Commentary: Amid memory of tragedy, let's renew our efforts to share hope

Church president says September 11 is reminder that world is 'battlefield'

6 Sep 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

Ted N. C. Wilson

On September 11, I was in a committee at the General Conference when I received word about the unfolding tragic events in New York City and Washington. I remember having a strange surreal feeling that this was not really happening and then a feeling of sympathy and deep sadness for those affected. We, of course, prayed for the thousands of people affected by this tragedy.

In the 1970s, I spent about seven years serving the church and the people of the metropolitan New York area. While living and working there, I learned to respect and care for the people of that great region and their strong
resiliency to challenging problems. When I heard about the attacks, I was reminded that life is very fragile and that it is important that we maintain a close connection with Christ on a daily basis as we share with others our hope for a better world when the great controversy between Christ and Satan is ended at Christ's soon second coming.

I am thankful for the manner in which the Seventh-day Adventist Church was able to assist and minister to so many individuals in New York and Washington D.C. during that difficult time. It is a blessing that this ministry continues in those two important cities and in many other places.

This week marks the 10-year anniversary of that tragedy. Many of us have been forever changed by the pain and suffering we witnessed that day, by the stories we heard and by our own personal loss.

As I look at our church 10 years later, I see a group of dedicated believers who are beacons of peace and justice to the world around them. I see a community of faith alleviating pain and suffering now, but pointing to an earth made new. Together, we long for the day when loss of human life will be a distant memory when Christ puts an end to death, tears and suffering. His second coming and then ultimately the new earth He will create will bring to an end the suffering and sin of this world as the book of Revelation tells us.

On September 11, 2001, we were reminded that our world is a battlefield. Forces of good and evil are at war all around us, and innocent lives are lost. But we know that the hurt will end. Our hope is in our loving God and Savior, who shares our pain and has the solution for the problems we face. What a privilege to read about His plan of salvation in the Bible, the authoritative Word of God.

Whatever the battle -- and don't be discouraged if it appears that evil seems to gain the advantage for the moment -- let us remember that at the end God "will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces" (Isaiah 25:8).

My hope is that we will continue to be a church that unites in showing God's love to friends and neighbors, in times of joy as well as adversity. It's my hope that amid the memory of tragedy, we are sharing a message of hope as we look forward to Christ's soon return.

Let us all be encouraged and comforted in believing what God said in Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Let's renew our personal and church efforts to share that hope with others in words and Christian service to God's glory.

--Ted N. C. Wilson is president of the Seventh-day Adventist world church.

In Dominican Republic, ADRA distributes food to families in wake of Hurricane Irene

Flooding, landslides have displaced thousands of families

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Christina Zaiback/ADRA International/ANN

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency is providing emergency food aid to displaced families in the Dominican Republic. The Caribbean island nation suffered widespread flooding and destruction in the
aftermath of Hurricane Irene last month.

ADRA distributed a two-week supply of food items common to the local diet to families in the province of San Cristobal, one of the most seriously affected areas of the country.

The emergency response specifically targeted households with children less than six years of age. Four days after Irene made landfall, ADRA delivered an initial 900 sacks of food to displaced families, many of whom are staying in makeshift shelters.

Reports indicate that hurricane-triggered floods and landslides have caused much of the damage in the Dominican Republic. Water levels in some areas remain dangerously high, threatening to flood, and in some cases, collapse main bridges. The overflowing Yubazo and Nigua rivers destroyed dozens of homes, displacing or leaving homeless thousands of families.

For updates, visit adra.org.

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**Inter-American seminary achieves full accreditation status**

*Institution offers graduate degrees free for pastors in region*

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Libna Stevens/IAD/ANN

The Association of Theological Schools granted the Inter-American Adventist Theological Seminary full accreditation status this summer, giving the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the region its own fully accredited institution offering graduate degrees in theology and religion.

The institution, operated with a distributed campus, offers degrees taught in English, Spanish and French to active Adventist ministers in 10 countries throughout the church in Inter-America. It offers a Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology, a Master of Arts in Religion, and a Doctor of Ministry.

Based at the division headquarters in Miami, IATS was launched in three countries in 1996 in partnership with United States-based Andrews University. School officials later expanded the number of sites and in 2003 began
seeking independent accreditation. Its 10 sites are now located in Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Venezuela.

ATS is a membership organization for the United States and Canada that accredits schools and approves postgraduate professional and academic degrees in the practice of ministry and research in theological disciplines. Its accreditation of IATS is effective as of June 2011 until 2018.

"This is such a milestone," said Jaime Castrejon, IATS president. "To have this prestigious accreditation is simply wonderful."

IATS also received accredited in 2000 from the Adventist Accrediting Association.

Church officials said the seminary was originally launched to enable ministers to study and work within their own territory and culture.

"This has been a long awaited accomplishment," said Israel Leito, president of the Inter-American Division. "It confirms to us that we have been on the right path now to offer all of our ministers the opportunity to get an advanced degree so that they can help our churches better, preach better sermons and minister to the educated member of today."

Ministers from across Inter-America are able to obtain a degree from IATS free of charge, thanks to a 0.5 percent share of tithe sent from each field territory as of this year. In previous years, the division covered all the costs, according to Filiberto Verduzco, treasurer for the church in Inter-America.

The investment has already produced 408 pastors, who graduated with masters and doctorate degrees from IATS while it remained in candidacy status awaiting accreditation from ATS, Verduzco said.

Castrejon, the IATS president, who holds a Ph.D. in Religious Education, says he has seen and felt the benefits of IATS throughout the territory.

"We have intelligent, thinking people sitting on the pews who are not content with mediocre sermons," Castrejon said. "Our members are educated, informed, so it is important that our ministers are trained to communicate at their level. I have seen a change in the spiritual adequacy of the members and I credit that to better professional sermons."

IATS originally launched by offering graduate degrees from Andrews at three sites: Montemorelos University in Mexico, Antillean Adventist University in Puerto Rico and Northern Caribbean University in Jamaica.

Two additional sites were later added: the University of Southern Caribbean in Trinidad and Colombia Adventist University in Colombia. Four additional sites were added in the 1990s.

But as ministers traveled to Andrews, the operation proved to be expensive for their employers in the short term, and costly in the long run as many graduates found jobs in the U.S.

"We were facing a brain drain in our territory with this situation, as pastors would get their visa and just stayed in the United States," Castrejon said.

While awaiting accreditation, IATS established its central site for academic operations at the Antillean Adventist University campus in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, in 2009.
Pursuing accreditation with ATS took longer than usual because of the need for the accrediting organization to understand the structure of a seminar like IATS, with multiple educational sites spread across many countries, Castrejon said.

For more information on the Inter-American Theological Seminary, visit www.interamerica.org.

Remembrance: Adventist musician Rittenhouse, 88, launched New England Youth Ensemble

Her mentorship program saw ensemble members perform at Carnegie Hall

31 Aug 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
ANN staff

Virginia-Gene Rittenhouse died yesterday at age 88. [photo courtesy Loma Linda University]

Virginia-Gene Rittenhouse, 88, a noted Adventist musician who founded and directed the New England Youth Ensemble, died at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center near her home in Sterling.

Rittenhouse, a conductor, pianist and violinist, founded the ensemble in 1969 with five students and directed it for decades. Her New England Youth Ensemble Carnegie Scholars Program mentored ensemble members, many of whom took the stage at Carnegie Hall, a renowned New York City concert venue.

The ensemble, which now numbers 45, regularly travels to perform worldwide. Since 1994, the group has served as church-run Washington Adventist University's resident orchestra, where it continues to earn critical acclaim.

Rittenhouse spent years teaching music in Seventh-day Adventist institutions such as Washington Adventist University and Atlantic Union College, where she taught violin and piano until the early 1950s.

Rittenhouse was born in Alberta, Canada on October 15, 1922, and raised in South Africa. At age 10, her debut performance of her own composition was aired over a South African national radio broadcast. At 13, she won a
music scholarship to study at the University of South Africa. She later received degrees from the University of Washington, Boston University and the Peabody Conservatory.

"The Washington Adventist University family is deeply saddened at the passing of a true pioneer in Seventh-day Adventist education," WAU President Weymouth Spence said in a statement yesterday. "She was a driving innovative force with the orchestra and the programs she began," he said.

Rittenhouse is survived by her husband of 61 years, Harvey, as well as numerous nieces and nephews.

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**Bus accident shadows Adventist student group's annual outreach event**

*Four dead among Nigerian Association of Adventist Students*

6 Sep 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

ANN staff

Seventh-day Adventist Church officials in East Nigeria are soliciting prayers for the families of four members of the Nigerian Association of Adventist Students, who died in a bus accident August 28.

The bus carrying students home from the group's annual public evangelism effort in southeast Nigeria was struck in a head-on collision by another bus near Calabar. The accident immediately killed three students, church officials said. Poor road conditions are blamed for the accident, which saw nine students rushed to an area hospital, where a fourth died shortly after, they said.

Seven of the remaining eight students have "improved considerably" since the accident and are now recovering at home, church officials said. The eighth student is still in the hospital with a broken leg, they said.

Shortly after the accident, Bassey Udoh, Adventist Church president for East Nigeria, visited the students in the hospital, as well as the families of the students who died.

Established in 1990, The Nigerian Association of Adventist Students includes Adventists studying at all of Nigeria's universities. The group provides a support system for Adventist students on secular campuses and coordinates campus outreach efforts. Members hold an annual public outreach event during summer vacation.

More than 280,000 Adventists live in Nigeria.

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