

From the G.C. President

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1. DATELINE INTER-AMERICA: With over 1.5 million members in Inter-America, the largest in membership of any division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, brings to mind images of soul-winning laity, a wide variety of colorful cultures and yes, the Adventist hymn "Mas Alla del Sol" (Far Beyond the Sun). Its 12 unions (with 60 conferences/missions) stretch from Tijuana (in Northwest Mexico), across the islands of the Caribbean and the countries in Central America, to include the countries along the northern rim of South America. About 1,800 district pastors minister to 4,982 organized churches and 7,162 companies, which means only about 15 percent of the congregations have the services of a pastor each week.

After several Spirit-filled weekend meetings, Sunday morning union presidents gave thrilling reports. They told how the Global Mission vision is being manifested and how pastors and laymen have established 448 congregations in previously unentered areas this year bringing the total to 2,172 in the quinquennium. Further, after the baptisms reported to date were tabulated, we found that 103,253 people have been baptized already this year and projections for the end of the year are well in excess of 110,000. It was exciting to hear that one out of every 15 on the islands of St. Croix, St. Vincent and St. Lucia are Seventh-day Adventists, as are one out of 12 on Antigua, one out of 11 on Montserrat, and one out of five on St. Eustatius.

2. WORKPLACE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT: In 1972, the United States Congress amended Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to ensure that Americans were not unnecessarily excluded from the job market because of their religious practices. Since that time, the federal courts have interpreted the Act in such a way as to make the burden on employers so light as to be almost meaningless. Whereas Title VII requires employers to accommodate employee religious practices unless to do so would create an "undue hardship" on the business, the Supreme Court has ruled that an employer must only offer one method of accommodation even where other methods more desirable to the employee are available. The Court has interpreted undue hardship to be anything that (1) violates a labor organization contract on seniority agreement, (2) reduces efficiency or productivity, (3) results in even minimal cost, without consideration of the size of the business involved, or (4) negatively impacts the rights of other employees. Invoking these rulings, lower courts have virtually explained away the burden placed on employers by Congress with the result that Sabbatarians, whose problems were a major impetus to the 1972 act, have very little statutory protection in the workplace. Many Americans from a variety of religious persuasions are

annually denied employment because their employers simply do not wish to accommodate sincerely held religious practices. The Workplace Religious Freedom Act, introduced in the House of Representatives by Congressman Jerrold Nadler, aims to remedy that situation and to restore the protection intended by Congress. The world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church endorses and supports this legislation.

3. SUDAN--CRUCIFIXION ALLEGATIONS: New reports coming out of the war-torn nation of Sudan allege that five Christians have been executed by crucifixion since the beginning of July. A Sudanese Anglican bishop says he has received confirmation that an Anglican priest and two believers, from an as yet unidentified Christian church, died when they were crucified in the Nuba Mountains in early July.

Anglican Bishop Daniel Zindo of Yambiyo reported in late August that he had spoken with a reliable investigator who interviewed eyewitnesses to the July 7 crucifixions. The executed Christians were identified as a Reverend Aron and two other Christians from Akon. The source, who Zindo declined to identify beyond a "reliable human rights investigator," reportedly conducted a fact-finding visit to the Nuba Mountains and said the executioners used nails six inches (15 cm) in length to crucify the three Christians.

"There is no clear reason, except that they are Christians," said the bishop. "The government is persecuting those who are the Christian leaders, because they want the people to all become Muslims." Zindo is the new chairman of the Nairobi-based New Sudan Council of Churches. His allegations match rumors originating from the Nuba Mountain region over the past few weeks. In a telephone interview from Nairobi, the Anglican prelate called the crucifixion of the Anglicans "a verified incident." Zindo also affirmed stories coming out of Sudan alleging an active slave trade in the area, in which the widows and orphans of slain Christian men are being sold into the north of Sudan and Libya for as little as \$15 a piece. "Nobody can prove it, but it's actually happening," he asserted.

The Khartoum government has denied repeated charges presented to the UN Human Rights Commission over the past year of crucifixions implemented by government forces against Christians. Government statements claim the allegations have "fueled imaginary confrontations between Islam and Christianity." (News Network International)

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