Seventh-day Adventist Church world headquarters  
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Church Chat: In Russia, Eastern Europe, Adventist leader focuses on training

Treasurer-turned-President Biaggi on improving pastoral, leadership basics

22 Sep 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States  
Ansel Oliver/ANN

The top leader of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Euro-Asia Division said at Spring Meeting in April that one of his chief priorities was training employees.
That's why earlier this month President Guillermo Biaggi and his team of leaders brought together all 1,300 of the division's pastors for a six-day training forum at Zaosky Adventist University in Russia's Tula Region. Leaders from the Adventist Church's world headquarters offered workshops on family life, biblical doctrines, and even basics such as delivering effective sermons, giving Bible studies and visiting members -- things that he says may seem common in some parts of the world.

The division hosted a similar event in 2006.

By population, Euro-Asia is the second smallest of the denomination's 13 world divisions. It has about 140,000 members, more than 40 percent of whom live in Ukraine. The division includes 12 countries of the former Soviet Union and covers 11 time zones.

Biaggi, 58, is originally from Argentina and previously served as the division's treasurer. He's a Certified Public Accountant, holds bachelor's degrees in business and theology, and has a master's degree in administration.

Following this month's conference, Biaggi corresponded by email with ANN. He discussed some challenges the Adventist Church faces and why reviewing the basics is necessary in his part of the world. Some excerpts have been edited for clarity:

**Adventist News Network:** What training did you feel was necessary to bring all 1,300 local pastors together?

**Guillermo Biaggi:** We need to have pastors connect with Jesus if they are going to be used by God. Not hustling to get home after work, but connecting with Jesus. It should be about mission and creating centers of influence, not getting caught up in movements that aren't biblical. We need them to remember the importance of their own family and to become strong speakers of God's word.

**ANN:** What kind of challenges is the church facing in your division?

**Biaggi:** There is a significant rate of apostasy, and there are several factors. One is that during the 1990s the Church experienced symptoms of a newly organized church structure. It enjoyed religious freedom and rapid growth, which made these factors more evident. Two, many pastors aren't well trained and aren't able to offer proper nurture and support. Then there is the lack of chapels, or you would say "temples" or "churches." Many of our congregations have to rent, and then a landlord will not rent to them anymore and they have to find a new
place to worship. It doesn't offer much security when that happens. And another thing, too, is that people are migratory. People want to go to the United States or Canada or Europe.

More than 1,300 ministers met for the six-day spiritual and training conference in the gymnasium at Zaosky Adventist Seminary in Russia earlier this month.

ANN: Why such a strong focus on training?

Biaggi: Many places you have people who worked at a church, then go on to conference and union -- as they gain more experience they are invited to serve in positions of higher responsibility. But in our division we have people without great experience filling some of the [leadership] positions. We're newer than most of the divisions. Only in 1990 did the General Conference set it up. We're not 100 years old like some divisions. But keep in mind, this kind of thing can happen anywhere, even in the Americas, where you have pastors not getting out visiting members or not giving Bible studies that are very effective. Everyone can use training.

ANN: Speaking of everyone, what are you doing to develop your own skills?

Biaggi: I am finishing with a group of leaders the Doctorate of Ministry program through Andrews University. We will graduate in May. Next summer, we are asking Andrews University's Dr. Skip Bell and his team to start in our division a new cohort for 28 ministry doctoral candidates. Besides professional degrees, I enjoy spiritual development through daily early morning time with the Lord. In prayer I repeat by memory about 35 to 40 texts to praise the Lord for His wonderful promises, love and grace.

ANN: How is it possible to conduct more of the needed training for managers and treasurers when the programs aren't offered locally?

Biaggi: It can be hard, but we are now working with [the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines] to implement a Master's of Business Administration and simultaneously a Master's of Science in Administration degree program in our division.

ANN: What other goals do you have for the division?

Biaggi: We want to reach the goal of 60,000 church members involved in the mission of the church. This would be approximately 50 percent of our church members. Also, we settled on a goal to distribute 5 million missionary books and 100 million published materials to be distributed [by 2015]. We will also develop 25,000 evangelistic campaigns, including the [division] yearly satellite program and many other regional and local church evangelistic programs.

ANN: What is the progress of your division's initiative of reclaiming former members prior to conducting a large-scale membership audit?
**Biaggi:** We are working on it. We are trying to convince pastors and local church leaders that they need to visit and call back home former church members, or members who are not coming to church or whom are discouraged, before they will finally make the audit. We are asking them to have seasons of prayer to claim God's promises, for the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of members who have lost their passion and love for the Lord, or are hurting and need healing. Also, to pray that we have a caring, loving and kind atmosphere at the local church, to receive them back with a big smile and hug of sincere love. Many are returning to church where they feel genuine love and care. We need to follow Christ's example -- searching for the lost sheep or the ones that went astray.

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**Adventists in North America make strides in curbing childhood obesity**

*Hundreds of Adventist churches and schools promote exercise, nutrition on Let's Move! Day*

26 Sep 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States  
Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN

Seventh-day Adventists at hundreds of churches, schools and hospitals in North America made strides yesterday in raising awareness of childhood obesity.

Church officials and members ran, walked and bicycled their way through *Let's Move! Day* on September 25. They played sports, planted community gardens, offered health screenings, cooked healthy food and logged steps toward a goal of one million collective miles of physical activity.

In Maryland, world church President Ted N. C. Wilson contributed to the goal by joining more than 130 other Adventists -- including multi-marathoner and world church Vice President Delbert Baker -- for a 5K on the grounds of the Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Sponsored by Vibrant Life, the race drew government officials to Hagerstown, including United States Representative Roscoe Bartlett and Joanne Grossi, regional director of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Grossi applauded Let's Move! Day activities to promote fitness and nutrition nationwide and called the Adventist Church "one of [the department's] best partners with our faith-based office."

The Adventist Church is among some 50 other faith and community organizations that [pledged last year](https://www.adventist.org/news/2011/letsmove) to support Let's Move!, a national initiative of U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama to fight the epidemic of childhood
obesity.

Reports indicate the nearly one in three children in America are overweight or obese, increasing their chances of getting asthma, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and other health risks.

Judy Palfrey, executive director of Obama's initiative, was among government officials in Hagerstown Sunday to help launch the run. Reading a letter from the first lady, Palfrey extended Obama's gratitude for the church's efforts in promoting community health, specifically in reversing the trend of childhood inactivity and poor nutrition.

"I truly believe our strength as a country and our ability to responsibly shape our future depends on solving this challenge, and people like you are vital to our success," Obama said in the letter.

Church health officials are hoping the day of activity extends into a lifetime of healthy choices for church and community members and their families in North America.

"Promoting small, simple changes in physical activity and food choices in our daily and family lives can make all the difference in preventing childhood obesity," said Katia Reinert, Health Ministries director for the church in North America.

The national Let's Move! Day is part of Adventists InStep for Life, an initiative of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America to promote exercise and better nutrition.

Dan Jackson, president of the church in North America, added miles toward the goal yesterday when he took a break from a meeting with church officers in Canada for a walk.

In Simi Valley, California, a partnership between the church's hospital, church and media center there is expected to help make fresh fruits and vegetables available to more children. Church and community volunteers gathered to plant a two-acre community garden on church grounds yesterday.

In a similar example of cooperation, an Adventist pastor in Virginia enlisted the support of local doctors' offices, hospitals, schools and community centers to promote awareness of childhood obesity.

"Many times as a church we are isolated, doing things only for our own members, whereas by making an effort to build relationships within the community, others will be more interested in getting to know us better and partnering with us in our sponsored events," Reinert said.

"Health initiatives like Let's Move! Day are one of our strengths as a church, allowing us to share the good news of an abundant life in Christ," she said.
Memories of missionary service still vivid for employees at Adventist Church headquarters

Many reminisce during building's first annual Mission Week

27 Sep 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
ANN staff

Missionaries pray for wisdom, good instincts and trust in God while in the field, but more than a few stationed far from home have also wished for "luxuries" such as cake mixes and air conditioning.

Employees at Seventh-day Adventist Church headquarters for the building's first annual Mission Week reminisced last week about their stints as missionaries. The emphasis week was a chance for employees -- many of whom now spend their days at desks far from the traditional mission field -- to reflect on the global scope of the church's mission work.

"The emphasis on mission is at the core of what the Seventh-day Adventist Church stands for," said world church President Ted N. C. Wilson, who welcomed employees to Mission Week on September 19.

Throughout the week, employees enjoyed special worship presentations from Adventist Mission, Hope Channel, Adventist World Radio and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency. They used the video chat service Skype to speak with student missionaries serving worldwide and raised money for missions with a silent auction and offerings.

Employees also left anecdotes, advice and life lessons on a memory wall in the building atrium.

The importance of adapting to a local culture while serving as a missionary was a common theme. Several employees said they learned not to equate "different" with "wrong" while serving as missionaries.

"Listen a lot to the local people around you and don't be too quick to jump in with 'how things should be done,'" one employee wrote.

"Expect things to be different," another offered.

Loneliness also seemed to influence many of the memories shared. Employees wrote about missing calls from home and time with family, especially during major holidays.

For some of the employees who shared memories, their time as missionaries was instrumental in shaping key life choices. For one, learning to communicate despite a language barrier led to a career in communication.

Examples of cultural misunderstandings topped the list of "most embarrassing moments" on the memory wall.

One employee, who served in Yap as a high school teacher, said he had to learn that a simple eyebrow raise meant Yes. "I asked one student three times if he owned a guitar. He 'answered' Yes three times," he wrote. Later, when he returned to the United States, the employee said he would confuse Americans by raising his own eyebrows rather than answering Yes.

Another employee, while serving in New Zealand, was flummoxed when a local woman asked if she would
"nurse" her baby. "Finally, I realized she was asking me to look after her. That was easy," the employee wrote.

A list of most missed items on the wall included air conditioning, Western-style bathrooms, books and cake mixes for birthday celebrations. But employees also wrote that missing a few everyday comforts meant they learned to depend on God. One wrote that she sensed God telling her exactly what to say while teaching Bible classes.

"Actually, I found out one doesn't need all that much [to serve as a missionary]. Your education, experience and relationships make you who you are," another employee wrote.