be braver, stronger, less discreet and more alive. We need to not only mingle and do good. We need to invite those we serve to make the greatest step anyone can—to follow Jesus Christ.

Hit the restart button on your evangelistic plans. And let’s, in the words of the Jackson 5, follow the “A B C, easy as one, two, three” steps of inviting others to follow Jesus.

1. Adventists grew roughly 30 per cent faster than the Mormons 2007-11

2. Ellen White, Ministry of Healing, p 143

James Standish is editor of RECORD.