Weekly News From Around the Columbia Union Conference

March 6, 2014

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Rob Vandeman, Columbia Union executive secretary; Ruben Ramos, vice president for Multicultural Ministries; Tabitha Martinez, associate treasurer; Beth Michaels, Visitor editor in chief; Celeste Ryan Blyden, vice president for strategic communication and public relations; Dave Weigley, Columbia Union president; and Seth Bardu, Columbia Union treasurer

http://t.e2ma.net/message/ew1te/6diogi[3/7/2014 11:34:43 AM]
union’s first woman vice president. Celeste Ryan Blyden was promoted from assistant to the president for communication to vice president for strategic communication and public relations. Rubén Ramos, who served as assistant to the president for Multicultural Ministries since 2007, was promoted to vice president for Multicultural Ministries.

Beth Michaels, who has spent eight years at the Visitor magazine, the last two as managing editor, will now serve as editor in chief and the union’s associate director of communication. Tabitha Martinez, who has served as the union’s assistant treasurer since 2006, was promoted to associate treasurer.

“We appreciate the contributions you all have made to the mission of the church here in the Columbia Union. We applaud your dedication and service,” said Dave Weigley, union president. He then turned to Blyden and said the union committee unanimously voted to elevate her to vice president.—Story by Taashi Rowe

NEW CONSULTANT HELPS WITH EVANGELISTIC SCHOOL

Earlier in the week, the Columbia Union Presidents’ Council voted to have Cindy Tutsch, DMin, join the office team for a part-time, one-year appointment. Tutsch, who recently retired from her post as associate director at the Ellen G. White Estate in Silver Spring, Md., will help in the efforts to launch an evangelistic school for young adults in the Columbia Union. “Cindy has served as a pastor and conference youth director. She understands young people and has started a number of evangelistic initiatives with young adults,” said Frank Bondurant, vice president for Ministries Development. “She will serve as a consultant to our study committee as we lay the foundation and discuss core values, a mission statement and outcomes for this school.”

Tutsch starts working with the Columbia Union team this week.—Story by Taashi Rowe

WGTS NOW HAS THE LARGEST VIRTUAL PRAYER COMMUNITY IN THE U.S., CHAPLAINCY TEAM REPORTS
WGTS 91.9 FM now has the largest virtual prayer community in the United States, according to the chaplaincy team from the Washington Adventist University-owned radio station based in Takoma Park, Md. The team shared the report with the Columbia Union Conference Executive Committee this morning. With 211,877 active participants in their PrayerWorks community, this means that one in 20 people in the Washington, D.C., area contacted the team during 2013 for prayer.

The station’s prayer program evolved from a call-in line to emails to an online, web-based, virtual community. With funding from the Columbia Union Conference, WGTS purchased the PrayerWorks software, where participants simply post their needs and set up alerts on their phones, which lets them know when someone is praying for them. When WGTS purchased the software, the largest virtual PrayerWorks community was in Minnesota with a then-unimaginable 50,000 active participants a year.—Story by Taashi Rowe

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Columbia Union President Offers Prayer in U.S. Senate

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“It is a great honor for me to participate, but it is not about me. It is about the church,” said Weigley, the first Seventh-day Adventist Church president to do so. “We are a viable force that God has designed to be on the Earth just before His return. This is recognition that God is calling our church to be involved in the last days.”

“We’re thankful to Chaplain [Barry] Black for providing this opportunity,” says Celeste Ryan Blyden, the union’s vice president for strategic communication and public relations, who coordinated the prayer with Black, who serves as U. S. Senate chaplain. “As a church, we need to seek more opportunities to make connections, build relationships and increase awareness of our faith.”—Story by V. Michelle Bernard

Columbia Union Honors Senate Chaplain

The Columbia Union group of conference presidents who visited the U.S. Capitol on Tuesday also took time to interact with Barry Black (pictured center), an Adventist minister who has served as the U.S. Senate chaplain since 2003. While there, Walter Carson, the Columbia Union's vice president and general counsel, presented the chaplain with an obelisk (pictured) and thanked him for his "outstanding service to his country and his church.”—Story by Taashi Rowe

On Capitol Hill, Union Leaders Wrestle With Church, State Separation
On Tuesday, with the United States Capitol building only a few blocks away, about a dozen leaders of Columbia Union’s local conferences, university and healthcare systems wrestled with ideas on choice and separation of church and state.

The three-lecture symposium was the brainchild of Walter Carson, the union’s vice president and general counsel; and Gary Ross, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty consultant.

Carson noted that this day was the first of its kind for the Columbia Union. “As leaders of the church, religious liberty is an important component of our faith, and this opportunity to get an in-depth lesson on this matter is not always available. We believe this day has equipped us all to be better leaders,” he said. Pictured is Jon Paulien, dean of Loma Linda University's School of Religion in California, who spoke about America in prophecy.—Story by Taashi Rowe

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Capitol Hill Workers Encourage Involvement

Michelle Chin (pictured left with Walter Carson), a member of Potomac
Conference’s Capitol Memorial church in Washington, D.C., and a legislative assistant for Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, was delighted with the union leaders’ visit. Chin, whose senator has been a co-sponsor of the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, said to them, “I just want to encourage you, as pastors, to encourage your church members to be active. I think one thing beautiful about the Adventist Church [is] while we are interested in policy, we haven’t been active in pushing on these very divisive and controversial social issues.”

Dwayne Leslie (pictured right), director of legislative affairs for the General Conference, also encouraged more Adventist involvement in government. “I think we have an important voice to be heard,” he said. “We can have an influence. We can fight for freedom.”—Story by Taashi Rowe
Columbia Union Names First Woman Vice President, Promotes Three Others at Spring Meetings

March 6, 2014 · by Taashi Rowe · in Columbia Union News

The former Visitor editor’s portfolio will expand to include strategic communication and public relations.

Story by Taashi Rowe

Today four Columbia Union staff members received promotions at the Columbia Union Conference Executive Committee spring meetings. Among them was the union’s first woman vice president. Celeste Ryan Blyden was promoted from assistant to the president for communication to vice president for strategic communication and public relations. Rubén Ramos, who served as assistant to the president for Multicultural Ministries since 2007, was promoted to vice president for Multicultural Ministries.

Beth Michaels, who has spent eight years at the Visitor magazine, the last two as managing editor, will now serve as editor in chief and the union’s associate director of communication. Tabitha Martinez, who has served as the union’s assistant treasurer since 2006, was promoted to associate treasurer.

“We appreciate the contributions you all have made to the mission of the church here in the Columbia Union. We applaud your dedication and service,” said Dave Weigley, union president.

He then turned to Blyden and said the union committee unanimously voted to elevate her to vice president. “It was one of those decisions where you could catch and feel the electricity in the room. It was time to do this. This is the right thing to do. It is the first time, to my knowledge, that the Columbia Union has had a woman vice president,” he said as the room exploded with a standing ovation.

Blyden has spent 12 years as editor of the award-winning Visitor magazine and has 25 years of communication experience. She has served the church as a journalist, editor, public information officer, marketing coordinator, media relations manager, corporate communication director, social media strategist and television producer. In addition to her new duties, she will continue to lead the communication department and serve as publisher of the Visitor. During her tenure, Blyden and her team grew the Visitor brand to include a weekly email newsletter, videos, websites, the popular annual calendar, social media and other platforms.

Ramos, a champion for soul-winning and church planting, was born in Argentina and grew up in the home of missionaries. He holds a degree in education and theology from River Plate University in Argentina, has experience as a literature evangelist, and pastored several Hispanic churches in the Potomac Conference before serving as the Hispanic Ministries director there for 11 years.

Prior to joining the union, Michaels worked for several non-profit organizations around the Washington, D.C., area, leading and assisting in...
their communication and marketing departments. She also spent five years at ADRA International helping and then leading their news and public relations efforts.

“Like me, Beth is a daughter of the Columbia Union and a graduate of Washington Adventist University. She also shares my passion to connect, inspire and engage members through the Visitor and our other communication platforms,” Blyden said. “We’re all thankful for her commitment to the ministry of communication in the Columbia Union.”

Martinez has also served four years as an assistant staff auditor for the General Conference Auditing Service. She holds a bachelor of business administration from Southwestern Adventist University in Texas and will finish her MBA from Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Md., in May. “Over the years, Tabitha has served as a dedicated and faithful member of our team,” said Seth Bardu, Columbia Union treasurer. “As an associate treasurer, she will be presented with even more opportunities to serve her church.”

New Consultant Helps With Evangelistic School

Earlier in the week, the Columbia Union Presidents’ Council voted to have Cindy Tutsch, DMin, join the office team for a part-time, one-year appointment. Tutsch, who recently retired from her post as associate director at the Ellen G.

White Estate in Silver Spring, Md., will help in the efforts to launch an evangelistic school for young adults in the Columbia Union. “Cindy has served as a pastor and conference youth director. She understands young people and has started a number of evangelistic initiatives with young adults,” said Frank Bondurant, vice president for Ministries Development. “She will serve as a consultant to our study committee as we lay the foundation and discuss core values, a mission statement and outcomes for this school.”

Tutsch started working with the Columbia Union team this week.
March 6, 2014 · by Taashi Rowe · in Washington Adventist University

**What started out as a mom-and-pop type call-in prayer line quickly ballooned into a prayer community of hundreds of thousands.**

*Story by Taashi Rowe*

WGTS 91.9 FM now has the largest virtual prayer community in the United States, according to the chaplaincy team from the Washington Adventist University-owned radio station based in Takoma Park, Md. The team shared the report with the Columbia Union Conference Executive Committee this morning. With 211,877 active participants in their PrayerWorks community, this means that one in 20 people in the Washington, D.C., area contacted the team during 2013 for prayer. The station’s prayer program evolved from a call-in line to emails to an online, web-based, virtual community. With funding from the Columbia Union Conference, WGTS purchased the PrayerWorks software, where participants simply post their needs and set up alerts on their phones, which lets them know when someone is praying for them. When WGTS purchased the software, the largest virtual prayer community was in Minnesota with a then-unimaginable 50,000 active participants a year.

“Our dream was to have 50,000 prayer requests in the Washington, D.C., area and we would be so thrilled,” said Terry Johnsson, the station’s chaplain. Team members were shocked when PrayerWorks told them they had more than quadrupled their goal.

When Dave Weigley, Columbia Union president, heard about the software, he jumped at a chance to support the project. “We’ve been needing this in our union. Just think if we had sold the station in 2007, we would have lost this powerful tool for ministry and influence in our community,” he said referring to the 2007 proposal to sell the station’s license.

“People in the Department of State, people in the White House, people all around the nation’s capitol listen to our station.” Kevin Krueger, the station’s vice president and general manager, notes that prayer is one of several prongs that the station uses to reach its 600,000-plus listeners, 40 percent of whom are unchurched. “We have a big goal to reach a post-Christian audience in this area for Jesus, and we are always working toward it.”

**READ MORE ABOUT WGTS**

**The Blessing of WGTS**

**WGTS 91.9 Meets More Than Just Music Needs**

Check out PrayerWorks!
Columbia Union President Offers Prayer for U.S. Senate

ColumbiaUnionVisitor.com /columbia-union-president-offers-prayer-for-u-s-senate/

March 4, 2014 · by Michelle Bernard · in Columbia Union News

Columbia Union President Offers Prayer for U.S. Senate

Story by V. Michelle Bernard

On Tuesday Columbia Union President Dave Weigley offered the opening prayer for the U.S. Senate in the Senate Chamber of the U.S. Capitol.

“It is a great honor for me to participate, but it is not about me. It is about the church,” said Weigley, the first Seventh-day Adventist Church president to do so. “We are a viable force that God has designed to be on the Earth just before His return. This is recognition that God is calling our church to be involved in the last days. That is why Barry Black is there.”

U.S. Senate Chaplain Barry Black invited Weigley to serve as guest chaplain for the day. Black, whose prayers during the Federal shutdown made federal headlines, encouraged Weigley and the other leaders from the Columbia Union to become more involved in their local governments.

“Your group represents the greatest number of Seventh-day Adventist leaders who have ever visited my office. In the nearly 11 years that I’ve been here, there haven’t been many of our leaders to visit this office … You’re missing a great opportunity frankly to become more involved in the governments where you are. Many of you know that the prayers that I prayed during the Federal Shutdown became almost a cause célèbre. People are waiting for gadflies. People are waiting for individuals who are not afraid to call sin by its name,” he continued.

Black, chaplain since June 2003, is the first Seventh-day Adventist to serve in this position.

“We’re thankful to Chaplain Black for providing this opportunity,” says Celeste Ryan Blyden, the union’s communication director, who coordinated the prayer with Black and his staff. “As a church we need to seek more opportunities to make connections, build relationships and increase awareness of our faith.”

The prayer includes six Bible texts and the “Doxology,” and espouses Adventist beliefs in creation, the Second Coming, religious liberty and community service. It aired on C-Span2. Here is a transcript of the prayer:

Let us pray.

Almighty God, Creator and Maker of all. Who sits enthroned above the Earth, and in whom we live, move and have our being.

We praise You from whom all blessings flow. We thank You for Your sustaining power, for peace and for the freedoms we enjoy.
We ask Your blessing on our great nation, insightful leaders and dedicated lawmakers. Establish their steps, and give them discernment and courage to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly. Strengthen them to uplift those who are downcast, who need the compassionate touch of a brother or sister’s hand.

Above all, may Your Kingdom come, may Your will be done and may we readily incline our ears to Your call today.

This we pray in Your holy and righteous name. Amen.

Before the prayer, Weigley, his Columbia Union leadership team and the presidents of the union’s eight conferences, Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Md., and an Adventist HealthCare representative met with Chaplain Black and several Adventist Hill staffers. Earlier that day, they met nearby for a special symposium on religious liberty.
On Capitol Hill, Columbia Union Leaders Wrestle With Church, State Separation

columbiaunionvisitor.com /capitolhill/

March 5, 2014 · by Taashi Rowe · in Uncategorized

Church leaders from around the Columbia Union spent the day in Washington, D.C., where they attended a symposium on religious liberty from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective.

Story by Taashi Rowe

Yesterday, with the United States Capitol building only a few blocks away, about a dozen leaders of Columbia Union’s local conferences, university and healthcare systems wrestled with ideas on choice and separation of church and state.

Interestingly, while Columbia Union leaders were guests of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJCRL), the focus for the day was looking at religious freedom from a uniquely Seventh-day Adventist perspective.

“I can’t think of any two groups that care more about religious liberty,” said J. Brent Walker, BJCRL’s executive director, when welcoming the group. “I’ve found it beneficial to work with Adventists on this issue as we promote religious freedom for all of God’s children.”

The three-lecture symposium was the brainchild of Walter Carson, the union’s vice president and general counsel; and Gary Ross, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty consultant.

Carson noted that this day was the first of its kind for the Columbia Union. “As leaders of the church, religious liberty is an important component of our faith and this opportunity to get an in depth lesson on this matter is not always available. We believe this day has equipped us all to be better leaders,” he said.

Dwight Nelson, senior pastor of the Pioneer Memorial church and an adjunct homiletics professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Michigan, began the day by discussing freedom of choice and found biblical parallels to the American democratic system.

Jon Paulien, dean of the School of Religion at Loma Linda University in California, titled his talk “America and the End-Time in Prophecy: A Seventh-day Adventist Perspective.”

Although much of the day’s focus was on the potential dangers of an entangled church and state, Doug Morgan, professor of history at Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Md., spoke of AT Jones, one of the first Adventists to make a foray into influencing legislation. He pointed out that Jones’ efforts as well as Ellen White’s writings support conscience-based activism.

Gary Ross summed up the lectures for the day as “substantial, relevant and beautifully presented.”

Attendees also briefly met with two Adventists who work on Capitol Hill: Dwayne Leslie, director of legislative affairs for the General Conference, and Michelle Chin, a legislative aid for John Cornyn, a Texas senator.
Meeting With The Senate Chaplain

The group also met with Barry Black, an Adventist minister who has served as the U.S. Senate chaplain since 2003. While there, Carson presented the chaplain with an obelisk and thanked him for his “outstanding service to his country and his church.”

Black told the church leaders that if they have not taken the time to get to know their government officials, they were missing a great opportunity to get more involved in their government. “These are the last days. I challenge you to interact with our government authorities before it is the last time,” he said. “Having been here with a front seat to history, I have seen the difference that interaction can make when teaching the Word of God.”

In reflecting on the day, Ron Halvorsen, Jr., president of the Ohio Conference, said the entire day was a reminder that throughout Scripture, God placed spiritual people in the political arena. “We have such a strong community stance on separation of church and state that we’ve stayed at arms length from [government]. The presenters did a good job of talking about how to be a spiritual voice for justice. And Dr. Black’s challenge that we get to know our political leaders is a good reminder of that,” he said. “The other reminder is that if people don’t know us, it’s easier for them to stereotype us and what we believe. When they know us, we are friends and they know we care. And who knows what difference it can make at key moments.”