In North America, a renewed focus on addiction recovery
‘Health Sabbath’ emphasis part of effort to raise awareness of Adventist Recovery Ministries

Wilson affirms Indonesia president’s religious freedom commitment
Helps inaugurate new hospital facility

Remembrance: Venden’s preaching, books focused on righteousness by faith
Adventist pastor highlighted Jesus, doctrine of salvation through grace

In North America, a renewed focus on addiction recovery
That’s a message Adventist health professionals are promoting as a new phase of the church’s addiction recovery ministry finds traction in North America.

Through resources and training, Adventist Recovery Ministries provides a pathway toward healing and freedom from harmful behaviors, church health leaders say.

“We really want to support everyone who wants to move beyond that feeling of being trapped in an unhealthy behavior, to find freedom in Christ to make a different choice,” says Katia Reinert, Health Ministries director for the church’s North American Division.

Adventist Recovery Ministries offers a spiritual take on the traditional twelve-step program used by Alcoholics Anonymous. The revised program matches each step with Bible verses and themes from the writings of church co-founder Ellen White that illustrate Christian principles such as surrender, confession and reconciliation. It also defines Jesus as the “highest power,” replacing the “higher power” recognized by traditional twelve-step programs as a source of strength.

The model dates back to the mid-1980s, when Adventist attorney Hal Gates, himself a recovered alcoholic, felt called to develop a recovery ministry anchored in Christ’s healing power. Shortly afterward, so-called “Regenerations” support groups sprung up across North America and later worldwide.

While the Adventist Church was supportive of Gates’ ministry, it wasn’t until two years ago that the church in North America voted to change its name and make Adventist Recovery Ministries a Health Ministries initiative.

Now, with new resources available, church health leaders are offering training programs at the annual Health Ministries Health Summit and locally. A typical training seminar runs during a weekend and equips healthcare leaders, clergy and lay people to oversee a support group in their church or community, Reinert says.

“Traditionally facilitators have themselves gone through the recovery process, but we want everybody to be equipped to facilitate a recovery group,” she says.

Knowledge and understanding of addiction is a crucial step in removing the stigma often associated with recovery, Reinert says.

“We want to show that addiction is common, like diabetes—something a lot of people deal with,” she says. “People don’t want to say, ‘I’m an addict,’ but all of us have some form of compulsive behavior. It’s not just about alcohol or tobacco or gambling. It’s about many other kinds of behaviors that can be unhealthy, from the food we eat to the entertainment we choose.”

Ahead of Health Sabbath, celebrated on February 16 in churches across North America, Reinert and
other health leaders are encouraging local churches to offer a recovery-themed worship service. Resources—available for download online—including sample sermons, presentations, a children's story and a trailer of “Unhooked,” a new television series produced by Hope Channel about addiction prevention and recovery.

As Adventist health leaders continue to raise awareness of addiction recovery, Reinert says she’s optimistic that the program will expand outside of North America. Already, the ministry translates its “Journey to Life” newsletter into Spanish, Portuguese, French and Russian. Plans are in place to translate training resources as well.

“Addictions are sadly one of the 'best kept secrets' of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” says Peter Landless, Health Ministries associate director for the Adventist world church.

“Adventist Recovery Ministries is an intervention I pray that the world church will embrace, making our churches community health centers where people in recovery may find a haven of safety and experience the love and grace of Jesus.”

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**Wilson affirms Indonesia president’s religious freedom commitment**

Feb. 19, 2013  
Jakarta, Indonesia  
Bruce Sumendap, Samuel Simorangkir and ANN Staff

In a meeting with Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Seventh-day Adventist Church president Pastor Ted N. C. Wilson affirmed the nation’s goal of upholding religious freedom in the Southeast Asian country.

“We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute in this country, and I am grateful to the president for the religious freedom granted to groups in Indonesia,” Wilson said to a press corps after a meeting with the president on February 12.

Wilson told reporters that he was impressed with Indonesia’s rising economic growth, but that President Yudhoyono “is also aware of the need to do more things” for his people. “The church is committed to helping in any way possible, socially, mentally, physically, and, of course, spiritually,” Wilson said.

The two leaders met at Halim Perdanakusuma Air Base near Jakarta.

Wilson visited Indonesia last week at the request of local church officials to celebrate the long history
of the Adventist Church’s service in the country. The Adventist Church operates several healthcare organizations and schools in Indonesia. More than 100,000 patients are served annually through four hospitals, and approximately 40,000 students are enrolled in 372 schools.

There are roughly 250,000 Adventist Church members in Indonesia, where the majority population is Muslim.

During his visit, Wilson helped inaugurate a new wing of the Manado Adventist Hospital on February 15. The new three-story facility provides an additional 55 beds in the hospital, which first opened in 2008.

At the ribbon-cutting ceremony, the governor of the North Sulawesi Province, Sinyo Harry Sarundayang, said the additional facility was a response to primary health development goals of increasing longevity, reducing the infant mortality rate and reducing the prevalence of malnutrition.

“Optimizing private hospitals is our priority,” Sarundayang said. "Manado Adventist Hospital is a representation of strengthening community health resources and becomes the right answer to continuous development of welfare," he said.

The provincial government pledged US$400,000 for radio-diagnostic equipment and a new ambulance unit.

The hospital has grown to employ 265 people, up from 25 employees when it opened five years ago.

On February 13, Wilson visited Bandung Adventist Hospital, which is located about 90 miles southeast of Jakarta, and considered one of the top hospitals in West Java. Founded in 1950, it now has 230 beds and employs 700 people. A new $7 million building facility was inaugurated last year.

Wilson also visited Indonesian Adventist University in Bandung, which was first opened in 1929. He helped to dedicate ground for the construction of a new science center, and later addressed an assembly in the university’s Alumni Center.

“You are an important part of the worldwide Adventist education process,” Wilson told a group of 2,000 faculty, staff and students. “You may seek knowledge of science and philosophy and all other bodies of knowledge, but remember that the foundation of all true knowledge is the knowledge of God,” he said.

The Adventist Church also operates hospitals in Bandar Lampung and Medan.

Wilson was joined on the trip by his wife, Nancy; Alberto Gulfan, president of the Adventist Church’s Southern Asia-Pacific Division; Joseph Peranginangin, president of the West Indonesia Union; Noldy Sakul, president of the East Indonesia Union; and Retired Army Lieutenant General T. B. Silalahi, who is a supporter of the Adventist Church.

Remembrance: Venden’s preaching, books focused on righteousness by faith
Following a period of spiritual struggle, Morris Venden went on to bring a renewed perspective of Jesus and salvation through faith to the Seventh-day Adventist Church beginning in the 1970s.

Venden, who died February 10 at age 80, was a well-known college pastor, guest speaker and author of more than 40 books. He was especially well received among students, young pastors and professionals who heard his sermons on assurances of salvation.

“He undoubtedly did more to teach righteousness by faith than anyone else in the denomination during his time. He preached it, he taught it, and he wrote it,” said Floyd Bresee, who served as secretary of the denomination’s Ministerial Association from 1986 to 1992.

“I think from the beginning we [Adventists] have had the right theology of grace. [Church co-founder] Ellen White spoke of that, but we are people of the law and some had what I would call unintentional legalism. Morrie pulled us further from that,” Bresee said.

Venden pastored several college and university churches, including La Sierra University and Pacific Union College in California, Union College in Nebraska, and Southwestern University in Texas. He also pastored the Azure Hills Adventist Church in Southern California before retiring in 1998.

At Azure Hills, he held three services each Sabbath that were filled to capacity. His son, Lee, recalled his father’s advice as he became a pastor himself: “The world and the Seventh-day Adventist Church are starving for more of Jesus. … Any pastor who will make Jesus the one string on his violin will be in demand.”

Venden later served as associate speaker at the Voice of Prophecy ministry, based in California. He suffered from frontotemporal dementia the final decade of his life.

Throughout his ministry, Venden punctuated his sermons with wit, delivering dry humor with a poker face. Though a strong presence in the pulpit, he was timid by nature, often shying away from greeting people before and after sermons at churches and campmeetings.

One of his most prominent books was “95 Theses on Righteousness by Faith,” published in 1987 by Pacific Press. His personal favorite was “From Exodus to Advent,” published by Southern Publishing Association, in which he compared – in his view – similar mistakes and lessons in both the biblical account of Exodus and the Seventh-day Advent movement.

“I think he was eager for his own subculture to learn from those lessons so we didn’t have to repeat the mistakes,” his son said.
Venden published 42 books through four publishers, his son said. They sold well in the United States and were also distributed internationally.

“His books were like an oasis of fresh spirituality. They uplifted Christ, not just keeping the Sabbath and keeping the law,” said Ovidiu Radulescu, a pastor now living in Arkansas, who in communist Romania secretly typed and distributed translated copies of Venden’s top seller, “Faith That Works.”

The tagline from the book on Amazon.com is "You don't get righteousness by seeking righteousness. Righteousness comes by seeking Jesus."

“I know several people who chose to stay in the church because of reading Morris Venden books,” Radulescu said.

Venden was born in Portland, Oregon, and graduated from La Sierra University in 1953. He and his brother Lou paired up as evangelists in California, for a while thinking they would become “The Venden Brothers II,” successors to their father and uncle, who were longtime evangelists.

In 1959, the duo was split up when Lou received a call to teach at Japan Missionary College.

It was during this time, in his early 30s, that Venden realized he didn’t have a strong spiritual faith, and he almost quit the ministry, his son said. “Dad went through a crisis. His own spiritual life was empty. He knew facts about Jesus but didn’t know him as a friend.”

It was through reading the book “Steps to Christ,” authored by White, that Venden began to renew his spiritual connection, later propelling him to continually underscore the denomination’s doctrines on Jesus.

Like his hero Adventist Pastor H.M.S. Richards Sr., “He believed the Adventist message could be aptly summed up in few words as ‘Jesus Only,’” his son said.

A memorial service is scheduled for 10 a.m., Sunday, March 3, at the Loma Linda University Church in California.

Venden’s own thoughts on funerals, from a 2003 sermon: “A good funeral is where Jesus is the focus. …Why not glorify the life giver instead of just eulogizing the deceased?”

—additional reporting by Mark A. Kellner and Jay Wintermeyer

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