Feeling the heat

The 2014 natural disaster season has gotten off to a hot start in the South Pacific—both figuratively and literally.

A category four storm has ravaged Tonga's northern islands, with winds in excess of 200 km/h destroying up to 95 per cent of housing and food crops in the region. The damage caused by Tropical Cyclone Ian has left thousands of people displaced and facing critical food shortages.

Meanwhile, Adelaide and Melbourne are in the midst of their longest stretch of hot weather in 100 years, with the mercury topping 40 degrees throughout this past week. Major fires are now burning in parts of South Australia and Victoria, with Western Australia still reeling from a bushfire that destroyed 52 homes earlier in the week.

Please take some time this Sabbath to pray for the victims of these disasters, as well as the fire fighters and volunteers who are doing all they can to save lives.

For the latest Adventist news and views from around the world, be sure to keep reading this week's edition of Record eNews.
Monteiro released from prison in Togo

Seventh-day Adventist pastor Antonio Monteiro has been released from prison in Lomé, Togo, ending a nearly two-year ordeal that kept him and four others detained on charges of conspiracy to commit murder in a case that captured the attention of the Adventist world church.

TRYathlon series starts with a bang

More than 1300 children took part in the Sanitarium Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon in Manukau in early December—the first of a series of events to be held in New Zealand and Australia over the coming months.

Adventists prepare for Religious Liberty Day

Commentary on the “Allah” debate in Malaysia, some surprising tips on where germs might be hiding in your kitchen, and a fascinating interview with PhD candidate Harvey Henderson who is returning to HIV’s ground zero in southern Africa to make a difference.
The worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church will place special emphasis on religious freedom at church services on Sabbath, January 25. To mark the occasion, Adventists in Switzerland have made a video for churches around the world to share with their congregations.

Extraordinary love

“By the way,” the doctor said abruptly, “I need to tell you that you have a Down syndrome boy.” This was the heartbreaking news that greeted Laurie and Robyn Evans at the birth of their fourth child, Duane.

. . . But I shall want

Wanting almost comes as naturally to us as breathing. But coveting is certainly not an “acceptable sin”.

Record poll

This year, my ambition is to

• Go vegan
• Get vaccinated
• Google visigoths
• Gain victory
• Grow veggies
• Go vacationing
• Get vocal

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A category four storm has ravaged Tonga’s northern islands, with winds in excess of 200 km/h destroying up to 95 per cent of housing and food crops in the region.

The damage caused by Tropical Cyclone Ian has left thousands of people displaced and facing critical food shortages. In response, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is currently preparing to distribute food packs to almost 1000 people on Tonga’s Vava'u and Ha'apai islands.

“The distribution will take place about nine days after the cyclone hit,” said Beryl Hartmann, Humanitarian Program officer at ADRA Australia. “People are currently able to eat the damaged crops, but within a few days these will be inedible.”

“Timing the response to coincide with the food shortage will ensure almost 1000 people have enough to survive.”

The packs will provide 160 families (approximately 960 people) food for a minimum of 14 days. The packs contain rice, sugar, flour, tinned fish, corned beef and cooking oil.

ADRA’s response is being implemented in partnership with the Seventh-day Adventist Church Mission in Tonga.

ADRA responds to numerous disasters across the South Pacific and around the world each year.

For more information visit <www.adra.org.au> or call 1800 242 372.
Mundaring, Western Australia

As victims of the Perth hills’ bushfires begin returning to investigate the damage, volunteers from the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Australia are working to secure emergency accommodation for evacuees.

Fifty-two homes were destroyed following Monday’s fires and hundreds of families were evacuated from the region. Many are still unable to return to what the Department of Fire and Emergency Services have called the ‘hot zone’ due to damaged infrastructure, downed power lines and the risk of falling tree limbs.

“The team here have been helping those displaced find accommodation either in commercial venues or in private accommodation,” says Suzanna Cuplovic, ADRA’s Disaster Welfare Coordinator for Western Australia. “The public have been extraordinarily generous. We are currently managing a database of more than 250 homes offered to those in need.”

As part of a formal agreement with the West Australian Government, ADRA is charged with facilitating emergency accommodation during times of natural disaster across the state. The agency also holds similar arrangements in NSW and the ACT.

Volunteers from the agency have also been called upon by Volunteering West Australia to assist the Salvation Army sort the large amounts of donated goods flooding to the region.

“Our trained volunteers are on call around the clock and are held in great esteem across the sector,” says Kevin Munro, ADRA’s National Manager for Emergency Services. “We are always one of the first ports of call when other agency’s need a hand.”

It is expected ADRA volunteers will remain in evacuation centres until the end of the week.

ADRA responds to numerous disasters across Australia and around the world each year. Current, ongoing responses include the Syrian refugee crisis, Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines and Cyclone Ian in Tonga.

For more information about these or any of ADRA’s work overseas or here in Australia visit <www.adra.org.au> or call 1800 242 372.
Monteiro released from prison in Togo

Seventh-day Adventist pastor Antonio Monteiro was released from prison this afternoon in Lomé, Togo, ending a nearly two-year ordeal that kept him and four others detained on charges of conspiracy to commit murder in a case that captured the attention of the Adventist world church.

Monteiro was released from the Lomé Civil Prison at 4.30 pm (UTC) today after being acquitted in a court verdict yesterday. Still in prison is Adventist Church member Bruno Amah, who was convicted by a jury and sentenced to life in prison. He is considering his legal options, including appealing the decision.

Monteiro today was greeted outside of prison by his legal team and officials from the denomination’s Sahel Union Mission, where Monteiro had worked since 2009 as the Family Ministries director. Monteiro is a native of the island nation of Cape Verde, and it’s expected that he will return there soon.

Adventist Church president Ted Wilson spoke to Monteiro by phone. Wilson said Monteiro thanked the world church for its support. Millions of Seventh-day Adventists worldwide had held prayer vigils, launched social media campaigns, sponsored letter-writing initiatives to government officials and diplomats, held press conferences and led a signature drive for a petition calling for the release of Monteiro and others involved in the case.

Church officials expressed “mixed feelings” over yesterday’s court ruling, which acquitted some and convicted others.

“The acquittal of Pastor Monteiro is good news and we are happy for him and his family. We are surprised and very sad about the condemnation of Amah,” John Graz, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director for the Adventist world church, said yesterday.

The arrests and detentions unfolded following a string of homicides in September of 2011. Five men, including Monteiro and Amah, were detained in March of 2012 and held without a trial and solely on the accusation of one man who was described as a “pathological liar” in a court-ordered psychiatric exam. That man, Kpatcha Simliya, who was also detained, was also convicted in yesterday’s ruling and sentenced to life in prison.
Depending on different newspaper and police accounts, more than a dozen bodies of women between the ages of 12 and 36 had been found in the northern Lomé suburb of Agoué in 2011. The bodies had stab wounds and some sexual organs had been removed. Blood and organs are often used in ceremonies of Voodoo, which is widely practiced in Togo.

When no arrests were made, the public demanded justice for the killings, church leaders said.

Simliya was later shown on television surrounded by police guards, telling the story of the series of murders he said that he organised and naming accomplices who collected blood and organs. But much of the story proved unlikely, including the number of victims and the methods used, according to Simliya’s medical examiner.

“Any informed and reasonable man would have doubts regarding his incredible outpouring or the feasibility of his crimes or supposed crimes,” a September 9, 2012, court-ordered psychiatric exam stated, which was viewed by ANN.

Simliya would later recant his accusation, saying he was beaten by police and forced to give names of people he supposedly knew were co-conspirators in a blood trafficking network, according to the psychiatric exam.

Still, his testimony—the only evidence in the case—was enough to bring convictions in yesterday’s ruling.

Church officials for the denomination’s West-Central African Division, based in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, said Monteiro will receive appropriate care back in his home in Cape Verde.
More than 1300 children took part in the Sanitarium Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon in Manukau in early December—the first of a series of events to be held in New Zealand and Australia over the coming months.

1320 participants (aged seven to 15) completed the course around Mountfort Park, with a number of New Zealand sporting celebrities—including netball star Temepara Bailey and professional cyclist Alison Shanks—on hand to cheer on the children and hand out medals.

“The Manukau event was a fantastic morning and it was great to see the kids giving it their all while having fun with their friends,” said Sanitarium Health and Wellbing Company general manager Pierre van Heerden. “I’d like to thank the parents and the local Manukau community for their support in making the event special for the children involved.”

A second TRYathlon was held in Rotorua a few days later, with 696 children taking part in the inaugural event for the city at Kuirau Park. Special guests at the event included Olympic rower and gold medallist Mahe Drysdale, BMX rider and Olympic silver medallist Sarah Walker and World Xterra champion (20-24 age category) Olly Shaw.

The Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon has a 22-year history in New Zealand, with more than 22,000 kids expected to participate this year. The Manukau and Rotorua events were the first in a series of TRYathlons to take place in New Zealand from December 2013 to April 2014. Events will also be held in cities across Australia from January to May.
Hundreds of thousands of children have taken part in the TRYathlon series since its inception in 1992. The event currently holds the World Record for the largest children’s sporting event of its kind.

Mr van Heerden said he hopes the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon will continue to become bigger and better.

“We want to give more children an opportunity to take part this year,” said Mr van Heerden prior to the events in Manukau and Rotorua. “Our TRYathlon series is all about encouraging kids to give it a try, get active and feel like a champion!”

BMX rider and Olympic silver medallist Sarah Walker (left) and Olympic rower and gold medallist Mahe Drysdale (right) pose for a photo with 10-year-old Paetahi Mitchell (centre) at the Rotorua Sanitarium Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon. [Photo courtesy: Supersport Images]

For more information about the 2014 Sanitarium Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon series visit <tryathlon.weetbix.co.nz> or <tryathlon.weetbix.com.au>. 
Adventists prepare for Religious Liberty Day

Zurich, Switzerland

The worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church will place special emphasis on religious freedom at church services on Sabbath, January 25.

The internal Religious Liberty Day is celebrated every year to heighten the awareness of human rights and religious freedom among church members.

Adventists in Switzerland have produced a video for the event in six languages—English, German, French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish (see below).

Churches around the world are encouraged to download and share the video with their congregations.

English

French

German

Italian

Portuguese

Spanish
Extraordinary love

It’s the most natural thing in the world—the joy and excitement that accompany the birth of a child. Will the baby be a girl or a boy? Will they have daddy’s dark hair or mummy’s green eyes? Will they be a crier or sleep peacefully through the night? Will the baby grasp mummy’s finger when she rests it in tiny hands?

Laurie and Robyn Evans weren’t new to parenthood. They already had three healthy children, full of life. But that didn’t mean this little one was any less anticipated and longed for.

Just as in the other pregnancies, everything proceeded normally. Yes, there was the drama of birth—but nothing particularly unusual. Nothing, that is, until the doctor turned on his way out of the room. It was then, and only then, they received news they had never dreamed they’d hear.

“By the way,” the doctor said abruptly, “I need to tell you that you have a Down syndrome boy.”

Laurie and Robyn were stunned. There had been no indication of any issues prior to the birth—nothing to suggest this baby would be any different from the three healthy children they already had.

The news hit them like a bombshell. In an instant, the moment of joy and excitement turned into fear and heartbreak. Neither of them were intellectually or emotionally prepared for what was to come. How could they adequately express—even to each other—the depth of their feelings?

That evening, Laurie had to leave his wife and baby Duane at the hospital overnight. Sitting alone in his car in the hospital carpark, this stoic man who had weathered many trials began to fall apart. Tears rolled—uninvited, unwelcome—down his cheeks.

As difficult as the news was, the questions it raised were even more problematic.

How could a Heavenly Father who loves Duane even more than his earthly father, permit this to happen?

In the 1970s, when Duane was born, the life expectancy for people with Down syndrome was low. Disabled children were often taken away from their families and placed into institutions. A number of European countries and American states even enforced sterilisation on people with Down syndrome. There wasn’t the support, understanding or options there are today.

The future looked bleak. Very bleak.

A few days before Duane’s birth, Robyn had come across an account written by the parents of a baby with Down syndrome. It had, surprisingly, ended on a positive note, sharing how the child became a blessing to his family.
In the days to come, that article gave Robyn and Laurie hope. All the despair they felt; the awkward pauses when they told their friends; the strange silence that sometimes accompanies the uncomfortable; the words of sympathy that can feel like emotional daggers. In all of it, there was still hope.

To this day, Laurie believes that stumbling upon that precious article was providential.

After the initial uncertainty, a peace settled on the family. Instead of questioning God, Laurie and Robyn decided to thank God—thank Him for entrusting someone special to their care.

However, bringing Duane home from the hospital was not the happy celebration they had expected. Their friends seemed to be acting strangely around them. Laurie and Robyn soon realised their friends were unsure how to interact with Duane and how to talk about him.

They made a conscious decision to bring Duane into their conversations as soon as they could, hoping to make it clear that there was no need for their friends to be nervous—they loved and accepted their son.

"D" Laurie Evans with his son, Duane.

Today, Laurie proudly describes his son as caring, loving, open and completely accepting.

"Duane makes more friends than any other family member," he laughs. "He’s turning 40 in a few years and he keeps making friends and inviting them to his 40th birthday party. If he met you, you’d get an invite too!"

Duane may never be able to explain the sanctuary doctrine or biblical prophecy, but he does understand that Jesus loves him and is preparing a home for him.

When Laurie was invited to baptise his nephew at Avondale, Duane eagerly asked if he could be baptised also. Before the baptism, Laurie invited his nephew to say a short testimony about his relationship with Christ. He felt impressed to ask Duane to do the same.

"I love Jesus. Jesus is my older Brother. I’m being baptised like Jesus because He’s my Brother and I’m part of His family," Duane said.

There wasn’t a dry eye in the chapel.

Adventist theologian Norm Young was in the congregation that day. "Don’t ever feel as though Duane doesn’t understand doctrine," he told Laurie. "He has something far more precious."

When Laurie’s mother passed away unexpectedly it was a huge shock, especially for Duane who had been very close to his grandmother.

Laurie remembers the family sitting around the lounge room, trying to work through their grief, when they realised that Duane wasn’t with them.

They found him in his bedroom, crying quietly. He soon returned to the lounge room, though, and headed straight for his mother.

"Jesus will raise Lala (his affectionate nickname for his grandmother) when He comes," he encouraged, putting his arms around his mum. He then proceeded to hug and comfort every other member of the family. "Jesus will make Lala better again," he reassured them all.

“He did what we should have been doing,” Laurie marvels. “He has an amazing compassion for people.”

“And he also has a great sense of humour,” Robyn adds.

When Laurie’s sister came to visit, she knew that Duane liked to sit in the backseat of the car, but she didn’t know which side he preferred.
So she hovered outside the car, not wanting to enter until she found out which side he liked to sit on.

“Which side do you sit on, Duane?” she asked tentatively. He grinned mischievously. “Inside the car.”

After nearly 40 years, Laurie and Robyn are no longer worried about raising a child with Down syndrome.

“Every family should have a Duane,” Laurie says. “Someone who bears no grudges, is kind and caring, and doesn’t know what it means to not love someone.”

Their only concern is one shared by many parents in similar situations. As they grow older, who will care for Duane?

When parents can no longer care for their disabled children, the government simply allocates them wherever there is a vacancy. This means parents and their children are often separated and have to live in environments that do not necessarily respect Adventist values.

Yooroonga is a Seventh-day Adventist initiative and the product of a group of loving parents. Its aim is to establish a residential care home for people with disabilities as well as their ageing parents, a place that upholds Adventist values and principles.

They already have a location for this property—adjoining the Adventist retirement village in Victoria Point, Queensland. This means aged parents can interact with their disabled children during the week and worship together on Sabbath.

After much prayer, the committee has decided not to apply for a government capital grant, knowing that the paperwork and waiting list would delay the building process. At this stage, they are hoping to commence building residential units later this year.

Having a firsthand understanding of the fears and concerns that parents of disabled children have, Laurie encourages them to think positively about their kids and their futures.

“Don’t be discouraged. Be grateful,” he says. “Consider it a privilege and an honour. Be thankful that God has seen fit to entrust you with the care of someone special.”

Donations to ARC-Yooroonga are tax deductible. For details go to <www.yooroonga.org.au>.

Vania Chew is PR/editorial assistant for RECORD.
“Um, things I want: robot dog, night vision goggles, bug vacuum, GPS watch, speakers that look like rocks . . . Oh! Yoghurt maker! I can’t not think of things I want.”—Phil Dunphy, Modern Family

Can you relate with Phil? I know I can. While a robot dog has never made it to my “want-list”, it wouldn’t be difficult for me to run off a good 50 things I would like to have or do. I’m scared to think of how many hours I’ve spent on YouTube longing for whale-swimming, Ferrari-driving, tornado-chasing adventures.

It was during a recent video binge, however, that a simple question pervaded my mind: Isn’t Jesus enough?

“Yes,” I responded, “but is it so wrong to want a few things?”

A “but”, by the very nature of the word, negates the significance of the statement that preceded it. “You’re doing a fantastic job. But . . .” “Thank you so much for this gift. But . . .” “Honey, I love you with all my heart. But . . .” Thus, either Jesus isn’t enough, or selfish desires aren’t acceptable.

A search through Scripture reveals no evidence that Jesus isn’t enough. And the Bible is by no means silent when it comes to the subject of wanting.

“And he said to them, ‘Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions’” (Luke 12:15, NKJV; see also 1 Timothy 6:10).

“You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour” (Exodus 20:17).

This commandment often gets overlooked. It could even be argued the Ten Commandments end with a bit of a whimper. “My neighbour probably doesn’t even realise I’m envying his new entertainment system. Where’s the harm?”

But coveting is certainly not an “acceptable sin”. In fact, “the tenth commandment strikes at the very root of all sins, prohibiting the selfish desire, from which springs the sinful act” (Ellen White, Patriarchs and Prophets). You need not look any further than the story of David and Bathsheba to see the chaos that comes from covetousness.

To covet is easy; to be content is hard, and a daily struggle for us all. It’s especially difficult when avenues of discontentment are so close by—television commercials, Pinterest, shopping centres, Facebook, just to name a few. In fact, a study released last year showed that
Facebook produces “a basis for social comparison and envy on an unprecedented scale”, resulting in a heightened level of life dissatisfaction.¹

Christians in particular have no business in nurturing selfish desires, for we have everything we need. “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5).

If you’re yet to make a New Year’s resolution, here’s one for you to consider: “I’m going to stop fussing over what I don’t have and fix my eyes on Christ and the blessings He has already heaped on me.”

Why? Because Jesus is enough . . . there are no buts about it.


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