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Reexamining Session format

A downsized GC Session might be in the church's future, but 2020 plans move forward with tradition

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15 Feb 2011, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
Libna Stevens/IAD/ANN staff

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's Inter-American Division appealed to its more than 3.3 million members last week to seek spiritual renewal through prayer and Bible study with the regional launch of the denomination's Revival and Reformation program.
Urging a spirit of constant prayer among Adventists in the region, the program echoes the Adventist world church's recent emphasis on spiritual revival. It also features a 160-day prayer initiative addressing specific needs for each church territory in the region, church leaders said.

The three-hour satellite event, broadcast live on Hope Channel and Esperanza TV, highlighted activities planned for members in the region for the initiative in the coming months.

A March 12 event will focus on prayer for children and young people. Later, Adventists in the region will pray for their pastors, charged with leading congregations toward spiritual revival. Focus will then shift to students and teachers across Inter-America's more than 1,000 Adventist-run schools and universities. In June, an emphasis on prayer in the home is expected to help members impact their neighbors.

"[God] wants to do something extraordinary in these end times," said Adventist world church President Ted N.C. Wilson, speaking at the February 12 launch at El Palacio de los Deportes in Santo Domingo. More than 13,000 Adventist leaders and church members attended the event.

Wilson urged Adventists in Inter-America to embrace a spirit of humility that he said will allow God to work through them. "We cannot initiate revival and reformation, we can only place ourselves in God's hands and then the power of [his spirit] will take control," he said.

"Let Seventh-day Adventists be known as people who practice Christianity. Let your humble lifestyle ... always point people to Jesus and His soon coming," Wilson added.

Wilson, who challenged church leaders in Inter-America to plead for an outpouring of God's spirit, was instrumental in prompting the region to launch its prayer initiative.

"The church in Inter-America has always been identified as a church that prays," said Israel Leito, president of the church in Inter-America. "We have this revival event today to thank the Lord, to tell the Lord that we want to be a people ready for His coming, and tell the world that we are a church that is 'Constant in Prayer' and will remain so."

Leaders in Inter-America report that church regions there have already embraced spiritual revival and reformation as part of their strategic plan to strengthen the church.

Shortly after Wilson's February 11 arrival in the Dominican Republic, top church officials from across the region met with the world church leader to pray for the initiative. The group heard Wilson's vision for a revived church and committed to take the call for spiritual renewal seriously.

"You look around the world and see what is happening in the natural world, political situation, fragile economic setting -- things are not going to get much better," Wilson said. "We know Jesus is coming soon."
Plans are underway for similar spiritual revival satellite event this summer, held in El Salvador, church leaders said.

Reexamining Session format

*A downsized GC Session might be in the church's future, but 2020 plans move forward with tradition*

10 Feb 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN

Just six months after the Seventh-day Adventist world church's largest business meeting, General Conference Session planners are already mapping out the global denomination's 2020 convention.

Planning for the event typically begins 10 years out, meaning the location for Session 2015 was announced in 2006 after a host city selection process, including a search for venues, proposal reviews, bidding cities and site visits.

Adventist Church administration won't vote on the location for Session 2020 until October, but some at world church headquarters are discussing whether a downsized Session is on the church's horizon.

As Adventist Church membership has grown, so have Session venues. Today, a potential host city must boast a covered stadium able to seat the estimated 70,000 who attend peak weekend meetings, said Sheri Clemmer, associate meeting planner for the world church. The site must also offer adjacent convention centers and nearby accommodations for upwards of 6,000 delegates and Session support staff, she said.

Session traffic typically wanes on weekdays. Daily business meetings -- where key decisions are actually made -- are often sparsely attended, except by Session delegates and a few faithful spectators. Instead, guests often crowd the exhibitor's hall or participate in the many activities held alongside Session.

Pardon Mwansa, a world church general vice president who chairs the church's Session Planning Committee, said some church officials are questioning the continued need for "camp meeting-style" Sessions -- as much spiritual retreats as business meetings.

"We don't need a crowd to elect leaders. We don't need a crowd to change policy," Mwansa said.

Others have asked whether a downsized Session might open cities outside of the United States to hosting duties. Of the 59 Sessions since the Adventist Church was established in 1863, only three were held elsewhere, said Mwansa, who serves as a world church general vice president and chairs the church's Session Planning Committee.
The format of the church's largest business meeting can only be reexamined during a vote taken at Session itself. While no such proposal exists, church administrators have "talked informally" about what shape future Sessions might take, said Lowell Cooper, also a world church general vice president.

"As the church grows, the potential for [Session] to become an even more complex and costly event increases, forcing us to consider what it is we need to achieve at Session, and what is optional," Cooper said.

Whether that discussion will lead to more Sessions held outside North America is debatable, church leaders said.

Church administrators who attended the 1995 Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, remember long train rides and less than ideal facilities.

"Some delegates -- and that includes me; I was a union president that year -- were traveling for at least two-and-a-half hours every day one way to get from our hotel to the convention center," said Mwansa. "We had to start off as early as 5:30 a.m."

An early morning might not seem insurmountable, but factor in jetlag, Mwansa said, and delegates tasked with making some of the church's arguably toughest and most pivotal decisions can become exhausted.

"The key factor is how best to facilitate the business of the church," he said, suggesting that a rested body and clear mind might help.

Also central in determining where Session is held is its budget. Getting audio-visual equipment, support staff and delegates to the location is expensive, said Verland Erntson, controller for the world church's Accounting department.

In 1995, the world church spent $5.8 million footing the bill for Session in Utrecht, not including airfare for support staff. Five years later, Session in Toronto, Canada, cost more than $1 million less. Even last year's Session venue in Atlanta, Georgia -- which totaled $5.5 million -- cost less than Utrecht. "That surprises me," Erntson said.

However, downsizing Session just to accommodate overseas host cities is an idea with "little traction" so far, Cooper said.

In 2005, then world church President Jan Paulsen asked regional church presidents to choose a venue other than world church headquarters to host Annual Council, one of the church's biannual business meetings. "Even for that smaller meeting, most of them preferred to come here -- they were used to it, and it was convenient," Mwansa said.

While holding Session outside North America might serve as a symbolic recognition of church growth
elsewhere, recent spikes in membership are already acknowledged in practice, Mwansa said.

The church's representative system "shifts in a powerful way the decisions and the future of the church by virtue of the fact that those delegates exercise their regional mindsets," he said.

Regardless of where Session is held, the global scope of the event is not lost, nor are the voices of membership worldwide drowned out, church leaders agree. Delegate selection criteria for Session gives no advantage to the region hosting the event, Cooper said.

The local pride that comes with hosting Session is, at least for now, reserved for residents of San Antonio, Texas. Their city will host the church's next Session in 2015. As for 2025?

If church administrators are "courageous enough" to conclude that Session is fundamentally a business meeting, they must ask how to most efficiently conduct it, Mwansa said.

"Then the outcome will be different," he speculates.

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**ADRA appoints new executives for finance, programs**

_Mordeno, Flemmer round out new leadership team for international agency_

14 Feb 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
ANN staff

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) International Board of Directors announced the appointments of two new executives last week.

Robyn Mordeno was appointed vice president for finance and Ken Flemmer as vice president for programs, according to a February 10 release.

Mordeno replaces Gideon Mutero, who served as vice president for finance since January 2007. Ken Flemmer replaces Mark Webster, who served as vice president for programs since October 2008, a spokesman said.

Also, Executive Vice President Mario Ochoa's title was changed from Executive Vice President to Vice President for Network Relations, agency spokesman Hearly Mayr said in an e-mail.

"The selection of this leadership team underscores ADRA's ongoing global efforts to deliver development assistance and humanitarian aid in a changing environment," said Geoffrey Mbwana, ADRA board chair and a vice president of the Seventh-day Adventist world church.

"Moving forward, this team has an outstanding opportunity to ensure that the agency is prepared to meet the increasing needs of so many underserved communities around the world."

Mordeno, now senior finance director FIELD-Support for the Washington D.C.-based Academy for Educational Development (AED), served in various financial leadership roles since she first joined ADRA in 1994, including posts in the ADRA Asia Regional office in Thailand, as well as Somalia, Albania, Azerbaijan, and Vietnam. Mordeno holds a Master of Science in Administration in International Development from Andrews University and a Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting and Management from Southern Adventist University.

Since joining ADRA in 1984, Flemmer has held various positions, including director for Safety and Security,
bureau chief for Internal Compliance, assistant vice president and ADRA Asia Regional director. In this new role, he will oversee the agency's project planning and new business development efforts, and the monitoring of U.S. government and privately funded development projects worldwide. Flemmer holds a Master in Science in Agriculture Management from California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo and a Bachelor of Arts in English from Andrews University.

Originally from Chile, Ochoa, an attorney, has been a vice president at ADRA International since 1986. He joined the agency in 1981 as assistant to the president, as well as counsel for International Legal Affairs. He previously served as a country director for ADRA Chile and academic dean for the Chilean Adventist University. He is a doctoral candidate in the Leadership Program at Andrews University and holds a law degree from the University of Concepción in Chile.

The release said the appointments "complete the new leadership team led by Dr. Rudi Maier, who was appointed president and executive director of ADRA International in October 2010."

For more information about ADRA, visit www.adra.org.

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**Church taps Leslie as Adventist point person in Washington, D.C.**

*Veteran attorney, business leader Leslie seeks 'seat at table' for church in public sphere*

9 Feb 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States  
Bettina Krause/PARL/ANN staff

Veteran attorney and business leader Dwayne Leslie will serve as the Seventh-day Adventist Church's voice in Washington, D.C., following a vote taken yesterday by the world church's Executive Committee.

**Attorney Dwayne Leslie brings broad experience from the legal and corporate worlds to his new position as director of Legislative Affairs for the Seventh-day Adventist world church. [photo courtesy PARL]**

As associate director for the world church's department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) and
director of Legislative Affairs, Leslie will represent the world church and its concerns on Capitol Hill, at the White House, and among Washington's diplomatic community.

Leslie replaces attorney James Standish, who served in the department for eight years.

One of his first goals, Leslie said, is to "expand the relationships that James has established, and to build on the great job he's done in representing the church."

During a career spanning both the corporate and legal worlds, Leslie has focused on legislative and healthcare issues and has represented a diverse range of clients, from biotechnology companies to media organizations.

Leslie said he will draw inspiration in his new role from the activism of the early Adventist Church which, despite its small size, frequently spoke publically on issues of temperance, freedom of conscience and human rights.

"Today, we still have so much to contribute to the public discourse -- on health, education, and issues of justice and conscience," Leslie said. "But how can we speak if we don't have a seat at the table?"

"The story of Adventism will be told -- but the question is: Will we choose to tell it ourselves? Or will we allow others to define our church and its agenda for us?" he said.

Leslie brings a broad range of experience and abilities to his new role, said John Graz, PARL director. "But more than this, he brings a strong desire to serve his church and advocate on its behalf," Graz said.

After studying economics and political science at Andrews University, Leslie went on to earn a law degree from the University of California at Berkeley. He began his legal career at the international law firm of Jones Day before moving to Mintz Levin, where his practice focused on healthcare, pharmaceutical and biotechnology clients. Most recently, he served as CEO of Phase V Pharmaceuticals.

When asked what prompted him to accept the position, Leslie said he believes the Adventist Church has a unique mission "to defend religious freedom, to be an advocate for justice, to be a voice for the voiceless."

Delbert Baker, a general vice president of the world church and advisor to PARL, called Leslie's appointment a "decisive step" toward strengthening the church's presence and impact in the public sphere.

"This is a key position," Baker said. "Mr. Leslie will have the opportunity to amplify the church's voice on issues that are central to our mission."

For more information about the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department of the Adventist Church, visit www.adventistliberty.org and www.irla.org.
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