Wilson is first sitting Adventist Church president to visit Belarus
Church dedication, talks with government leaders mark official tour

Adventist Church in North America votes $500,000 for emergency hurricane relief
Executive Committee also receives analysis of membership; education goals

In Inter-America, evangelism efforts for 2013 are lay-member focused
Year of Laity initiatives launched in ceremony region-wide via Internet

Wilson is first sitting Adventist Church president to visit Belarus
In what marked the first visit to Belarus by a sitting Seventh-day Adventist world church president, Pastor Ted N. C. Wilson last week toured church infrastructure and met with government officials in the Eastern European country.

The Adventist Church in Belarus was formally organized in 1990, shortly after the dissolution of the former Soviet Union. The Russian Orthodox Church is still the country’s majority religion, but Adventism is growing, with more than 70 congregations established since the early-90s and a current membership of more than 5,000.

Wilson was on hand for the dedication of a new church center in Minsk built by Adventist pastors from Belarus. Complete with a sanctuary, fellowship hall, apartments for church workers and studio space for the newly established Hope Channel Belarus, the center is expected to meet the infrastructure needs of the region’s growing Adventist community.

Attending the dedication ceremony was a “ privilege,” Wilson said, acknowledging the “intense energy” demonstrated during the construction process, which took 45 working days to complete.

“God has a great plan for Belarus. The wonderful things that have been accomplished are only the beginning of what God will do,” Wilson said.

The world church leader first visited Belarus in the mid-90s while serving as president for the Adventist Church’s Euro-Asia Division, which oversees church operations in Russia and nearby countries.

While in Belarus this time, Wilson took the opportunity to meet with government officials, including Leonid Gulyako, commissioner of Religious and Ethnic Affairs for Belarus, who said the Adventist Church’s message supports the country’s priorities.

“We acknowledge the Adventists’ deep faith and honest expression of [that] faith, your support of healthy family relationships and your work against drugs,” Gulyako said.

Wilson also met with the deputy mayor of Minsk to reaffirm a working relationship between the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Minsk municipality.
Adventist Church in North America votes $500,000 for emergency hurricane relief

North American Division executive secretary Pastor G. Alexander Bryant looks on as NAD president Pastor Dan Jackson announces the vote to donate $500,000 to assist victims of Hurricane Sandy in the northeastern portion of the U.S. The action was taken Sunday, November 4, during NAD Year-End Meeting in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States. [photos by Dan Weber/NAD]

Daniel Honoré, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Northeastern region, discusses the needs of the people affected by Hurricane Sandy, and possible ways the church can respond.
Nov. 07, 2012
Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
Reporting by Mark Kellner, Adventist Review

Seventh-day Adventist leaders in the North American Division (NAD) voted a $500,000 emergency relief grant for victims of Hurricane Sandy, which struck the Northeastern United States last month. A special collection is to be taken on November 10 in congregations across the division and might raise an additional $500,000 or more.

The action was taken on November 4, as more than 300 delegates and leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church met in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States, for the NAD’s Year-End Meeting.

NAD President Dan Jackson told delegates that the division was “taking money from our reserves” to finance the effort. He added, “I believe that shows the heart that we are trying to express. We are fast-tracking this whole thing.”

The move came in response to emotional pleas for assistance from church leaders in the affected region: “We appeal to you to do everything you can to relieve suffering,” Daniel Honoré, president of the church’s Northeastern Conference, based on Long Island, told delegates.

Having been without electricity or heat for nearly a week before arriving in Maryland for the session, Honoré said that reaching out to others in the area is an optimal preparation for NY13, the Adventist outreach planned for metro New York next year.

“I believe there are people who would never come to our meetings because we sent them a brochure in the mail,” Honoré said, “but now we have an opportunity to reach the masses in New York through our kindness and our love. If we truly believe NY13 can be a major evangelistic success, [let’s] meet the people’s needs, and let’s make friends with this metropolitan area, and when we stand to preach the gospel, thousands will come.”

Also at the Year-End Meeting, Jackson, in a Sabbath sermon, called for churches to be more “inclusive.”

The time has come for God’s people to become very serious” about fellowship, Jackson said.

Jackson said, “In reality, genuine Christian fellowship is the result of connection with God. You and I were, in fact, brought into existence for fellowship with God. Ultimately, the experience we have with Him is what we offer to one another regardless of lifestyle, theology, circumstances, or race, et cetera.”

He added, “One of the issues here is that genuine fellowship is often lacking in our churches and conferences ... it is not seen and experienced in the way we treat those who disagree or in the way we treat one another in the home, in the school, in the church and in the work place – and it is killing
us. It turns people off."

Later in the week, Jackson reviewed a year’s worth of visits he had made, trips which he said reflected the vibrancy and diversity of the division. At the same time, the “mother division” of the Seventh-day Adventist world church is facing challenges, he said, and Jackson enumerated several goals for the area, including redoubling efforts to raise enrollment at Adventist schools.

NAD Vice President for Education Larry Blackmer said the division would seek to launch an integrated educational network, online, offering training to Adventist young people, homeschooled and in non-Adventist schools, as well as college level courses and continuing education for pastors, church workers and volunteers.

Blackmer said the division was ready to launch "a platform of 'Education for Everyone.' We are ready to begin delivering the ability to connect this church as never before."

Another NAD vice president, R. Ernest Castillo, reported on the church’s outreach to multi-lingual ministry groups, noting that nearly 352,000 of the division’s 1.15 million Seventh-day Adventists are from those communities. He added that about 55 percent of baptisms in 2011 came from these ministry groups.

Committee members also received an update on membership records. Executive Secretary G. Alexander Bryant told delegates that every day, on average, 108 people join the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America.

Bryant said there are 1,154,428 Seventh-day Adventists worshipping in 5,413 churches and 773 companies across NAD as of June 30.

“Since 2000, our division has continued an upward climb in membership,” Bryant told delegates. "When we put emphasis on evangelism, we see an increase in [our] growth rate."

Net membership growth in North America for the year ending June 30 was 1.35-percent, he said, down modestly – .3 percent – from the year before.

Adding to the complicated membership picture are the numbers of lost and deceased members compared with those joining the church. In the six-year period of 2006 through the end of 2011, a total of 240,891 joined the denomination in North America. However, a total of 130,929 members either died, were missing from church activities or dropped out. So for the six-year period, Bryant said, the net membership gain was 109,962 members.

Bryant said the North American Division’s demographics show that while Adventists here are living longer, young adults are often “missing in action” from church activities. The NAD has “a lower percentage of young adult [members] than other divisions," he said. While 6 percent of the population in the U.S. and Canada is between the ages of 25 and 34, he reported, only 3 percent of Adventist members fall into that category.

Another disparity – which Bryant said should change – is that while Seventh-day Adventist membership in North America is 60 percent female, only 14 of 214 executive-level positions in conferences and unions are filled by women.
In Inter-America, evangelism efforts for 2013 are lay-member focused

Top Seventh-day Adventist leaders in Inter-America participate the launch of the church’s 2013 Year of the Laity initiatives and activities during a live webcast in the Comayaguela Adventist Church in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, on October 27. The online event connected thousands of local church boards across the territory during the two-hour program. [photos by Libna Stevens]

Pastor Israel Leito, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Inter-America, addresses top executive church leaders and online viewers on 2013 Year of the Laity initiatives.
Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders in the Inter-American Division have designated next year’s evangelism efforts as lay-member focused, with officials coordinating the division-wide push with church boards and individual members.

Division leaders last month launched the “Year of the Laity” initiative during a live online program at the Comayaguela Adventist Church in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

Dozens of top leaders participated in the event, while tens of thousands of church board members across the territory watched through some 8,000 connections via the Internet.

“The church has been enriched by the hard work of our ministers and laypersons, and other active members in spreading the gospel in Inter-America, and this is why we have designated 2013 as the Year of the Laity to let work of the church be felt more throughout the community,” said Israel Leito, president of the church in Inter-America.

The two-hour event opened the division’s Year-End Meeting, a bi-annual meeting of the division’s Executive Committee.

Scheduled events and activities such as spiritual celebrations, special baptisms and community impact events are planned as the church and its ministries unite for next year’s evangelism efforts, said Melchor Ferreyra, Personal Ministries director for the church in Inter-America.

“We are excited to gain full participation from our laity, which includes professionals, men, women, young people and children in the preaching of the gospel,” Ferreyra said.

Already, nearly 1 million laypeople have been specially trained during the Vision One Mission initiative, which seeks to train 1 million disciples in any of five areas: preaching, Bible instruction, witnessing, small group leadership and global mission pioneering.

Ana Aceituno Ortiz of the Tepeyac Adventist Church in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, was among the 30 church board members gathered at the live event. Her church board voted to adopt the initiatives presented during the program.

“This program was such an inspiration because it outlined how all the ministries can work together to have a greater impact in our community,” said Ortiz, who serves as Children’s Ministries director at her church.

Already, Ortiz has organized activities for the 65 children in her church, including music festivals, health brigades, and ministry in local orphanages and nursing homes.
“Next year will inspire us to do more and reach more,” she said.

For Ricardo Barrantes, a church elder and Stewardship Ministries director at the 250-member Kennedy Adventist Church in Tegucigalpa, watching and listening to next year’s scheduled events was exciting.

“These are wonderful plans and activities which means we have to work harder and faster to continue serving God and preparing others to meet Jesus,” said Barrantes.

On stage, Ignacio Navarro, president for the church in Chiapas, Mexico, stood next to fellow top administrators from Inter-America’s church regions in commitment to joining efforts planned for the Year of the Laity. So far, nearly 67,000 laypersons have been trained for outreach in the southern part of Mexico, he said.

“This online program helped bring about renewed efforts for the lay forces in our territory,” Navarro said. The denomination there is planning to hold a massive baptismal ceremony in a 35,000-seat stadium in February as a result of the work of the laity there.

Edgar Redondo, president of the church in North Colombia, said more than 50,000 laypeople have been trained to witness, preach and distribute literature.

“These initiatives will only enrich the church, help individual church members to discover their gifts and talents better and focus on sharing God’s love and grace,” Redondo said.

He said church members in North Colombia have already been active in holding health expos and distributing 200,000 copies of “The Great Controversy,” a book written by church pioneer Ellen G. White, to citizens and government officials.

“Without the laity, the church has no reason for being, so we are certain that God will continue blessing,” said Leito, the division president.

The Inter-American Division reports a membership of roughly 3.5 million. The region includes the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America and the five northernmost countries in South America.

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