Seaside, New Jersey is among coastal areas of the U.S. that sustained widespread flooding in the wake of Hurricane Sandy. [photo: Tim Larsen/Office of New Jersey Governor Chris Christie]

Adventist Community Services volunteers distribute emergency supplies in New York City borough of Queens. [photo courtesy Greater New York Conference Communication department]

Adventist Church president offers condolences in aftermath of Hurricane Sandy

Special offering will raise funds for hardest-hit areas of New York

Adventist World Radio increasing language offerings in Africa, Asia

Board also approves 20 percent budget increase for broadcasting hours

Adventist Church president offers condolences in aftermath of Hurricane Sandy

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Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
ANN staff, with reporting by Nigel Coke, George Johnson, Mark A. Kellner and Libna Stevens

Seventh-day Adventist world church President Ted N. C. Wilson this week offered a message of condolence to residents of the Northeastern United States and the Caribbean in the wake of Hurricane Sandy.

"Please accept our sympathy and sadness for the devastation that has taken place, especially in New Jersey, the metropolitan New York area and the Caribbean," Wilson said. "We will continue to pray for members, churches, church organizations and the wider community that has been struck by tragedy."

No Adventist lives have been reported lost as yet, but 152 church members and one pastor in Cuba lost their homes, according to the church’s Inter-American Division. Fifteen Cuban churches were a “total loss,” IAD said, and another 93 churches suffered partial damage. An additional 352 Cuban Adventists reported some damage to their homes from the storm.

Hurricane Sandy was the largest storm by area to hit the U.S. in generations, resulting in widespread flooding, power outages and property damage. The so-called “superstorm” -- a hurricane-winter storm hybrid -- crippled the
Members of the Boston Adventist Church in Northeastern Jamaica’s Portland Parish hold Sabbath worship services under a Gynep tree after Hurricane Sandy destroyed their church building. [photo: Daniela Daniels]

subway system in New York City and prompted the New York Stock Exchange to close for two consecutive days because of weather for the first time in more than a century.

The death toll from Sandy rose to at least 82 across eight states today, with the largest number of fatalities occurring in New York, according to media reports. New York Harbor sustained a record 14-foot storm surge during the hurricane.

Residents of the affected areas, among them Adventists, are reeling in the aftermath. It is estimated that at least 42 Adventist churches, with congregations totaling 4,500 members, are located in the most affected areas, a press release from the church’s North American Division Communication department said. Only eight of the church’s pastors had been contacted at the time of release.

Don King, president of the church’s Atlantic Union Conference, said at least three New York City-area congregations were hit hard by the storm. Among those sustaining damage, King said, are the Macedonia Seventh-day Adventist Church in Wyandanch on Long Island, and the Solid Rock Seventh-day Adventist Church in the New York City borough of Queens.

“The pews were floating,” King said of the Solid Rock church, where flood waters encroached from the Atlantic Ocean and Rockaway Beach, about a quarter of a mile away from the church.

Extensive power outages continue to complicate communication to church offices in the region, especially on Long Island, where the church’s Greater New York Conference is headquartered on the North Shore.

So far, five Adventist churches have reported that families in their congregations were affected by Sandy. Two Adventist churches in the Bronx are currently serving as shelters.

The Greater New York Conference’s Adventist Community Services (ACS) is planning to raise $100,000 for 100 Adventist families in the region that have experienced total or partial flooding damage, the press release said. Already, conference representatives have visited some of the 20 families whose homes were flooded.

“We are working with [conference] administration to collect a special offering for the following two Sabbaths in all the Greater New York Conference churches,” said Reuben Merino, ACS director for the conference.

Adventists in hard-hit New Jersey are also planning relief efforts. The New Jersey Conference’s ACS is “ready to help out wherever necessary,” said Claudia Ramirez, ACS disaster response coordinator for the region. The agency is currently collecting personal care kits, clothing and canned food items to distribute.

The church’s humanitarian organization, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, is coordinating with ACS to provide electric generators, hot meals, temporary shelter and emergency kits to affected residents along the East Coast.
"It's important for our church to be there to help people who have been affected by widespread devastation," said Dan Jackson, president of the church’s North American Division. "We could be the Jesus that some of these people will only see and experience through these acts of kindness."

World church headquarters, near Washington, D.C. closed for two days this week while the region weathered Sandy. Wilson was on one of the last flights to Moscow before area airports were put on lockdown. Now in the church’s Euro-Asia Division for Year-End Meetings there, Wilson expressed solidarity with those involved in rescue and cleanup.

"We are praying for you and your colleagues as you assist our church members in this difficult situation," he said. "May God guide and encourage you and our members as you witness for Him during the challenging aftermath of the hurricane."

Before slamming the U.S. Mid-Atlantic region, Sandy ravaged the Caribbean, killing more than 70 people and destroying homes and businesses. Much of the region remains without electricity and some roads are still impassable, due to downed trees and utility poles.

In the Bahamas, electricity was out for days, while many agricultural areas of the Dominican Republic were flooded, collapsing local bridges. Before the storm, the Dominican Republic’s government asked the local ADRA office to help warn people about Dengue fever and how to prevent it, the church's Inter American Division said. ADRA is also distributing water, food and blankets to families in the Dominican Republic, where more than 1,200 homes were completely submerged in mud, a press release from the agency said.

Adventists in northeast Jamaica reported that up to 75 percent of Adventist Church property in the island nation incurred damage, leading the Boston Adventist Church in Portland Parish to hold Sabbath worship services under a Gynep tree.

Despite setbacks in northeast Jamaica, church members there are leading a humanitarian relief effort. ADRA has distributed blankets and continues to monitor the situation, assessing damange to homes and assisting in rehabilitation efforts, the agency said.

"Though we have been hit hard, the church is organizing assistance to persons in need of food, clothing and repairs to roofs through the community services department, service groups and ADRA in Jamaica," said Damion Clarke, who pastors the Boston Adventist Church.

Adventist World Radio increasing language offerings in Africa, Asia

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ANN staff

Adventist World Radio next year will increase the frequency or length of several programs in Asia and Africa, bringing the amount of content back to previous levels before cost-cutting measures several years ago.

At a recent meeting of AWR’s board of directors, leaders approved a nearly $600,000, or 20 percent, increase in airtime budget to fund local language programming. Last year’s budget for airtime was slightly less than $3.3 million.
That move will also increase broadcast hours by about 20 percent next year, to more than 32,000 hours, up from 27,000 hours.

The action specifically increases programming for 21 languages that AWR regional directors have identified as underserved. Those languages include Amharic, Somali, Panjabi, and Urdu.

“We are very grateful to God that we are able to expand this ministry wider and wider so that more people can hear the gospel in these languages,” said AWR President Dowell Chow. “We are able to make this welcome change thanks to several years of solid financial stability.”

This latest step is part of a wider expansion of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s broadcasting in the Eastern hemisphere. In July, Hope Channel, the church’s official television network, announced investment for more programming in Africa, especially in local languages.

AWR is also planning programming and developing infrastructure for broadcasts reaching Myanmar, Bhutan and Pakistan. Officials are also expanding the capabilities of the network’s operations in Guam. There, several huge antennas broadcast programming in more than 30 languages into Asia.

The number of subscribers to AWR podcasts is also on the uptick. As of August this year, the ministry reported close to 2 million podcast subscriptions. From January to November of last year, there were more than 200 million total podcast downloads.

Adventist World Radio is the official global radio ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Its mission is to broadcast the Adventist hope in Christ to the unreached people groups of the world in their own languages. AWR’s programs can be heard in nearly 100 languages through AM/FM and shortwave radio, on demand, and podcasts at awr.org.

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