

Mission Sonlight-3rd Qtr. 2008-United States

Narrator: Welcome to Mission Sonlight. Our report today comes from the United States, part of the North American Division.

Among the earliest settlers of the United States were those who sought the freedom to worship and raise their families according to the dictates of their conscience. This was to become one of the freedoms that are today guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. Visitors to the nation's capital are reminded of the foundations of freedom and responsibility that those who formed this country envisioned and pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor as they sought to form a more perfect union.

It was here, in a relatively young country, which promoted religious freedom, that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had its early beginnings.

As religious fervor swept across the young nation in the 1840's, men like William Miller sought to understand the Bible and God's plan for their lives. Through his preaching, many became convicted of the soon return of Jesus Christ. Miller, along with others, believed that Jesus would return on October 22, 1844. When this failed to happen, the disappointment was overwhelming and large numbers became discouraged. However, there were others who clung to their faith and continued to seek solace and guidance in the scriptures.

With continued study and prayer those early church pioneers were led to a greater understanding of God's marvelous plan for rescuing this world from sin. Leaders such as Joseph Bates, Ellen and James White, J. N. Andrews were eager to continue telling

others the story of Jesus and His soon return. From that little group of believers, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was officially organized in 1863 with 3,500 members worshipping in 125 churches. Although growing from humble beginnings, today the Adventist church is recognized as a worldwide denomination with over 14 million members. Each Sabbath over one million of those members worship within the borders of the North American Division in 6019 churches, companies and groups.

Headquarters of the Adventist church of North America are located in Silver Spring, Maryland where Don Schneider serves as president of the Division.

Our early church leaders knew that to reach others with the story of Jesus, it was necessary to have materials that could be distributed and used for study and spiritual growth. They used the printed word as a means to spread the good news that Jesus was coming again. Periodicals such as the Advent Review and Sabbath Herald were published and read by many. As James White labored over each issue he could never have imagined a day when satellites, computers and Internet would provide the electronic method which many today use for their daily spiritual devotions.

Another of the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution is that of freedom of speech. The Adventist church in the United States is fortunate to be able to speak openly and freely about its beliefs through the means of radio, television, the Internet and even podcasting, as well as in the church pulpit. The church has affiliate programs such as *It Is Written*, *Voice of Prophecy*, *Amazing Facts* and *Breath of Life* that broadcast in communities and homes across the nation.

Additionally, communities are now being impacted by the LifeTalk radio network as more than 70 stations broadcast programming that features Bible study as well as relationship building, interpretation of current events as well as stewardship of finances and health.

Elvin Vence: LifeTalk got started back in the '90s in Yakima, Washington. Then it moved to Von Orr, Tennessee where they had a new facility and uplink.

Narrator: When LifeTalk received permission from the Federal Communications Commission for low-power FM licenses to operate from 50-100 watts, many churches were inspired to apply for them and begin stations in their communities.

Elvin Vence: With the help of LifeTalk some 60 or 70 stations applied. They were able to get equipment through LifeTalk at a great discount.

Narrator: As the stations were growing during the late '90s through 2001, LifeTalk also provided training in production, programming and on-air presence. Today, the LifeTalk headquarters are located in Collegedale, Tennessee.

LifeTalk radio is able to go where Adventists don't have a physical presence making it an invaluable tool to reach people who may not have any other way of learning of Jesus.

Elvin Vence: We are halfway between Knoxville, Tennessee and Chattanooga. There are three growing communities in this county and there is no Adventist presence at this time. Hopefully, this will provide seed for churches in this county.

Narrator: People are listening and the responses are coming in to the programming that is carried on the local LifeTalk stations.

Elvin Vence: I've had people call me from as far away as Loudon, which is basically almost outside of my listening area.

Narrator: People don't only listen to LifeTalk in their homes and cars. Reports have come in of local shops and businesses tuning to LifeTalk for their customers to listen to as they shop and work.

Bob Hill: Based on our surveying at the county fair, we have a pretty good feeling that there are a good percentage of people in our county and the city proper that know that we're there.

Narrator: Sometimes it is easy to take freedom of speech and religion for granted when it is so readily available to us. As we are surfing the Web or worshipping on Sabbath we might forget that there have been citizens of our nation who have had to keep watch in places far from home and loved ones, as they guard and defend our freedoms.

Gary Council: Adventist Christians have dual citizenship. We're citizens of the kingdom of God by new birth and we're citizens of our country—our fatherlands in which we were born by birth.

I would say in our present world situation that we find ourselves, that Adventists are loyal citizens of our country. We have been what I would call conscientious cooperators. We have willingly served, where we can, as loyal citizens.

Narrator: There have been times when the church has found it necessary to prepare its members for service to their country. In years past, young people were given medical training through the Medical Cadet Corps or MCC. This helped prepare the trainees to serve their country and fellow countrymen as medics.

One young man who served with distinction is well remembered for putting himself at great personal risk to save the lives of his comrades.

Gary Councill: Desmond Doss demonstrated with tremendous powerful witness and valor about his beliefs and faith and was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Many Adventists have served loyally and faithfully since.

Narrator: Adventist military personnel have long depended on materials from the church to help them keep strong in their faith as well as having the opportunity to witness to those around them. Since World War II the Adventist church has provided Bible kits for church members who are serving in the armed forces. Today, service members are able to use many different methods to access religious materials for their own use as well as for sharing with others. One of the most convenient ways is use of electronic media.

Although LifeTalk Radio is based in the United States, it is having an impact on Americans who live and serve their country outside the nation's borders. Darryl Bentley discovered how this was important to him during a recent deployment to Iraq.

Darryl Bentley: While I was stationed in Iraq I had the opportunity to witness and do Bible studies to a number of soldiers. Being far from home, far from my reference library, far from the resources that one typically has available from the church, I found myself turning more and more to the Internet.

Narrator: Bentley used the Internet to glean materials for Bible studies as well as to find materials to feed himself spiritually.

Darryl Bentley: There were no Adventist chaplains on the base in which I was stationed so I was left on my own to feed myself from the Word of God.

Narrator: Bentley also used this as a way to prepare himself to help the soldiers who were coming to him with tough questions that they were facing in their own personal situations.

Darryl Bentley: While I was deployed in Iraq I used Adventist media and websites to feed myself spiritually so that I would have that Biblical and spiritual meat with which to turn around and feed the soldiers who came to me for counsel and for guidance and for questions on the Scriptures.

Narrator: Since his return from Iraq, Bentley has shared on LifeTalk radio about the struggles returning soldiers and their families face.

Darryl Bentley: I had the opportunity in November 2007 to be interviewed on LifeTalk radio and that was a tremendous blessing. The emphasis of that show was discussing reintegration issues that veterans face coming back to a deployment to Iraq. I just really appreciated the ministry of LifeTalk radio and that they do have a deep concern and care for veterans and their families.

Narrator: It's through Adventist media such as LifeTalk radio and VOAR that Adventist church members both here at home and in far-flung countries can access the spiritual resources they need for themselves and their friends and neighbors who are seeking answers for their lives. As a church we should be humbled by the opportunities and technology God has given us to tell others the story of Jesus. Meeting Jesus may not always take place in a whitewashed building with oak pews and carpet. Instead, it might in the shifting sands of a desert or the sun baked city of a country half a world away.

Wherever it happens, the important fact is that the story of Jesus is told in a way that the Holy Spirit will touch the listener and a life will be changed.

Gary Councill: I want to make one thing very clear and that is within our membership in uniform—I call them saints in Caesar’s household, taken from Phil 4:22—our military members are, on the most part, very faithful witnesses. They have entered a circle normally closed to the church and are credible witnesses for our faith, and for the fact that Adventists are loyal citizens.

Narrator: Among our members in uniform, we have military chapel worship groups in many locations overseas. These are most often lay-led and are impacting both Adventist members and those they serve with daily. Reports are being received of baptisms taking place as a result of these groups.

Gary Councill: These people are a living testimony and are a witness in their communities about what the Seventh-day Adventist church believes.

Most military today have some access to a computer and where they do they can go online and listen to all kinds of websites. They can get in contact with VOAR and LifeTalk. This becomes a tremendous outreach as well as a spiritual enabling force.

Narrator: Media ministries such as LifeTalk radio and Voice of Adventist radio are crucial to reaching this world with the most important message they can ever hear. It might be someone in your community or a soldier deployed far from his family that is touched by the ministry of these two radio networks. You have a mission field right here in your home division. One of the ways you can reach others is by sharing generously on September 27 with LifeTalk and VOAR. As you begin to make plans for your 13th

Sabbath offering, also plan to share the story of Jesus with someone this week. We have the freedom now to do so. Let's take advantage while we can.

Reporting from the North American Division, this is Mission Sonlight.