Faith and freedom

Imagine being assaulted while on your way to church. Imagine being arrested for owning a Bible. Imagine being killed for calling yourself a Christian. Such thoughts are terrifying. Yet this is the reality for thousands of Christians around the world.

And it’s not just Christians. People of all faiths—and even those with no religious affiliation—are being persecuted for their beliefs.

Because of this, the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church will place special emphasis on religious freedom and human rights issues at church services tomorrow. We encourage you to check out the special video and join in on the conversation.

Click here to learn more about the global religious freedom crisis. Also, be sure to check out this week’s edition of Record eNews.
Sanitarium sells Christchurch site

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San re-development on track for 2014

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Adventist school damaged in NZ earthquake

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Photo of the week

Recently released pastor Antonio Monteiro sits with hundreds of Christmas cards sent to him by Adventists around the world during his detainment.

Watch/download InFocus

Family life educator Trafford Fischer gives research-based tips on maintaining a healthy relationship. And host Kent Kingston sits down with Helen Eager, a veteran welfare worker with the Asian Aid charity. What keeps her going amidst the pain, suffering and ugliness she encounters every day?
Faithful servants

“Despite the Adventist Church's rigorous theology, we are remarkably tolerant in our philosophical employment standards,” writes James Standish.

*This week's offering (January 25, 2014): Christian Services for the Blind and Hearing Impaired
Adventists killed in Central African Republic

A Seventh-day Adventist was killed by gunfire in Central African Republic last month, the latest of several Adventist victims of sectarian violence in the nation.

Emeryc Patrick Dalikouba, 21, the son of an Adventist pastor, was gunned down on December 21 outside his father’s home.

Jean Jacques Gueret, president of the Adventist Church in the country, said Dalikouba was “a young, vibrant man engaged in the movement of Adventist Youth.”

Gueret said three other Adventist young adults were killed last April.

Adventists have not participated in the civil unrest between Christian and Muslim groups, Gueret said.

Violence began in the former French colony last March after a mostly Muslim rebel coalition installed their leader, Michel Djotodia, as the country’s ruler. The move prompted attacks by Christian militia. More than 1000 people have died just in the past six weeks, The New York Times reported.

Djotodia stepped down earlier this month, and a transitional parliament on Monday elected the capital city of Bangui’s mayor Catherine Samba-Panza as interim president, the nation’s first female head of state.

More than 886,000 people have been displaced by the violence and some 86,000 have sought refuge in neighboring countries, The Wall Street Journal reported. The United Nations has designated Central African Republic as one of the top three current humanitarian emergencies, which also include Syria and the Philippines.

“We are praying for the newly elected leadership of this country,” said Gueret, the Adventist Church president in the nation. “We are all wanting the violence to stop.”

There are 10,600 Adventist church members in the nation of approximately 4.6 million.
There is a crisis for freedom of religion and belief around the world. The events of the Arab Awakening have unleashed forces antithetical to the free practice of religion, both for members of majority faiths and for religious minorities. Elsewhere in the world, authoritarian governments continue to use the mechanics of the state to crush independent religious activity. People of all faiths and none are threatened by these trends, which have implications beyond human rights and include threats to international security and the growth of violent religious extremism.

Click here to read more.
A Global Response to Religious Freedom Violations

There is a crisis for freedom of religion and belief around the world. The events of the Arab Awakening have unleashed forces antithetical to the free practice of religion, both for members of majority faiths and for religious minorities. Elsewhere in the world, authoritarian governments continue to use the mechanics of the state to crush independent religious activity. People of all faiths and none are threatened by these trends, which have implications beyond human rights and include threats to international security and the growth of violent religious extremism.

At the same time, a number of European and North American countries have undertaken initiatives to promote religious freedom and oppose limitations to this fundamental right. Starting in 1998, the United States established a special office and ambassador inside the State Department, as well as an independent monitoring commission relating to the issue of freedom of religion. More recently in the United Kingdom, the work of Baroness Sayeeda Warsi’s team and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, as well as the British Parliament’s All Parties Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief, have engaged the issue. Additionally, the European Union has issued guidelines on freedom of religion and established a working group on the subject.

Yet, the challenges facing religious freedom are enormous and growing, extending beyond the capabilities or influence of any one government or organization. Coordinated international action is needed to create momentum for positive change. The networking of European and North American efforts could multiply the effectiveness of bilateral engagements and begin to counterbalance the forces of extremism and repression.

In short, this global challenge needs a global response.

Considering the numerous countries and institutions expressly interested in international religious freedom, the worldwide response to terrorism provides a useful model for how to pool resources and share expertise. In 2011, 29 countries and the European Union created the
Global Counterterrorism Forum to discuss ways to defeat violent extremism. Since then, a series of high-level ministerial meetings has led to the creation of a special fund to share resources and of programs to counter extremist violence.

Launching a similar project—a Global Religious Freedom Forum—is very attainable. The aforementioned countries, and others with an expressed commitment to upholding the religious freedom protections recognized by Article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), could convene a series of high-level meetings every nine to twelve months to coordinate efforts and create synergies in promoting freedom of religion or belief internationally. The meetings would bring together government officials, parliamentarians, and representatives of international organizations. Participants would be encouraged to consult with NGOs and religious communities before and after each meeting to engage all relevant international actors in these efforts.

The purpose of the meetings would be simple and unprecedented: to bring together like-minded policymakers around the issue of freedom of religion or belief for all persons. Discussions would focus on enhancing global cooperation through sharing information about priorities and activities to date, ascertaining current and future challenges, and identifying gaps in international efforts. Ultimately, the effort could lead to a plan of action mobilizing the necessary expertise and creating a joint monetary fund for programming.

Unlike the UN Alliance of Civilizations or recent debates in the UN regarding “defamation of religions,” such a Global Religious Freedom Forum would be framed around support of UDHR Article 18. This would include the freedom to believe or not to believe, the right to worship, change faiths, be free from coercion, and peacefully share one’s religious views with others and one’s children. The meetings would rally international actors currently committed to Article 18 and re-commit participants to actively work to promote and protect the rights it enumerates.

As the challenge posed to freedom of religion or belief cannot be addressed in one single event, subsequent meetings would build momentum to increase capacity for joint action and provide a venue for sharing ideas and formulating responses to new challenges. Future meetings could also discuss ways to encourage more parliamentary and governmental involvement from other states. Religious freedom is relevant in every country and culture and is not a Western concern. “Proselytizing” to bring in other supporters of UDHR Article 18 from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and South America would add additional international, cultural, and religious diversity to an issue of global concern.

Many countries are responding to increasing religious freedom violations, but greater coordination is needed between governments and international organizations to ensure maximum impact. While human rights violations and religious wars are as old as human history, nation-states have now declared that religious persecution beyond their borders cannot go unnoticed. Forming an international coalition for freedom of religion or belief can push back against the forces of intolerance and help create a future where religious diversity and freedom is respected and protected.

Knox Thames is the Director of Policy and Research at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). He can be followed on Twitter at @thames22. The views expressed in this article are his own and may or may not reflect the views of the Commission.
Sanitarium sells Christchurch site

Sanitarium Health & Wellbeing Company issued the following statement about the sale of its Christchurch factory site.

Sanitarium has today announced the sale of its Christchurch site and a lease-back arrangement for its Marmite factory.

Currently Marmite production occupies only a small portion of the Harewood Road site. This means that the site is not being fully utilised.

“We have a signed contract for the sale of the Christchurch site to an undisclosed purchaser”, announced Pierre van Heerden, general manager for Sanitarium. “As part of this agreement, there is a lease-back arrangement for the Marmite factory for up to five years. Marmite production will continue as normal.”

Sanitarium’s Christchurch distribution building is not part of the lease-back agreement and Distribution operations will be centralised to Auckland.

The South Island sales team will still be located and operate as normal in Christchurch from different premises.

“Across the site, there are four positions redundant and we are working through redeployment options with affected staff,” says van Heerden.

Since the Canterbury earthquakes in 2010 and 2011, the Sanitarium Health and Wellbeing Christchurch site has undergone a number of changes including extensive work to strengthen the Marmite production area, which is a new standalone unit.

Settlement on the purchase is due to be completed by the end of May. Until that time Sanitarium will maintain the site in its current condition.
San redevelopment on track for 2014 opening

Wahroonga, New South Wales

Sydney Adventist Hospital’s major redevelopment is on track to open from August/September this year.

Sydney Adventist Hospital is the flagship of Adventist HealthCare Limited based in Wahroonga, NSW and also operates other healthcare facilities Dalcross Adventist Hospital, San Day Surgery Hornsby, and San Diagnostics & Pharmacy Services.

The development is a significant milestone in the Hospital’s 110-year history and expands the bed capacity by 192 beds to 552 beds and by 10 new operating theatres to 24.

The main tower of the ‘New San’ will be named in honour of long serving and much loved current CEO Dr Leon Clark. Clark Tower will include a 40-bed state-of-the-art maternity unit with nine purpose built delivery suites and an Integrated Cancer Centre.

As a result of the expansion, former general manager Phil Currie has been appointed to a newly created role of Performance and Change general manager, to meet the redevelopment needs.

Manawatu, New Zealand

A 6.2 magnitude earthquake struck the lower North Island of New Zealand on Monday, damaging several buildings including an Adventist school. No injuries have been reported.

The earthquake struck at 3.52 pm near the town of Eketahuna, approximately 120 kilometres northeast of Wellington.

*The earthquake damaged two classroom ceilings at Longburn Adventist College.*
[Photo courtesy: Bruce Sharp]

Longburn Adventist College (LAC), located in Manawatu, suffered some minor damage in the earthquake, including two collapsed classroom ceilings.

“Damage at the college was mainly superficial,” said LAC principal Bruce Sharp. “New ceilings are currently being installed, and we are confident the college will be opening on time for the start of the 2014 school year.”

*Messy room: the aftermath of Monday's 6.2 magnitude earthquake.* [Photo courtesy: Bruce Sharp]

The North New Zealand Conference said they have received no other reports of damage to church properties or members' homes.

Several buildings and roads were damaged across the lower North Island, with news outlets also reporting a number of landslides and power outages.

According to *The New Zealand Herald*, seismologists have urged residents in the region to be prepared for more aftershocks over the next few weeks.

New Zealand is located in the “Ring of Fire” Pacific earthquake zone, with the country experiencing up to 15,000 tremors every year.
In 1991, I found myself on a bit of a sticky wicket. I was wrapping up my MBA in what was dubbed the worst year to graduate into the American job market since World War II. And if that were not complex enough, I didn’t even have the legal right to work in the US. On top of that I had a little pile of student debt to worry about. Still, I had interviews with Solomon Brothers brokerage on Wall Street, Bell bike helmets in Los Angeles (LA) and a wide array of outfits in between.

I was very enthused for all things environmental at the time after a summer internship working on environmentally friendly products. Which was the reason I found myself sitting in the LA offices of Greenpeace for what I found at the time, a very strange interview. Rather than discussing my expertise and experience, they focused obsessively on one thing: my personal philosophy.

I now get it. Greenpeace isn’t about simply being effective and efficient. They are about advancing a very particular philosophy. So being competent isn’t good enough. Employees have to be passionate about the very specific approach Greenpeace takes and the specific views they advance. Philosophical dissonance can’t be tolerated because their “product” is their philosophy.

And fair enough. After all, the worst thing an organisation can have is a highly effective employee dedicated to undermining its core values. As Jesus put it: A “house divided against itself, will not stand” (Matthew 12: 25).

Which makes me think of the Adventist Church. Despite our rigorous theology, we are remarkably tolerant in our philosophical employment standards. Yes, people who work for the Church agree to uphold our fundamental beliefs. But when an employee uses his position to actively undermine one of our core beliefs, we tend to tolerate it in the belief that by so doing so, we are showing grace. But what of those whose faith is destroyed by rogue employees in the process? Where is the grace for them?

Of course, some claim that maintaining philosophical employment standards is a violation of freedom. But there’s no right to stay on the payroll when we are working directly against the core beliefs of the organisation that employs us.

Don’t believe in a six-day creation? That is our right. Accepting a salary and undermining a six-day creation to students at an Adventist educational institution? That is unethical. Don’t accept the Adventist belief on sexual morality? That is our right. Use our paid church position to publicly undermine the Church’s position? That is unethical. Believe Adventists are wrong on the seventh-day Sabbath, the state of the dead, the investigative judgement, the Godhead, salvation by grace through faith, the Spirit of Prophecy or any of the other 28 core beliefs? That’s our right. Use our Church-paid position to publicly undermine those beliefs? That’s unethical.

But then how do we grow or progress if employees can’t question Adventist beliefs? First, there are a wide range of areas of process and policy that employees can, and do, question (witness this column from time to time). And there is much unsettled in our theology—our
theology of ordination, for example. Second, when it comes to our 28 core beliefs, we have a deliberative process to effect change. At the last GC Session, for example, a Dutch delegate proposed we change our belief on human sexuality (he was overwhelmingly voted down). We also have annual meetings at which leaders from around the world meet and vote on issues. And we have regional sessions at which proposed changes can be debated.

Do representative processes always work as quickly as we’d like? No. Do representative bodies always reflect our idiosyncratic views? No. But if we are employees, that is the process we work through to achieve change. We don’t have a right to use a position entrusted to us, and for which we are financially supported by faithful church members, to undermine the Church’s core beliefs. We might believe we are mavericks of truth. We really are unfaithful employees who lack the courage to leave the comfort of church employment to ply our trade in the substantially less tolerant open market.

Greenpeace did both of us a favour with its focus on philosophy. It flushed out that I was just a guy who wanted to make the world better by advocating for pragmatic change that is within our reach. Greenpeace, on the other hand, wanted to radically re-engineer society. No doubt they found the person they were looking for. And I went on to find a position with an organisation I was philosophically aligned with. Church employees who use their position to undermine the core beliefs of the Adventist Church should have the integrity to do exactly the same.

James Standish is editor of RECORD.