Germany visit highlights leaders' perspective on denomination's goals

Specifics on mission, biblical unity

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Ansel Oliver/ANN

Open dialogue sessions with top Seventh-day Adventist officials at several locations throughout Germany offer perspective on leaders' goals for the church in that and other secular societies.

Top Adventist leadership toured Germany this month to support Adventist leaders in the secular country and better understand their challenges. Here, leaders pray during the Bavarian Conference Convocation in Augsburg July 2. [photos courtesy EUD]
During a visit earlier this month, Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson and other church officials supported local leaders in their push for outreach, offered clarification of denominational initiatives and highlighted the biblical base of the Adventist Church's beliefs during discussions on theological unity.

"Germany has a variety of theological issues that are being discussed from different ends of a spectrum," said Mark Finley, assistant to the president for evangelism, who accompanied Wilson in Europe. "I think the [president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church] accepting an invitation to visit was helpful."

Finley said common themes arose during different dialogues, including questions about the denomination's Revival and Reformation initiative.

Of the word "revival," Finley said it's "the renewal of spiritual grace in the soul. Revival is something that every generation needs to look forward to and experience. It's the moving of the Holy Spirit in the heart, life, mind and soul. Because our natures are fallen we constantly need spiritual renewal -- like Lamentations 3:23 says, 'His mercies are new every morning.'"

Finley defined "reformation" as "the reforming of the thought patterns to live life in the image of Christ, to think thoughts of Jesus. You have to have reformed thinking before you can have reformed behavior. ... What God is longing for is for people who are committed to Him. For people who have undivided allegiance in their hearts, the spirit of God will take care of their behavior."

Many question-and-answer periods with members, pastors, professors and students over the 10-day visit raised similar discussions held in other countries as members from a variety of perspectives offer support or seek further clarification about the goals of the denomination's officials.

Wilson and other leaders accepting international invitations for special events and ceremonies often include open dialogues in itineraries.

Several members and students also asked about the church's 28 Fundamental Beliefs and the necessity of accepting all of them to be a faithful Adventist.

"We pointed out that they are all biblical teachings and not just determined by an administrative committee at the [church's world headquarters]" Finley said. "The world church has come together and discussed and mutually agreed upon them."

"Also, if you drop one belief, it seriously impacts other beliefs," he said. "They are not a creedal statement, they are inter-related."

"Still, there may be different understandings of these beliefs -- not everyone may understand them the same, and there is room for growth in our individual lives."

Finley also pointed out that the church has added a 28th Fundamental Belief to the original 27 officially voted in 1980. "There is a process for doing so," he said.

The new belief, Growing in Christ, was added in 2005, and the General Conference Session last year began a process that would allow for the rewording of the church's belief on Creation. The move, which would specifically state Creation was a six-literal-day event, was met with opposition by some Session delegates from the Euro-Africa division, which includes Germany.
The Adventist Church’s mission unites its members worldwide, world church President Ted N. C. Wilson told an audience of some 3,500 during the convocation.

Still, Wilson said he wasn't worried about the unity of the church. "I know that the Holy Spirit is in charge," he told some 3,500 attendees of the Bavarian Conference Convocation at Schwaben Halle in Augsburg on July 2.

"The Adventist Church was raised up for a special purpose: to spread the message of salvation. ...This message unites us," he said.

Later responding to a question on why he quotes church co-founder Ellen White so frequently in sermons, Wilson responded, "You can write a wonderful sermon without using a quote from Ellen White. Her writings should never take the place of the Bible, but I find her statements very helpful, so I like to quote them."

Throughout his sermon at Augsburg and at visits at Darmstadt and Friedensau University, and Wilson repeatedly emphasized the denomination was a "prophetic movement," and that "The Lord [had] entrusted an enormous mission in the hands of His Remnant Church of declaring the Three Angels' Message," he said, referring to Revelation 14.

He and other leaders encouraged a renewed emphasis on mission and local outreach, much like the church pioneers there in the late 1800s. Today, there are about 35,000 members in the country, down from about 44,000 members in the 1950s.

"I think leaders have an obligation to create a wide smorgasbord of opportunities for involvement," said Mike Ryan, a general vice president of the Adventist Church.

He said mission has sometimes been too narrowly defined as preaching and giving Bible studies. "If you read Ellen White, the horizon of opportunities is much wider than those two methods. It's delivering food to someone who's sick or visiting people in prison, or getting involved in a community organization."

"People need to pick one," Ryan said. He said lay involvement in mission has been demonstrated to drive church growth.

Recognizing that traditional Adventist outreach of the Three Angel's Message Mission can be difficult in secular, post-modern society, Finley shared how that message might have been specifically designed for such a mindset.

"Post-modern young people want to be involved in something large, the Gospel affects the whole world -- what could be larger?" Finley said. "Giving glory to God in every aspect of your life -- physically, mentally, spiritually -- that's a holistic approach and the post-modern mind is looking for something holistic. We talked about the hour of God's judgment -- the post modern mind wants justice."

For Wilson, the visits in Germany were a chance to support leaders and better understand their challenges.
"I'd like to enlist the support of the world church in praying for our members in Germany, that they will have success with the daunting task of reaching people in a sophisticated, secular society," he said. "It's a very tough challenge."

--additional reporting by Corrado Cozzi

ADRA delivering food, water during East African drought

Response areas include Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda

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Christina Zaiback/ANN staff

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency is providing water, food and emergency supplies to thousands of the most vulnerable people affected by a drought in East Africa.

ADRA's Africa Regional Office, based in Nairobi, Kenya, is launching a multi-faceted intervention in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda to combat the high rates of malnutrition and protect the affected population from the threat of the spread of disease. An estimated 85,000 individuals will benefit directly from this response, ADRA officials said.

Low rainfall over the past year is causing the driest year across the region since 1951.

The World Food Programme reported that more than 10 million people in East Africa are in dire need of humanitarian aid as a result of diminishing food sources stemming from the recent rise in food prices and severe drought that have overwhelmed the region.

Of the nearly 10 million people requiring humanitarian assistance, more than half are children.

An ADRA spokeswoman said the agency's response is an increase of existing operations in the region.

"We're not new in these areas and we're aware of the needs and how to serve these populations," said Marie-Jo Guth, who serves on the Emergency Unit at ADRA International.

"Without water, it's a simple matter of survival for many of them right now," said Guth, who returned from Ethiopia last week.

In the Western Somali region of Ethiopia, ADRA will provide an emergency water trucking response, as well as livestock feed and veterinary assistance to protect the assets of the farming communities, who rely on livestock for their livelihood.

In Kenya, ADRA is providing food rations to 800 households, with a special ration reserved for pregnant and lactating mothers, and an additional ration for malnourished children.

Kenya is experiencing its highest rate of acute malnutrition since 2003, a significant cause being the 25 percent increase in food prices from January through April. ADRA is also drilling four boreholes for wells in various communities and making drinking water readily available with emergency water trucking.

In Somalia, ADRA is providing high-risk areas with clean drinking water through a water trucking response and
repairing several boreholes in strategic locations. ADRA is also constructing latrines to protect against the spread of diseases among internally displaced persons camps.

In Uganda, hundreds of thousands of people are reported to be in danger of severe starvation and living with a dangerously low supply of water. ADRA will provide food, water and emergency non-food items to 55,000 beneficiaries in northeastern region of Karamoja.

ADRA is a global non-governmental organization providing sustainable community development and disaster relief without regard to political or religious association, age, gender, race or ethnicity.

For more information, visit adra.org.

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**Adventist Filipino choir wins 'Choir of the World' title**

*Music an expression of 'thanksgiving' for Adventist University of the Philippines-based group*

15 Jul 2011, Wales, United Kingdom

Anthony Q. Esguerra/ANN staff

A Seventh-day Adventist choir based at Adventist University of the Philippines earned the "Choir of the World" title at the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod this year.

The university's Ambassadors Chorale Arts Society bested more than 4,000 performers from 50 countries to earn the prestigious title.

"This is God's victory," said director Ramon Molina Lijauco Jr. "We can't thank God enough for these opportunities," he said, adding that the choir's music is an expression of "thanksgiving and remembrance to the creator and source of music."

The small town of Llangollen has hosted Eisteddfod -- Welsh for "festival" -- since 1947. The event celebrates musical competition, performance and international peace and friendship. Well-known Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti marked his first professional performance in the United Kingdom at Eisteddfod in 1968.

The Ambassadors also won first prize in the categories of Mixed Choirs and Chamber Choirs, and received the Luciano Pavarotti Trophy.

They wouldn't have made it to the festival without prayers and the support of choir alumni, who helped raise the
necessary $43,000 to cover airfare, accommodation, visas and registration fees, Lijauco Jr. said.

The Ambassadors regularly perform worldwide and are counted among the notable choirs in the world, according to the World Ranking List of Musica Mundi. They have performed with the Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra and at last year's General Conference Session in Atlanta, Georgia. In 2006, the choir earned "World Choir Games Champion" status in the Gospel and Spiritual Category at the 4th World Choir Games in Xiamen, China.