In Thailand, humanitarian arm of church responds to worst flooding in 50 years

ADRA distributes thousands of emergency care packages, cases of water

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ANN staff

ADRA Thailand teams load boats with emergency supplies for the Bang Pa Ku villages this week. In the capital, Bangkok, floodwaters on the outskirts are moving toward the city center. [photo courtesy ADRA]

The humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is responding to the worst flooding Thailand has seen in half a century. More than a third of the Southeast Asian country is currently flooded following months
of unexpectedly heavy monsoon rains.

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency in Thailand has already distributed nearly 2,000 emergency care packages to affected families. Each package includes food staples, drinking water and medicines. ADRA Thailand also provided an additional 1,500 cases of water to residents of remote districts, where families are stranded without electricity or supplies.

Water flowing south toward the Gulf of Thailand has already killed close to 400 people and displaced more than 100,000, the Associated Press said. Tens of thousands of Bangkok residents are fleeing the capital ahead of waist-high water, reports indicate.

Adventists in the region are reporting damage to homes and property, but no loss of life. The church's university, located two hours outside of Bangkok on higher elevation, remains safe from floodwaters, said Simon Siew, a church official for the Southeast Asia Union Mission.

Church leaders are concerned that Thailand Adventist Mission headquarters -- as well as many of the church's nearby schools, churches and a hospital -- are vulnerable to flooding in the coming days. The Thai government is expected to open area flood control dikes to relieve surging canals and rivers.

"There is an urgent need right now for the Thailand Adventist Mission to procure two boats to help with the flood relief efforts," Siew said in an email this week. "Please pray for our folks there as they struggle to go on with their lives in the face of this horrible natural disaster."

ADRA officials in Thailand are expected to reassess the situation in the coming weeks, providing additional assistance as necessary.

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**North American Adventists reaffirm commissioned ministers as conference, mission presidents**

*Following Annual Council actions, division also votes to join theology of ordination study*

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Adventist Review staff

In a carefully balanced pair of actions, Seventh-day Adventist leaders in North America voted October 31 to fully participate in the world church's recently launched study of the theology of ordination while also reaffirming the division's unique policy of allowing ordained or commissioned ministers to serve as presidents
of local conferences and missions.

The latter action, voted by nearly a 3 to 1 margin, broadens the opportunities for non-ordained leaders to be elected to the top position in any of the 58 conferences that make up the 1.1-million member church region.

The pair of votes came three weeks after the North American Division's request for a variance in the world church's model constitution to allow for broader leadership opportunities was turned down by the church's Executive Committee at its Annual Council. The model document states that conference leadership can only be held by an ordained pastor; the NAD policy, while valid within its territory, places the region at variance with the constitutional template.

NAD president Daniel Jackson put the day's discussion in the context of church unity. "The church is the apple of God's eye," Jackson said, referencing Scripture. "People around the world are interested in what happens here. But at moments of change there is some pain. No reformation occurs without pain. If there is some difference at the end of the day, how do we demonstrate that we are part of the body of Christ?"

Ron Clouzet, director of NAD's Evangelism Institute and a professor of Christian Ministry and Pastoral Theology at Andrews University, urged delegates to act on the basis of Bible teaching. Church "governance should follow theology," Clouzet said. "I firmly believe in the ordination of women. Once we have settled the issue of theology, [the rest] will be chicken feed."

Jackson also sketched several options available to the church leaders and delegates gathered in the world church headquarters auditorium. The Executive Committee's rejection could simply be noted; the NAD's policy, voted in 2010, could be discussed and rescinded; or delegates could reaffirm the policy they voted one year earlier.

More than two-dozen speeches from the floor followed in the next two hours, most urging the body to reaffirm the 2010 action to broaden leadership opportunities by allowing "commissioned" ministers who had not been ordained to hold top leadership positions in conferences. Though Jackson had clarified that the topic of the ordination of women to ministry was not the point of the discussion, numerous speakers spoke in favor of ordaining women, while others asked how the proposed NAD action would be viewed by leaders and members in other world territories.

Ron Clouzet, director of NAD's Evangelism Institute and a professor of Christian Ministry and Pastoral Theology at Andrews University, urged delegates to act on the basis of Bible teaching. Church "governance should follow theology," Clouzet said. "I firmly believe in the ordination of women. Once we have settled the issue of theology, [the rest] will be chicken feed."

Michigan Conference president Jay Gallimore said he concurred with Clouzet's main point, but also urged caution: "Unless we can find, unless we can produce the Biblical understanding to move on this, collectively and together, we're never going to convince either the world church or our own churches," he told delegates. "We're a biblical church, we're a Bible church ... I hope all of us have an open mind to say 'Lord, teach me what is right.'"
"We need this to carry the work forward and we wish to send the message that women are needed," said Gina Brown, dean, of the School of Health Professions, Science and Wellness at Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Maryland. "Let God's work be done."

"We are structured to allow for differences," urged Arnold Trujillo, vice president of the Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, one of the largest of the nine regional units of the North American Division. "We were not designed to be a monolithic organization, but one where dynamic tension is allowed to exist. We need freedom to be different, without compromising our mission. We sing in harmony, not in unison."

Just before noon, a motion to reaffirm the 2010 action was put to a secret ballot vote and passed by a margin of 162-61.

Speakers on both sides of the discussion praised Jackson's sensitive handling of the difficult issue as well as the prayerful and civil way the discussion unfolded.

The delegates also discussed and unanimously voted the request by the October Annual Council that each division participate in a multi-year process to study the theology of ordination by establishing a Biblical Research Committee in each territory for that purpose.

According to the protocol voted by the world church's Executive Committee, reports from each region will be integrated into a comprehensive report to the 2014 Annual Council meeting. That gathering will then determine whether to recommend any changes to the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas -- the 20th anniversary of the historic debate and vote on women's ordination held at the 1995 Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

In Inter-America, ministers connect in first region-wide virtual council

*Online meeting draws 3,000 pastors; Wilson urges urban mission*

1 Nov 2011, Miami, Florida, United States
Libna Stevens/IAD

Seventh-day Adventist pastors from Inter-America met online with top church leadership last week to discuss ways of motivating church members to pray and study the Bible.
More than 300 pastors from South Mexico participate in Inter-America's first region-wide virtual ministerial council from Linda Vista Adventist University in Chiapas. They were among nearly 3,000 pastors who met online with division leadership in Miami, Florida on October 26. [photos: Libna Stevens]

This first-ever virtual ministerial council, held October 26 from Inter-America Division headquarters, was part of the church's call for region-wide spiritual revival, which has gathered momentum since the beginning of the year.

For two hours, some 3,000 district pastors and chaplains gathered in their respective regional conference or mission offices to hear top church leaders in Miami speak on spiritual revival and reformation, division-wide initiatives and new resources. Participants also engaged in a question and answer session.

"We are so busy with leading churches, visiting members, baptizing souls, that it is good that we come away for a few hours to chat with you, learn what concerns you and encourage you to continue being effective super pastors," said Israel Leito, president of the church in Inter-America.

Adventist World Church President Ted N. C. Wilson encouraged ministers and leaders via a pre-recorded video message to deepen their study of Scripture.

"God's Word is so crucial to our future as a prophetic people," Wilson said. "Please don't ever discount or depreciate the Bible and its message as only symbolic or allegorical. God's Word and its accounts of history, including miracles, are true and real and demonstrate God's authority."

During his 10-minute message, Wilson asked leaders: "Are we willing to climb out of our areas of comfort ... to let God do what is necessary to prepare each of us for a true revival personally and corporately for a change or reformation through our lives as we become more like Jesus and for the reception of the latter rain?"

Wilson also reiterated his call for personal and public evangelism to the world's large urban centers. During the virtual council, local pastors heard the church's strategy for Revival and Reformation.

Other division-wide initiatives were announced, including a continuing education program for ministers, member retention programs and Vision One Million, a discipleship training program designed to equip one million church members to share the gospel in their communities by next year.
Hector Sanchez, ministerial secretary for Inter-America, encouraged pastors to continue pursuing a spiritual revival within themselves in order to effectively minister to their congregations.

"Let's dedicate two hours a day meditating on the Word of God," Sanchez said. "In the midst of our many tasks, commit to studying the Bible. We want to invest in you, we love you from the bottom of our hearts, we believe in you and want to train you further and provide the tools you need to continue with the mission."

As the program turned to its forum segment, Leito encouraged pastors to minister to their families and focus on spending time with their families.

During the program, Leito encouraged ministers to watch out for each other and seek counsel when they are struggling with issues or challenging situations.

"Let's be pastors to our pastors," Leito said.