

# From the G.C. President

February 27, 1995

Robert S. Folkenberg

■ **DATLINE - MIDDLE EAST & PAKISTAN:** Our journey this past two weeks took us to the Middle East, cradle of civilization. ✓ **Egypt**, land of Moses, mummies and museums. Egypt, where the pyramids were already old in Abraham's day, was our first stop. But we came to visit Adventists today. Islam is a major challenge for the Adventist Church. About 90 percent of the population (about 60 million, 99 percent live along the Nile river—16 million in Cairo alone) are Muslims. In the seventh century the Egyptian Christians, oppressed by the Byzantines, welcomed the invading Arabs as liberators and accepted Islam. A Christian minority remained. Today, the Coptic Orthodox Church is Egypt's largest Christian church.

Egypt was the first Middle Eastern country to be entered by the Adventists. In 1877 Adventists in Naples sent the *Signs of the Times* to friends in Alexandria. Romualdo Bartola, a layman, visited Alexandria in 1878, baptized seven persons and formed a group. A school was organized in 1879, and some tracts published. Several members were killed in 1882 during a riot against foreigners, and many members scattered. George Keough came from Ireland in 1908 and led our work in Egypt for many years. A group of Christians who had been keeping the Sabbath for six years heard of Keough and invited him to visit them. He baptized 24 and in 1913 organized the first Adventist Church composed entirely of Egyptians.

Today, there are over 1,200 members meeting in 22 congregations. While in Egypt, I attended the opening of the Egyptian Field Session, visited Nile Union Academy and our small but successful food factory.

✓ **Kuwait**, the ardently Islamic, ultra-modern, recently war-torn, arid, oil-rich, city-state at the headwaters of the Persian Gulf, was our next stop in the Middle East. What a joy it was to meet with over 100 members, foreigners working in this prosperous nation, who attended a worship service last Tuesday evening.

✓ **Dubai**, one of the seven emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates and the Emirate with the most Adventists, was our next stop. Wednesday evening we worshiped with 80 believers (from four Emirates). Eighteen years ago the Lord laid a burden on Esther Gallyot to establish congregations in all the Emirates. A legal secretary, Esther is the spiritual leader of these congregations and truly is a mother in Israel. The Lord is blessing her ministry in a remarkable way.

✓ **Pakistan:** The first missionaries to what is now Pakistan arrived in 1901. Work expanded into the Punjab when, in 1913, S. Wellman met S. Samuels, an independent Christian minister. Samuels accepted the Sabbath and invited Wellman to the Punjab.

Today, an Islamic State, Pakistan is one of Christianity's major challenges. Only 1 percent of the population of 125 million are Christians and of these only 11,000 are Seventh-day Adventists. Yet our membership is growing rapidly. Friday we drove two hours to Hyderabad where

18 months ago there wasn't one Adventist among the one million inhabitants. Since then two churches were established in the suburban villages of Kotrie and Tandojan. Today *all* 500 inhabitants of Tandojan are Seventh-day Adventists! Friday I attended a baptism concluding an evangelistic series conducted by Borge Schantz, director of the GC's Islamic Center at Newbold College. Two hundred seventy-nine souls were baptized, and two new congregations established in the suburbs of Hur Camp and Tando Mohamad Khan. Other meetings in Karachi yielded another 150 souls. It is unusual for a union to baptize on one weekend a number equal to almost five percent of its total membership! Then we boarded the flights to begin the 24-hour journey home thus concluding February's travel with 26 days away from home, 47 hours of flying and preaching 13 sermons.

■ **NET '95 OPENS:** Saturday night, February 18, the largest audience to gather for public meetings in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church gathered in 676 locations across North America, linked by satellite. Of the 66,000+ who heard the first presentation by Evangelist Mark Finley, only 3,000 were at the Chattanooga, Tennessee Convention Center "uplink site." Other groups, ranging from 15 in Aztec, New Mexico, to 600 on the campus of Andrews University participated by satellite "downlink." At least 20,000 of those in attendance identified themselves as not currently members of the Adventist Church.

The meetings are the culmination of "Net '95," an evangelism initiative of the North American Division which began about 18 months ago. The use of satellite linkage in public evangelism is a bold experiment for the Adventist Church. Many feared that "people won't come to church just to watch TV" but it didn't turn out that way. "The people really respond," says Pastor Steve Shaw, who had 172 in his Aurora, Illinois, church including 50 non-members. Sedro-Woolley, Washington (Sabbath attendance 150+) is typical of the nearly 700 participating churches. Opening night's attendance was 117, with 37 guests. White reported, "When Mark asked the audience to read a text with him people in our audience joined in. They seemed very responsive." Describing his personal reaction White added "When the whole process began, I could hardly contain my feelings. I had such a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes. This was 'my church,' not anyone else, but 'my church,' the remnant church of Bible prophecy on the cutting edge of technology. I caught my breath. I believe all heaven was singing with Wintley, 'Jesus is coming again.' What a day! What a church! What a God! I'm so proud of 'my church!' I'm so proud to call myself an Adventist Christian pastor!"