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World Church Leaders Call for Day of Prayer for Imprisoned Pastor

Seventh-day Adventist world church leaders are asking Columbia Union Conference members to join tens of thousands of Adventist congregations in a day of prayer Sabbath, July 27. They will be praying for the immediate release of a pastor wrongly imprisoned and without trial in the West African country of Togo. July 27 marks day 500 of the ordeal. This is the second day of prayer that the world church has spearheaded for the pastor, the first being December 1, 2012.

Pastor Antonio Monteiro, a native of Cape Verde, worked as a department director at the denomination’s Sahel Union Mission in Lome, Togo, since 2009. His arrest came nearly a year after the May 2011 killings of a dozen young women, whose blood and sexual organs were removed. Togo is home to one of the world’s largest bases of Voodoo, which includes blood and body parts in ceremonies.

Despite no evidence whatsoever of his involvement, Monteiro was imprisoned on March 15, 2012, and has still not received a trial.—Story by ANN Staff

READ MORE
Local Paper Highlights Beltsville Church’s Inmate Ministry

The Gazette, a local Maryland newspaper, recently covered an innovative program at Potomac Conference’s Beltsville (Md.) church. According to the article, the church, which runs the Beltsville Adventist Community Center (BACC), is “piloting a first-in-the-state program connecting prison inmates with their families. ‘We’re very excited to be piloting this,’ said Glenn Holland (pictured),” the church’s associate pastor.

The article further states, "The pilot program uses video conferencing software and equipment to allow family and friends to schedule an appointment at BACC to see and speak with inmates at Jessup Corrections Institution eligible for visitation at no cost, Holland said."—Photo by Greg Dohler/The Gazette

READ MORE IN THE GAZETTE

60 Take on Healthy Living at Allegheny East’s Fitness Retreat

For the 35th year in a row, campers at Allegheny East Conference’s Fit 4 You Retreat are spending
two weeks in Pine Forge, Pa., exercising; eating healthy vegan meals; attending seminars presented by Seventh-day Adventist doctors and professionals; and learning to adopt a positive lifestyle change. This year Kerri Williams (pictured left) is leading the 60 camper in a drum circle. She is also teaching them how to identify triggers that sabotage their health goals and how to get back on track.

“Romans 12:1 tells us that taking care of your body is an act of worship. Verse 2 says that in order to do this, we must change the way we think. So at Fit 4 You, we begin the process of changing our minds and lifestyles, using that ability to make choices,” says A. Leah Scott (right), executive director of the program and director of the conference’s Health Ministries.

—Story by Celeste Ryan Blyden

Potomac Pathfinders Earn Service Honor in a Unique Way

The 36-foot train caboose badly needed a paint job. Originally built in 1954 for the New York, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad Company, it was now an iconic piece for the town of Elkton, Va. Hoping to entice youth groups to help to give the caboose a facelift, town
officials offered monetary rewards.

When Charlotte, a town official contacted Linda Gildner, co-director for Potomac's Elkton church Explorers Pathfinder Club, they gleefully accepted the proposal but with one amendment. They would paint the caboose for free! They also agreed to paint on a Sunday instead of a Saturday like the rest of the groups.

“This project helped the Explorers fulfill their … community service honor,” said Gildner. “I know I can always trust and count on these young people. … They are the future for our church and the future is bright.”—Story by Tiffany Doss

READ MORE ABOUT THE EXPLORERS

100 Attend New Jersey Church’s Health Seminar

More than 100 people recently attended a three-day health seminar at New Jersey Conference’s Toms River church. The seminar topics were “How to Live to 100,” “Defeating Diabetes” and “Cancer: Is there a Cure?” Tim Riesenberger (pictured) MD, MPH, presented
Think You Know Everything About Literature Evangelists? This Issue May Change Your Mind!

each night’s topic in language that the layperson could understand and shared healthful tips that easily incorporate into any lifestyle.

Church members performed free blood pressure screenings and distributed free copies of *Vibrant Life*, one of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s oldest health publications. There were also drawings each evening, and prizes included one-month health club memberships, vegetarian and vegan cookbooks and Riesenberger’s DVDs.

“The Lord continues to open doors since this event,” said Robert Petronella, the church’s community services director. “One of the attendees, a doctor at Community Medical Center and an imam in his community, is making arrangements with Dr. Tim for his return to present the program at his mosque.”—Story by Cheryl McCourry

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**WAU President Elected to Board of Maryland College Association**

The Board of Trustees of the Maryland Independent College and University Association (MICUA) recently elected Weymouth Spence (pictured), EdD, president of Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Md., to serve as association secretary/treasurer.
MICUA is a member-driven organization devoted to serving the interests of independent higher education and supporting the work of campus leaders throughout the state. Established in 1971, the association provides services to foster cooperative efforts among its member institutions and all segments of higher education. As the voice of independent higher education in Maryland, MICUA seeks to inform the broader public about its member institutions and the vital importance of independent colleges and universities.—Story by Grace Virtue

Watch Our New Video: “Camp Meeting in the City”

Most Columbia Union Conference camp meetings involve retreating to a rural area to praise and worship God and reconnect with old friends. At Potomac Conference Spanish Camp Meeting, leaders challenged that notion on many levels when thousands of Hispanic members converged on the city of Richmond, Va., to worship and share Jesus with the locals. Click here to watch the 6-minute video.
"We live in an age where contracts are made to be broken, or at least wiggled out of. Perhaps we should pay attention to Ecclesiastes 5:1-7. In short, the writer warns: Don’t be quick to utter a vow, or anything else, to God. Making a vow to the Lord is a serious commitment. Making a vow before God requires you to carry out what you vowed. In effect, it makes something a sin for you that was not a sin before. The better you understand what a vow really is, the more Jesus’ warning to “swear not at all” makes sense.

As best I understand it, we as Christians are not to have two different standards for truth: regular speech and vows. Instead, we are to make sure our yes means yes and our no means no."—Eugene Anthony, pastor of Allegheny West Conference’s Berean church in Ashtabula, Ohio, and Mt. Zion church in Erie, Pa.
MARYLAND

July 27: Akeem James, founder of Ultimate Cry, a ministry that desires to spread the message of Christ's soon return, will lead an afternoon seminar on how the character of Christ can be practically revealed through His people. This free seminar will be held at the Gaithersburg (Md.) Brazilian church at 7412 Muncaster Mill Road from 3-6:30 p.m. Click here to learn more about the ministry.

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WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Stay Connected:
Literature Evangelists Share Testimonies at Glen Burnie Church

Story by Taashi Rowe
Published 7/24/2013

“We have a small team and a hard territory,” said Tyler Trahan, a Bible worker at Chesapeake Conference’s Glen Burnie (Md.) church. “There are a lot of ‘no soliciting’ signs, and a lot of people are not interested in spiritual things.”

Even so, Trahan has 18 Bible studies already lined up this summer in this working class suburb of Baltimore. Not bad for a hard territory. The soon-to-be 24-year-old, a graduate of the Amazing Facts College of Evangelism, says he is able to give these Bible studies because of student literature evangelists (LEs) who have weathered the merciless summer sun, dogs, “no soliciting” signs and even the police.

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For around 10 weeks each summer, students between the ages of 16 and 25 work in Dover and Wilmington, Del.; Baltimore; Philadelphia; New Jersey; Washington, D.C.; and southern Virginia. They trudge through residential and commercial areas and even parking lots to share books filled with God’s message with whomever they meet. Many times they are turned away. However, many times the students report having a “divine appointment” with someone who needed an encouraging word, prayer and/or was thirsty to know God. The students then connect those who show interest with Bible workers.

The young people, who attend academies and universities all over the Columbia Union and beyond, took over the church services on Sabbath. When introducing the group to the congregation, Jason Williams, Chesapeake’s associate literature ministries director, said, “These are God’s special forces.”

Special, indeed, as this is a tough job trying to get their books into the hands of people. It’s also a life-changing experience for many.

Testimonies From the Streets

Gessy Desir, a nursing major at Washington Adventist University (WAU) in Takoma Park, Md., wasn’t particularly interested in AEC’s program until her sister got involved. “I saw her character transform,” Desir said. “I noticed she was always talking about God, not just silly things, and I thought, ‘I need this.’ I think it’s amazing that God can use insignificant people to deliver His message. There are so many thirsty people waiting to hear God’s Word. When we give them the message, they are so overjoyed, it’s like I’ve given them $1 million. This program is really impactful. I hope more students like myself can get to do this, as it really transforms your life.”

Desir’s sister, Hongkara, who is an elementary and special education major at WAU, started to do this work during the winter. “I used to be so shy and trusted only my own strength,” she says. “But, then I started to lean on the Lord and saw how He started to use me to touch other people. I didn’t
think I could do it—put up with the heat, the cold, rejection—but He has exceeded every goal I’ve set for myself.”

Below Hongkara shares an example of how God placed significant people in her path to help share His message:

“I was canvassing in a Walmart parking lot, and my day wasn’t going well. I saw a Caucasian young man and, when I smiled, he smiled back so I went over and shared with him two devotional books and two cookbooks. He asked me if I normally did this in parking lots and I said, ‘Yes.’ He told me that he was the manager and that I really wasn’t supposed to be doing that. Usually they kick people out. But, he said I was doing such a good job, that he was a Christian too, and wanted me to keep doing what I was doing. That encounter was a true blessing, and the rest of that day I kept meeting people who were open to the message.”

Literature evangelism is also a work of faith. LEs essentially depend on donations. There are minimum donations required for each book they distribute.

Hannaiah Straughn, a 21-year-old English as a second language major at Southern Adventist University in Tennessee, is working in Wilmington. He recalled: “One day, I got dropped off next to a Mexican restaurant. I canvassed a cashier using as much Spanish as I could. She ended up being interested in a [health book] written in Spanish. She then canvassed the rest of the restaurant for me in Spanish. Everyone in the restaurant didn’t have enough for the books and so they pooled their money together. Even then, there was a book they wanted on nutrition, but they didn’t have enough for the minimum donation. I gave them the book believing that God will provide for me somehow. The cashier then got all the people together and invited me to pray over all of them. [Later,] I walked past a gas station that I already canvassed, but the Holy Spirit told me to go back. I told the guy there that I was a student at Southern. He said his daughter graduated from there! He said he already had most of the books but gave me a donation of $20, which was the exact amount I needed for the book I gave away at the restaurant!”

Dexter Marshall, a 19-year-old student at Essex Community College in Baltimore, got involved in this program last summer because he was yearning for a new experience. He remembers meeting a woman who was so touched by his story and his prayer that she not only bought $50 worth of books, she also wrote him a check for $500. A member of Chesapeake’s Dundalk (Md.) church, Marshall says literature evangelism “had me do things I don’t normally do. I talked to a lot of people, something I don’t do. I was able to reach people in a way that changed their lives and, in return, I got to be more open.”

Rick Christman, Chesapeake’s literature evangelism director, knows first hand how impactful these student experiences can be. Spending summers as an LE allowed him to graduate from college debt free. While that may be a draw for some people, Christman says getting students involved in this program shows them how they “can be frontline missionaries in their home country.”
A Growing Ministry

“Literature evangelism is probably one of the fastest growing youth programs in North America,” he continues. “We’ve seen a 20 percent increase over the last five years. He estimates that with his Chesapeake team, along with teams from the Allegheny East and Pennsylvania Conference, there are close to 100 young people working in literature evangelism this summer. AEC expanded their program and students now work on winter, spring and summer breaks. They also started programs at WAU and at Takoma Academy in Takoma Park, Md. Chesapeake also started a program at Highland View Academy in Hagerstown, Md.

“Young people are looking for something positive to do,” said Reginald Alexander. “This is one tool that will deepen their spiritual walk. It is amazing to see the change in individuals from when they first come into the program to when they leave. They leave knowing, without a doubt, that God is real and their faith is strengthened.”

Christman says literature evangelism gets students involved in playing a critical role in a church’s annual cycle of evangelism. This year the Chesapeake Conference is working with both the Glen Burnie and Brookland churches in Maryland and the West Wilmington church on their cycle of evangelism. In the spring, they had lay training where they taught members how to follow up on Bible study interests. In the summer, the LEs come in and not only sell books, but also survey the neighbors on how the church can help fulfill their needs. Then the two Bible workers give Bible studies, and in the fall, there will be an evangelism meeting, which hopefully results in baptisms.

Christman reports that last year, due to the conference, churches and LEs working together, the Dover church had 18 baptisms. People are now fired up and excited to continue outreach.

Jazmine Walls, a Bible worker in West Wilmington, said, “When you have God in the mission, you can do anything … The LEs help make our work more sufficient and we are able to get to people faster.”

“I did LE for seven years,” Diego Boquer, who pastors both the Brooklyn and Glen Burnie churches, told the congregation in a sermon titled “The Theology of ‘Sending.’” ”It changed my life completely. Don’t think you’re disposable. God wants to use you, but the message is more important. Don’t just think you’re going today; you’re going always—as you go to work, as you go to the grocery store, you’re always sharing God’s message.”

Last Sabbath afternoon, was another opportunity to share. Members from the Glen Burnie and Brooklyn churches, Bible workers and literature evangelists roamed the neighborhoods of Glen Burnie distributing hundreds of GLOW tracts and, in doing so, possibly changing lives.
COMMENTS POLICY: The Columbia Union Conference Visitor encourages quality conversation and welcomes your thoughtful comments. All comments are subject to approval but will not be edited. Please limit your comments to 500 words or less. Only one comment per person will be published.

There are no comments.

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The government of Togo has imprisoned Antonio Monteiro, an Adventist pastor, without a trial or evidence of his involvement in a crime, for nearly 500 days.

Seventh-day Adventist world church leaders are asking Columbia Union Conference members to join tens of thousands of Adventist congregations in a day of prayer Sabbath, July 27. They will be praying for the immediate release of a pastor wrongly imprisoned and without trial in the West African country of Togo. July 27 marks day 500 of the ordeal. This is the second day of prayer that the world church has spearheaded for the pastor, the first being December 1, 2012.

Pastor Antonio Monteiro, a native of Cape Verde, worked as a department director at the denomination’s Sahel Union Mission in Lome, Togo, since 2009. His arrest came nearly a year after the May 2011 killings of a dozen young women, whose blood and sexual organs were removed. Togo is home to one of the world’s largest bases of Voodoo, which includes blood and body parts in ceremonies.

Despite no evidence whatsoever of his involvement, Monteiro was imprisoned on March 15, 2012, and has still not received a trial. Five attempted appeals by his lawyer, the Adventist world church and several foreign diplomats have failed to set him free. Government officials have made promises to church leaders and lawyers, but have not followed through.

The only accuser has been declared mentally unstable and a “pathological liar” by a court medical exam. He has since recanted his accusation and declared that police forced him under duress to offer names of people he knew.

“‘To say that Monteiro is innocent goes without saying,’” said John Graz, director of the Adventist world church’s department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty. “‘The accusation against Monteiro is that he, as an Adventist pastor, conspired to have these women killed to use their blood in a religious ceremony. It’s an absolutely unbelievable and bizarre charge.’

Local newspapers have called for the release of Monteiro and others who are held without a trial—a violation of Togo’s constitution—which guarantees a right to a trial.

The Adventist News Network on July 18 released a four-part series of articles detailing the case. The series—which details the arrest, conversations with police, and prison conditions—is based on interviews with sources involved in the situation, a statement by Monteiro, emails, newspaper reports, police records and court documents. A spokesman for Togo’s Ministry of Justice declined to comment for the series.

To get your church involved in this day of prayer for Monteiro or to sign a petition for his release, visit pray4togo.com.

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New community center offering inmate video visitation

The Beltsville Adventist Community Center is not yet a year old, but it is already piloting a first-in-the-state program connecting prison inmates with families.

"We’re very excited to be piloting this," said Glenn Holland, community pastor for BACC, which is operated through the Beltsville Seventh Day Adventist Church.

The pilot program uses video conferencing software and equipment to allow family and friends to schedule an appointment at BACC to see and speak with inmates at Jessup Corrections Institution eligible for visitation at no cost, Holland said.

Holland said he learned about videoconference visitation being used in Virginia through the regional conference of Seventh Day Adventist churches. Holland said Virginia is the only other state to provide the service.

"It seemed like something we ought to be doing in Maryland," Holland said.

Holland said he contacted the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and last September, a plan began to create the free pilot program.

"We think this is better for safety and it is easier on families in that they do not have to travel as far," Martha Danner, DPSCS deputy director of Community Supervision Support.

Jessup is currently the only prison participating, but if the pilot is successful, it would be expanded to other state prisons, Danner said, adding that several Baltimore area churches have expressed an interest in participating.

Inmates are more likely to be successful after prison if they have strong family support, but many families cannot make the journey on a regular basis, Danner said.

"If somebody can visit from a remote location and maintain closer contact with the inmate, that inmate may well do better when he or she gets out," Danner said.

There are 22 prisons in Maryland and JCI is closest to Prince George’s County.

Capt. Anthony Lewis, pilot project coordinator for JCI, said the benefits include not having to search visitors for contraband or worry about visitor safety inside the facility.

"Jessup Correctional Institution was pleased to be chosen by the DCPCS to pilot this video visit program," said Lewis. "This is a wonderful program and I would like to see it expand throughout the DPCPS."

The first video visitation was held July 14.

"It went great," said Holland. "They were really excited to be the first ones to try it."

The inmate and visitor wished to remain confidential, Holland said.

Video visitations must be scheduled at least a week in advance, by calling the Beltsville Seventh Day Adventist Church. Currently, they are only scheduled for Sundays, as the church observes the Sabbath on Saturdays and hosts a daycare program weekdays, but if demand increases, it may be extended to weekday evenings as well, Holland said.

Holland said the prison video visitation is just one example of ways churches and government can cooperate.

BACC provides other services such as counseling, a computer lab and a food pantry.

"Both churches and government need to be working together to meet the needs of the community that we both have a mutual interest in serving, and that’s what we’re doing here," Holland said.
Elkton Explorers Earn Honor by Helping Community

Tuesday, 16 July 2013 15:09

Originally built in 1954 for the New York, Chicago, & St. Louis Railroad Company and now an iconic piece for the town of Elkton (Va.), the 36ft train caboose, badly needed a paint job. For a monetary contribution, the town of Elkton (Va.) was asking youth groups to help give the town train caboose a face lift.

"In late March, Charlotte Shifflett, a representative of Elkton, asked us to help," explained Linda Gildner, Elkton Seventh-day Adventist Church’s co-director for Explorers youth. "The proposal was met gleefully by the Explorers, but the amendment to do it for free was quickly stated." The only detail to be settled was when it would be painted. This small group was approved to paint on Sunday, instead of Saturday like the rest of the groups.

"This project helped the Explorers fulfill their three parts to the Community Service Honor," said Gildner. "They had to complete a service for the local town government, for community residents and for a specific group within the town."

To complete the second criteria, the group had invited local Veterans to special church service, which involved a Full Drive and Flag Presentation. A ‘Declaration of Thanks,’ commended them for their sacrifices and services, was read by the Explorers. "We had local veterans from WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan," said Gildner. "We also had recipients of a WWII Purple Heart and a Vietnam War Bronze Star. It was a very powerful service."
Lastly, the club distributed empty bags; hand decorated with Fall theme drawings, to collect non-perishable food for the Elkton Area United Services Foodbank. The Explorers have been a part of this ministry, in conjunction with the church's Adventurer team, for the past five years. Over the years, they have collected between 2,400 and 3,200 pounds of food.

"I know I can always trust and count on these young people," said Gildner. "They always step up. I know my young people and believe in them. They are the future for our church and the future is bright."

Comments (0)
Upcoming Events Around the Columbia Union

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August 24: The registration deadline for those interested in participating in the Christian Storytelling Café’s storytelling contest. The contest takes place in Hagerstown, Md., on September 1 and includes the following age categories and entrance fees: youth, aged 14-19 ($5) and adults, aged 20-plus ($10). For more information about the contest, contact Faith Crumbly at (301)797-1537 or ustorytellers@gmail.com.

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NATIONAL
September 1: Enter the 2014 "Forever Faithful" International Camporee theme songwriting contest by September 1. Click here to enter the contest. If your submission is chosen, you could win two free tickets to the camporee and the honor of having your music become the 2014 Forever Faithful International Camporee official theme song. For more information, contact Justin Yang or Stacy-Ann Thomas.

ONLINE
July 21: A memorial service for Joe Melashenko, former pastor of the Hagerstown, Md., district, will take place at the Paradise church in California on Sunday at 4 p.m. (PDT). The musical service will be streamed live at http://www.ustream.tv/channel/paradiseadventist. He passed away on June 21 at the age of 91. In lieu of flowers, donations may be sent to the Voice of Prophecy and/or Quiet Hour radio ministries.

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