January 15, 2015

Weekly News From Around the Columbia Union Conference

What is the Future of Mount Vernon Academy?

Delegates to the specially called constituency meeting about the future of Mount

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Vernon Academy (MVA) voted to adopt a process that the Ohio Conference will carry out over the next few months. Essentially it says that MVA needs to raise a total of $3 million by March 10, 2015, or will cease operations at the end of the 2014-15 school year.—Ron Halvorsen, Jr.

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Spanish Caravan of Hope
Concludes, Produces 344 Baptisms

The Spanish Caravan of Hope, an evangelistic initiative to spread the gospel throughout New Jersey, ended this fall. Jorge Aguero, Personal Ministries director, and José Cortés, conference president, organized the events. The caravan included special programs across the state, starting in July. During the initial phase, which spanned to October, leaders baptized 169 people. During the November 1-15 phase, 185 people in central New Jersey gave their lives to Christ and were baptized.—New Jersey Conference Staff

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Former Union Publishing Associate Dies

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Robert “Bob” LaGrone, who served the Adventist Church in the publishing work for more than 42 years, died earlier this month. He was a young adult convert into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but after converting soon started full-time literature evangelism work in the Southern Union as a way to help others discover God’s love.—Beth Michaels

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Union Plans Hispanic Evangelism Festival
February 20-22 the Columbia Union will host the Lay Evangelism Festival (Livevangelism 2015). Church pastors and leaders of more than 200 Hispanic churches from across the mid-Atlantic area will gather at the Ocean City Convention Center in Ocean City, Md., for the training weekend.—Sylvia Urrutia

Read the entire January Visitor online here!

More Adventist News

Take a “Psychological First-Aid” Crisis Care Course This Weekend

Martinsburg Church Hosts Tribute to Civil Servants

New Jersey Governor Appoints Mt. Olivet Pastor to Commission

2015 Adventist World Budget Funds Mission, Administrative Support

73 Baptized During Potomac Hispanic Evangelism Efforts
January 12, 2015 · by Michelle Bernard · in Columbia Union News, Ohio Conference

The following is an update from the Ohio Conference after the January 11 Constituency Meeting on Mount Vernon Academy.

MVA – Update #6
January 11, 2015 – Constituency Meeting Results

Dear Ohio Conference Family and Friends,

Delegates to the specially called constituency meeting about the future of Mount Vernon Academy (MVA) on January 11 voted to adopt a process that the conference will carry out over the next few months. Essentially it says that MVA needs to raise a total of $3 million by March 10, 2015, or will cease operations at the end of the 2014-15 school year.

This was by no means an easy decision, but the 340 delegates in attendance who came together and heard the reports on the finances, enrollment and needs of the beloved academy, courageously and prayerfully voted—257 for, 82 opposed—to accept the December 2, 2014, recommendation of the Ohio Conference Executive Committee (EXCOM), which states:

“WHEREAS, EXCOM has received the findings and recommendations presented by the Blue Ribbon Committee (BRC), and

“WHEREAS, EXCOM has received the MVA Board of Trustees (BOT) action dated December 1, 2014, and

“WHEREAS, EXCOM places great value on providing long-term Adventist secondary education for the constituents of the Ohio Conference…

“EXCOM recommends accepting the BOT action dated December 1, 2014, with the following changes/additions to its benchmarks…

• Raise $1.5M by February 10, 2015
• Raise $1.5M by March 10, 2015
• Any sale of real estate assets restricted to debt reduction and capital improvements and not current operations.

“In the event these benchmarks are met, EXCOM recommends the following:

• Develop long-term vision and action plans by March 15, 2015, that will provide steps and strategies for a sustainable future of the academy, encompassing the three core components of leadership, enrollment and finances, as identified by the BRC.
• EXCOM Personnel Committee will conduct an assessment of current administration and faculty and make the necessary recommendations regarding continued employment or change.

“In the event the benchmarks are NOT met by March 10, 2015, EXCOM recommends the following:

• MVA and its BOT will immediately begin the process necessary to cease operation of the academy by the end of the 2014-15 school year.
• EXCOM will develop alternative options for secondary education for current and future Ohio Conference students including funding options and scholarships.”

Leaders Remain Committed to Secondary Education

It takes $3 million to operate Mount Vernon Academy annually. If that money can be raised by March 10, 2015, the school would enter the 2015-16 school year debt free with the necessary working capital. If the money is not raised, we will have to take the necessary steps to cease operations.

Whatever happens, secondary education remains a priority in the Ohio Conference, and we will continue to seek ways to provide the opportunity for our young people to access quality, Adventist Christian education. In the meantime, we will continue to lend strong financial oversight of MVA's operations to ensure financial prudence.

The situation with MVA has precipitated a conversation about Adventist education that we will continue to pursue—with union and division leadership and locally within the Ohio Conference family. Together we need to figure out how to make Adventist education viable—now and in the future. As we seek alternative options, it will take more prayer, study, idea sharing and conversations like we had at the three December town hall meetings and today's special constituency meeting.

Leaders Request Prayer and Support

As we have done since we became aware of the needs of MVA, we will continue to post updates on our conference website at www.ohioadventist.org, Facebook page and in the Visitor magazine.

SUPPORT

To lend your financial support to MVA and secondary education at this critical time, please contact Ohio Conference interim treasurer Lyle Litzenberger at (740) 397-4665, treasurer@ohioadventist.org or Ohio Conference, PO Box 1230, Mount Vernon, OH 43050. Donations can also be made online at www.ohioadventist.org (earmarked for "secondary education—special").

Friends, please continue to keep the students and staff of MVA in prayer, and join us in seeking God's direction for secondary education in the Ohio Conference.

Thank you and God bless you,
Ron Halvorsen Jr, President
Spanish Caravan of Hope Concludes, Produces 344 Baptisms

January 14, 2015 · by Michelle Bernard · in New Jersey Conference, New Jersey Conference

Spanish Caravan of Hope Concludes, Produces 344 Baptisms

Story by New Jersey Conference Staff

The Spanish Caravan of Hope, an evangelistic initiative to spread the gospel throughout New Jersey, ended this fall. Jorge Aguero, Personal Ministries director, and José Cortés, president, organized the events. The caravan included special programs across the state, starting in July. During the initial phase, which spanned to October, leaders baptized 169 people. During the November 1-15 phase, 185 people in central New Jersey gave their lives to Christ and were baptized.

Leaders held the closing ceremony November 15 at the Tranquil Valley Retreat Center in Andover, ending the third phase. Various small groups from across the state participated in a small groups parade, and many attendees gave their lives to Jesus through baptism at the event. “We are thankful to all the pastors and lay members who worked on spreading the Gospel,” says Aguero. “We praise God for the success of this evangelistic effort.”

Omar and Nessy Grieve, directors of La Voz de la Esperanza, spoke at the closing event. Junior Kelly Marchena, an internationally known Seventh-day Adventist singer, performed at the closing event and at events during the initiative.

Cortés says he firmly believes that the Holy Spirit is working among the church to God’s glory. He summarizes that 344 joined the Adventist Church as a result of the Spanish Caravan of Hope.
Robert “Bob” LaGrone, who served the Adventist Church in the publishing work for more than 42 years, died earlier this month.

Story by Beth Michaels

He was a young adult convert into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but after converting soon started full-time literature evangelism work in the Southern Union as a way to help others discover God’s love.

LaGrone later served as publishing director for the Central States and Allegheny East conferences, then finished his church career as associate publishing director for the Columbia Union Conference (1980-1995). He also served on many boards and committees, including the North American Division Publishing Board and Review and Herald Publishing Presidential Committee. Additionally, he participated in numerous studies of church history and its publishing work.

“Elder LaGrone is remembered with great fondness by those that worked with him here at the Columbia Union,” says Rob Vandeman, union executive secretary. “He was passionate about the publishing ministry and worked tirelessly to assist conferences with their literature evangelist programs. The impact of his passion and vision reached far beyond the boundaries of our union.”
Union Plans Hispanic Evangelism Festival

columbiaunionvisitor.com/union-plans-hispanic-evangelism-festival/

January 5, 2015 · by Michelle Bernard · in Columbia Union News, Noticias
Union Plans Hispanic Evangelism Festival  
Story by Sylvia Urrutia  

February 20-22 the Columbia Union will host the Lay Evangelism Festival (Livevangelism 2015). Church pastors and leaders of more than 200 Hispanic churches from across the mid-Atlantic area will gather at the Ocean City Convention Center in Ocean City, Md., for the training weekend.

The event will focus on the basic means of fulfilling Christ's mission. The four parts of that mission are: every disciple praying and reaching out in love to five friends; small groups nurturing revival and evangelism throughout 500 houses; reaching out to new territories by planting 15 new churches; and church ministries and departments intentionally focusing on congregation and community needs.

“We hope every participant will return committed, motivated and equipped to joyfully carry out Jesus' mission,” says Rubén Ramos (pictured), vice president for Multilingual Ministries and organizer of the event.

For more details, write to surrutia@columbiaunion.net or call (410) 997-3414, ext. 586.

Read more articles from the January 2015 issue

- January 2015 Feature: Unlikely Hero
- Underscore: When Tragedy Strikes a Town Near Us, How Should We Respond?
- Elizabeth’s Tips for “Heroes”
- Happy New Year Message from Columbia Union President
- Book Release: Devotions by Dawn
- Book Release: King Jesus is Coming
- Did you Receive your 2015 Calendar?
- Read the January Bulletin Board
CRISIS CARE TRAINING
“Psychological First Aid”

Sunday, January 18th
Registration ($25)
8:00 AM

Training
8:30 AM - 2:30 PM

Location
Columbia Union Conference
5427 Twin Knolls Road
Columbia, MD 21045
FMI contact CeCe Lester
cle5313@aol.com
301.503.4772

The Washington Metro Adventist Community Services Federation, in partnership with the North American Division Adventist Community Services; The Dept. of Ministries Development of Columbia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and Adventist Community Services of Allegheny East Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, invite you to attend a premier Critical Incident and Crisis Care Training. The presenter is Michael Lombardo, D.Min. He has 20 years experience as a Pastor in the Southern Union and 15 years experience as a Hospital and Prison Chaplain. He currently serves as Director of Pastoral Care at Park Ridge Health in Hendersonville, NC. Dr. Lombardo is a Board Certified Chaplain with the Association of Professional Chaplains and a CISM Trainer for the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Training is a 6-hour interactive course that teaches participants how to be of assistance after a disaster or critical incident has occurred. This course is for individuals new to disaster response who want to learn the core goals of PFA, as well as for seasoned practitioners who desire a review. It will feature helpful instruction, innovative activities, video clips, and usable handouts that will introduce a volunteer to the world of disaster mental health and how to provide early assistance to those in need.
Martinsburg Church Hosts Tribute to Civil Servants

Story by Mark Walker

The Martinsburg church in West Virginia honored local law enforcement and fire safety workers during a recent worship service. Dan Pabon, a chaplain for the Montgomery County Police Department (Maryland), spoke and used the biblical account of Lazarus found in John 11. He demonstrated the importance for those who put their lives at risk to trust God daily to be their protector and keeper.
Numerous civil servants who work at the state and local levels in Berkeley and Jefferson counties in West Virginia, and in the Hagerstown and Frederick, Md., communities attended, including local and state police officers, a fire department official and a retired judge.

“This is our first attempt to honor those who do this line of work,” says William Vargas, an elder. “Our goal is to make the service of appreciation and recognition an annual event.”

_Pictured above: Tom Boggess, Martinsburg pastor (third from left), honors William Ivany, Dan Pabon, retired judge Mariano Ramirez, Keith Sigulinsky, Richard Molina and Pedro Morales for protecting citizens. Photo credit: William Vargas_
Chris Christie, New Jersey governor, recently appointed Joseph Thelusca, pastor of the Mt. Olivet church in Neptune, N.J., to serve as a member of the New Jersey Commission on National and Community Service.

“My involvement in the commission brings a sense of diversity and necessary representation for our urban communities throughout the state. My main desire is to bridge the gap between various local, nonprofit community entities to the many funding opportunities that are available through the commission,” says Thelusca.

Thelusca's current term extends until May 14, 2017.
2015 Adventist World Budget Funds Mission, Administrative Support

January 8, 2015 · by Michelle Bernard · in Columbia Union News

Highlights of headquarters budget of $184 million; full budget upon request

Story by Ansel Oliver/ANN

The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s 2015 General Conference World Budget funds mission work and administrative support, as well as funding operation of the denomination’s world headquarters building.

The 2015 General Conference World Budget this year of more than $184 million allocates:

- $47.6 million for operating costs, salaries and programs of the world headquarters building.
- $45.1 million in appropriations to the fields outside of North America.
- $30.2 million for missionaries and employees serving in other divisions other than their own.
- $23.8 million in subsidies to institutions.
- $14.5 million in headquarters administered funds for programs in divisions.
- $10.5 million in subsidies for institutional services.
- $12.4 million for General Conference Auditing Service.

An Adventist Church finance officer underscored that the 2015 General Conference World Budget only includes items relating to the denomination’s world headquarters and appropriations to world fields. The World Budget does not include the reported incomes or budgets for its 13 divisions or respective local administrative units and congregations (The Adventist world church receives more than $2 billion in tithe annually). Many local administrative units may choose to report their own budget in a similar way.

Operating costs for the denomination’s headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States, is limited to 2 percent of world tithe, and it is again expected to operate significantly under that cap.

"We have been running under that cap for decades, making more resources available for world fields," said Juan R. Prestol-Puesán, undertreasurer for the Adventist world church.

Prestol said this year’s World Budget highlights the continuing adjustment in tithe percentages from North America, a decision that was approved by the denomination’s Executive Committee in 2012.

Until 2012, the North American Division contributed 8 percent of its tithe to the World Budget, while the other 12 divisions each contributed 2 percent. The 2012 vote reduced North America’s tithe percentage contribution down to 6 percent, which would be implemented over several years. North America’s tithe is approximately $1 billion, and the 2015 continuing adjustment means a reduction of $10 million to the World Budget from North America, Prestol said.

“"We are carefully threading through the process of the time of reduction without affecting existing programs," Prestol said.

Recipient divisions other than North America are allocated appropriations between $1.3 million and $5 million.

More than one-third of appropriations to divisions are located in the 10/40 Window, a geographical rectangle in the
eastern hemisphere between the 10 and 40 northern lines of latitude. The region is home to more than 60 percent of the world’s population and less than 2 percent are Christian.

This year, for the second year in a row, the North American Division will receive an appropriation—$295,000, mostly to help administrate the Guam-Micronesia Mission, which until three years ago was part of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division.

Prestol also said the Adventist Church this year will spend most of the funds allocated for the 2015 General Conference Session. Church finance officers have set aside $1.4 million each year for the past five years for the 2015 GC Session. Prestol said the GC Session fund from 2010 ended with nearly $1.5 million in unspent funds.

Other appropriations over $1 million identified in the 2015 General Conference World Budget are:

- $7.8 million for Loma Linda University
- $5.5 million for Adventist World magazine
- $5.4 million for Andrews University
- $5 million for Hope Channel
- $2.6 million for the Ellen G. White Estate
- $2.6 million for Adventist World Radio
- $1.6 million for subsidies to publications
- $1.4 million for the 2015 General Conference Session
- $1.3 million for Adventist Mission
- $1.2 million for the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies
- $1.2 million for the Geoscience Research Institute
- $1.1 million for the Adventist University of Africa

To see a complete copy of the 2015 General Conference World Budget, please send a request to the ANN editor at adventistnews@gc.adventist.org.

**Pictured:** In an interview, Adventist Church Undertreasurer Juan R. Prestol-Puesán gave an overview of the 2015 General Conference World Budget. Above, he addresses the denomination’s Executive Committee in October. This is the sixth consecutive year ANN has made the full budget available for readers to review. [ANN file photo by Ansel Oliver]
73 Baptized During Hispanic Evangelism Efforts

Story by Tiffany Doss

Twenty-two Hispanic churches in the Potomac Conference recently participated in a week of evangelism as a preamble to a large crusade featuring international evangelist Alejandro Bullón, an international evangelist. These small church efforts helped lead 41 people to choose baptism. “We encourage our nearby churches to do their own evangelism, because it’s less intimidating for visitors to become acquainted in a smaller church setting,” explains Jose Esposito, director for Hispanic Ministries. “By the end of the series, many of our newcomers felt comfortable and fired up enough to attend our bigger event.”

Bullón presented the messages themed “Hope Lives!” at the weeklong crusade held at the Southern Asian church (SASDAC) in Burtonsville, Md. The messages focused on the heavenly sanctuary and highlighted the hope that Jesus brings each day. Every night more than 1,000 people attended, with more than 1,400 attending on the last Sabbath. More than 100 people accepted Jesus as their Savior and 32 chose baptism during the meetings.

On the last Sabbath, Franklin David, SASDAC senior pastor, not only welcomed everyone to the event that day, but also mentioned that the doors to his church were open to anyone that wanted to learn about Jesus, no matter what language they spoke.

“Our prayers were answered, the gospel was preached, pastors joyously baptized new souls, Christ was exalted and the mission was accomplished,” says Esposito.