Spring Meeting, in Battle Creek, marks church’s 150th anniversary
Delegates review development of denomination; groundbreaking for replica of first publishing house in Michigan

‘No more anniversaries,’ Wilson says in Spring Meeting sermon
At Battle Creek, Sabbath message calls for recapture of urgency

At Battle Creek, afternoon presentations highlight lessons from history
‘Where do we go from here?’ Adventist Church president asks

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Delegates urged to ‘practice what they preach’; a walk during every meeting break?

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Auditing service to adjust funding structure over four years

Spring Meeting, in Battle Creek, marks church’s 150th anniversary
In a replica of the meeting house where Seventh-day Adventist Church pioneer and prophet Ellen G. White once spoke for 10 hours on the Great Controversy, world church leaders met yesterday to commemorate the church’s 150th anniversary.

The Second Meeting House is located on the campus of the Adventist Historic Village here in Battle Creek, the birthplace of the Adventist Church and the site of this year’s Spring Meeting, a biannual business session of the church’s Executive Committee, its top governing body.

Delegates received a crash course in Adventist History 101, with a side of some of the more obscure events surrounding the church’s early formation, a strong urging to learn lessons from the past and, above all, a call to rekindle the enthusiasm early Adventists felt for the Second Coming of Christ.

“We must never lose the sense that [Jesus’ Second Coming] is soon,” Adventist historian Jim Nix told delegates. “This is what our pioneers fervently believed.”

Nix, director of the Ellen G. White Estate, explored the church’s early roots in Battle Creek during a morning presentation. When church pioneer Joseph Bates first arrived in the rural Michigan town, Nix said, he asked the local postmaster for “the most honest man in town,” in hopes that man would be open to the emerging Adventist message. The man was David “Penny” Hewitt, a peddler so honest that if he unknowingly cheated a customer so much as a penny, he felt compelled to make immediate amends, Nix said.

After a “morning worship” by Bates extended well into the evening, Hewitt and his wife, Olive, were convinced of the seventh-day Sabbath and the sanctuary doctrine. The couple became Battle Creek’s first Sabbath-keeping Adventists. In 1860, David would suggest naming the growing denomination the “Seventh-day Adventist Church,” three years before it was officially established.

Delegates also learned about some of what Adventist historian Merlin Burt called “spiritual detours in leadership” during the church’s early formation.

“The Bible doesn’t hide the weaknesses of people of faith, and nor should we tell an incomplete story of our pioneers,” he said.
Burt, who directs the Center of Adventist Research at church-owned Andrews University in nearby Berrien Springs, Michigan, took the opportunity to defend the reputation of a man many Adventists have viewed unfavorably as an authoritative legalist.

That man, George Ide Butler, was embroiled in a heated debate with other early Adventist leaders regarding the doctrine of righteousness by faith. Butler rejected the notion, claiming it slackened the reins of God’s law.

By 1888, Butler’s health had collapsed. He had been “thrust” into leadership of the Ohio Conference after two dissenters, Snook and Brinkerhoff, questioned Ellen White’s prophetic authority and unexpectedly left the church, Nix said. Butler would later serve two terms as Adventist Church president.

He retired to a rural citrus farm in Florida, where he cared for orange groves and his wife, Lenthia, who had suffered a debilitating stroke. Years later, in a letter, Butler said the setting gave him ample “opportunities for meditation,” and admitted that his mistakes were “manifold.” Mellowed by quiet reflection, Butler fully accepted the doctrine of righteousness by faith and returned to church administration, mentoring A. G. Daniels and other young members.

Calling the story “redemptive,” Burt urged delegates to apply its lessons to their own leadership.

“Even when God works and changes our own lives, our limitations still remain,” Burt said. “Hopefully, though, when we’re dependent upon God we can be more humble in our opinions, more charitable to others, less critical, and try to understand and care for others. When we are aware of the mercy of God, it makes us more merciful and able to be more effective leaders.”

During a mid-day break, delegates witnessed the groundbreaking of two new buildings on the campus of the Adventist Historic Village — replicas of the church’s first publishing house and first health reform institute in Battle Creek.

Adventist world church president Ted N. C. Wilson, flanked by presidents of the church’s 13 world divisions, raised bright blue shovels into the air for a photo opp, a stark contrast to the gray drizzle that clouded the village.

“May this be a reminder of the importance of transferring truth through the spoken word, and the written word,” Wilson said, referring to the future publishing house.

During an afternoon presentation, Adventist world church Vice President Delbert Baker explored how the early church’s outreach method put it at the leading edge of advocacy for equality.

Early Adventists, Baker said, grappled with slavery, equality and other “defining issues” of the mid-19th Century. The church was officially established two years before the end of the Civil War, which pitted the northern and southern U.S. states against each other in a bloody battle over slavery, states’ rights and the preservation of the Union.

Ellen White counseled early Adventists to let “timeless biblical principles” guide their approach to race relations. Using Luke 4 as what Baker called an “outreach blueprint,” Adventists were “unequivocal” in their belief that the Bible prompted ministry to all people and compelled Christians to “set the oppressed free.”
Indeed, Baker said, early Adventists were a diverse group, well representing gender, age and ethnicity. A former slave named Charles Kinney became the church’s first black minister. Missionary Anna Knight was the first black woman to do outreach in India.

Progress, however, “was not accidental” or, at times, even “easy,” Baker reminded delegates. It often required the “prodding of members” and the “confrontation of Ellen White.”

Early Adventists also struggled over whether to formally organize as a church, a subject Barry Oliver, president of the church’s South Pacific Division, explored. Early pioneers such as James White were fervent in their call to “come out of Babylon,” which they first interpreted as a challenge to leave organized religion and return to gospel simplicity.

But financial collapse and an urgent need to fund outreach led the Adventist Church to embrace formal organization.

“The development of mission was a clear impetus for organization,” Oliver said, adding that early leaders were equally clear in cautioning that “when structure inhibited mission, it should be changed.”

Formal organization led to burgeoning church growth worldwide. When the church was officially established in 1863, there were 3,500 Adventists. By the turn of the century, there were 75,000 church members worldwide in America, Europe, the South Pacific and other so-called “mission fields.”

During a question-and-answer period, one delegate asked Oliver whether he feared current tension between world church headquarters and local regions would jeopardize the church’s unity. Some administrative units of the church have lately challenged the world church on the issue of women’s ordination.

“You’re asking me to be a prophet,” Oliver said, eliciting laughter from the delegates. He thought for a moment, then recommended a healthy “balance” between the church’s world headquarters and regional administration.

“We are resilient as a church, but unity must be guarded appropriately,” he said.

'No more anniversaries,' Wilson says in Spring Meeting sermon
Meeting in the city where the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s General Conference was first organized, members of the world church’s Executive Committee heard a direct call from Adventist world church president Ted N.C. Wilson, to not forget the lessons learned from Adventist history.

Wilson spoke during a Sabbath sermon on April 13, 2013, at the Seventh-day Adventist Tabernacle in downtown Battle Creek, Michigan, part of a weekend planned to commemorate 150 years since leaders of the then-nascent movement voted to organize the loosely knit confederation of believers into a General Conference.

“This is a very sad anniversary,” Wilson told delegates gathered for the 11 a.m. worship service. “We should have been home by now! The Lord has wanted to come long before this. Why celebrate any more anniversaries when we could be in heaven?”

The early Adventist pioneers, many of whom had survived the 1844 “Great Disappointment” of the so-called “Millerite” movement, which expected the return of Christ on October 22, 1844, still believed in the soon-coming return of Jesus, Wilson noted, but now refused to set dates. Nevertheless, many believed the work of proclaiming the Three Angels Messages of Revelation 14 would be completed quickly and that Christ’s return would be imminent.

Today’s 17 million-member Seventh-day Adventist Church still passionately proclaims Christ’s imminent return, he observed. Wilson, the 20th president of the church since its organization in 1863, asked whether the movement has been as faithful to God’s commands and counsels as it might have been.

"Why must we wait on this earth any longer?" Wilson asked. "Why must we observe more anniversaries of the establishment of the General Conference? Are we guilty of not obeying and following our own counsels and going backward and not forward? God has called the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a movement to a unique message and a unique mission. When will we fully embrace it and remember God's leading in our past and not forget Him? How long will we, like ancient Israel, keep breaking our promises to the Lord and following our own counsel and not His?"

In his Sabbath message, which was also carried live on the “Hope Channel,” a satellite network owned by the Adventist world church, Wilson explained why the anniversary was important, not as a time for celebration, but as a challenge for Adventists now.

"We are celebrating 150 years here in Battle Creek because we don’t want to forget who we are, where we came from and what God has in store for us as His people -- a unique people with a unique message at a unique time in Earth’s history," Wilson said. "Jesus is coming soon! All the signs point to the climax of Earth’s history. It is time to proclaim the three angels’ messages with Holy Spirit power. It is time to reap the results from The Great Controversy Project. It is time to enter New York and many other cities with the power of the loud cry with our ‘Mission to the Cities’ project! It is time to fully utilize comprehensive health ministry to act as the right arm to the Gospel message. It is time to ‘Tell the World,’” he added, noting several world church outreach initiatives.
Wilson stressed that world church leaders will continue their role of guiding the movement's many global operations as it continues to work to proclaim the gospel message.

"The General Conference will continue to stand firm for God's truth as the overall supervising body of God's worldwide work," Wilson said. "It will not lessen its strong guiding and nurturing role over all Seventh-day Adventists worldwide until the very events of history occur when ultimately religious persecution prevents organizations from functioning. The General Conference, by God's grace and His power, will not be decentralized, neutralized or sidelined."

Concluding his remarks, Wilson said the mission given to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, from its pioneer days and the organization of the General Conference in Battle Creek 150 years ago, is uniquely intended for this movement.

"This message will not pass to another group or church," Wilson declared. "There will not be another remnant church. You and I are part of the final church God has prepared. [The] 150 years of the General Conference is simply a call to move forward on that great journey on that narrow pathway, allowing God to make revival and reformation real and actual in our lives and in the church."

David Trim, director of the Adventist world church's Office of Archives, Statistics and Research, recounts how the early Advent movement grew from an small, insular group in the U.S. Northeast to one "illuminating the whole earth" with "God's truth."

[photos: Brandan Roberts]
Adventist world church President Ted N. C. Wilson urges Spring Meeting delegates to allow the weekend's historical lessons to "inspire an unprecedented return to the message that Jesus will soon return."

The two-day review of history was not, however, merely an academic exercise. Instead, the presentations were designed to help delegates to the church’s Spring Meeting, one of two bi-annual business sessions, understand the roots of present-day Adventism as well as to draw lessons from the lives of pioneers, early believers and even apostates.

The fervor of early Adventists sometimes faded: Moses Hull was one of those who suggested the name "Seventh-day Adventist Church," but later apostatized into Spiritualism. John Harvey Kellogg, leader of the church's early health and education departments, built the famed Battle Creek Sanatorium, but later wrested it from church control, and in 1907 was dropped from membership because of his advocacy of pantheistic ideas. Toward the end of his life, Kellogg acknowledged his errors, at least privately, but declined rebaptism for fear of igniting controversy, said Bill Knott, editor of Adventist Review and Adventist World magazines.

Sadly, though, Knott said, "Kellogg's story ended well before his death," because of his separation from the movement.

Ella Simmons, an Adventist educational system veteran now in her second term as a general vice president of the Adventist world church, spoke of the collapse of institutions centered in Battle Creek—the Sanitarium, snatched away by Kellogg and later burned; the Review and Herald Publishing Association, also burned in a fire; and Battle Creek College, which ultimately collapsed.

Early church pioneer Ellen G. White had warned church officials against what she called the "proliferation of buildings" in Battle Creek, Simmons said. White feared the concentration of institutions in one place would indulge insular thinking and jeopardize the church’s mission and outreach, she said, adding that White later went so far as to call the fires “necessary” in an article for the Adventist Review.

“It’s not the buildings or institutions that give character to the church, but the faithfulness and integrity of its workers,” Simmons said. “We are the temples of God.”

But, Simmons noted, the failures and problems at Battle Creek were the ashes from which major institutions such as Loma Linda University and Andrews University grew.
Simmons also traced the development of the church’s education system, now a network of 112 colleges and universities and about 8,000 schools worldwide, serving an estimated 1.7 million students. Establishing a denominationally-based school system was an afterthought for early Adventists, many of whom questioned the value of investing in education when the end of the world was supposedly imminent.

Church co-founder James White was among early proponents of Adventist education, saying, “The fact that Christ is coming soon is no reason the mind shouldn’t be improved.”

Early Adventists were not always committed to worldwide mission, either. More than a decade passed between when the church was founded and when John Nevins Andrews left for Europe as the church’s first overseas mission.

In his Sabbath afternoon presentation, Trim recounted the change in Adventist attitudes that moved the church from solely preaching its message in North America to a focus that took it “into all the world.”

At first, early Adventists were preoccupied with the United States’ “providential” place in history, Trim said. They were reluctant to take biblical phrases such as “all the world” and “every nation,” literally, concluding that they “did not need to leave America to fulfill prophetic destiny,” he said. Indeed, some of the church’s first missionary work was to reach immigrant populations in the U.S.

By 1873, it was again James White who called for a change. In one sermon, he mentioned that the Advent message should “go to all people” 14 times. Ultimately, Trim said, it was influential leaders such as James, prophetic counsel from Ellen White and good communication—constant reports from Europe detailed the need for mission work there—that led to world mission. Together, “these implanted passion for mission in the Adventist DNA, which I hope will never be extracted,” Trim said.

Reflecting on the shifts in focus and realizations early church leaders came to, Adventist world church president Ted N. C. Wilson thanked the afternoon presenters for highlighting the need for humility and flexibility in leadership, drawing this lesson from the life of former church President George Ide Butler: “You can’t be a leader and think you know it all. You’ve got to come to the cross every day,” Wilson said.

Echoing his Sabbath sermon, the world church leader also took the opportunity to urge delegates not to become complacent, but to recapture a sense of urgency about the Second Coming.

“What do we go from here?” Wilson asked. “Use the experiences of this weekend to inspire an unprecedented return to the message that Jesus will soon return. Let’s be part of this great Advent movement.”

In closing the afternoon presentations, Jim Nix, director of the Ellen G. White Estate, thanked former world church President Jan Paulsen who, while in office, first suggested that Spring Meeting be held in Battle Creek to commemorate the church’s 150th anniversary.

Adventist Church promotes next step for comprehensive health ministry
Adventist evangelist Mark Finley quoted a line yesterday from his mentor, television ministry legend George Vandeman, to encourage Seventh-day Adventists to take a more proactive approach to personal and corporate health.

The line comes from a story Vandeman was fond of telling: The only way to reach an ancient monastery perched atop a towering mountain was a single rope. A monk peering over a sheer cliff pulled tourists up in a wicker basket. “How often do you replace the rope?” one asked nervously.

“Every time it breaks,” the monk said.

The punch line hit home for many delegates to the first business session of Spring Meeting here in Battle Creek. They laughed, but they also paused to reflect on their own lifestyles, not unlike early church leaders who, 150 years ago, first heard church co-founder and prophet Ellen G. White’s account of her vision on seemingly radical health principles. Don’t smoke. Exercise. Leave that pork chop off the menu.

That vision, given in a time period when bloodletting and doping were common medical practices, would become the backbone of what is today a holistic global health ministry. The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates a network of about 600 hospitals, clinics and dispensaries worldwide, and counts many innovative health leaders among its members.

But this week, top church officials called for a renewed emphasis on the comprehensive side of health ministry—the blending of physical and spiritual components. The discussion was a continuation of what world church health and ministerial leaders first addressed at a summit last month.

“We’ve been doing this for 150 years. It’s in our DNA,” Finley said. “But we’re taking a new look at it.”

Delegates reviewed and accepted 10 recommendations that came out of that summit. They include refocusing on Christ’s method of meeting physical needs before spiritual ones, and finding ways to integrate these methods into curriculums and practices at the church’s education institutions. The document also pledges to support the work of “centers of influence,” where such ministry is already taking place.

“If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen,” said Dr. Allan Handysides, co-director for the Adventist world church’s Health Ministries department, quoting a passage from White’s landmark book, “The Ministry of Healing.”

Adventist world church President Ted N. C. Wilson also referred to White’s writings. “The best thing you can do in New York is medical missionary work,” he said, quoting a line from a letter she wrote. “Health,” he continued, “is the right arm of evangelism. Health is what opens the door.”
Going forward, health ministry will be deeply rooted in church initiatives such as Mission to the Cities, church leaders said.

Some delegates, however, questioned whether the world church’s current budget for Health Ministries could fund a quality, appealing program that will impact the community. A delegate from the church’s South Pacific Division strongly urged the Executive Committee to review existing successful community programs and incorporate them into mainstream ministry. He cited depression- and addiction-recovery programs as possible examples.

Mike Ryan, an Adventist world church vice president, agreed. “We have so many programs, but bridging them to create something big, we’re weak on that”—hence the urgent call for “comprehensive” health ministry delegates heard today.

Jonathan Duffy, president of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, applauded the new approach to health ministry. He said there are steps to conversion, beginning with raising awareness and ending with lifelong discipleship.

“What excites me is that this is a genuine attempt at blending ministries,” Duffy said. “All of us have to consider this and ask, ‘How am I contributing to this ministry?’ How does ADRA fit into this? We are part of the preparatory work.”

Handysides said not only should the message be comprehensive—appealing to physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual needs—but the delivery should be, too.

“Every church, every hospital, every institution, every supporting ministry must be comprehensive in its message,” Handysides said. “Even these meetings are going to have to change,” he added, referring to the long hours spent sitting in conference rooms during church business sessions.

“We’re going to have to take a walk at every break,” he said.

Jóhann E. Jóhannsson, treasurer for the church’s Trans-European Division, thought accepted recommendations could be more pointed toward Adventists themselves.

“I feel these 10 points only focus on what we’re going to do for others, with no mention of what we need to do ourselves. Exercise doesn’t come easy for most of us. We can say we don’t smoke or drink,” Jóhannsson said, “but there are other groups out there right now who [demonstrate health] much better than we are. We need to encourage ourselves to practice what we’re going to preach. Then I think as a church we can do this.”

Finley agreed, adding that when a full document is voted at Annual Council in October, delegates will be asked to pledge to follow the church’s health principles in their personal lives.

Adventist world church vice president and frequent marathon runner Delbert Baker closed with a thought that may have been on more than a few delegates’ minds: “Mark, I think everyone wants you to take them for a jog right now.”
Delegates of the 2013 Spring Meeting voted today to elect Dr. Peter Landless, a physician and pastor, as director-elect of the Seventh-day Adventist world church’s Health Ministries department. Landless will replace current director Dr. Allan Handysides, who has announced he will retire in September.

Delegates also received the names of two nominees for other vacancies at the church’s headquarters in Silver Spring in the U.S. state of Maryland. They elected Jesse Johnson to fill a vacancy on the Adventist World Radio board. Johnson is currently president of netAserve, which provides technology support to the Adventist Church.

Kimberly Westphall will serve as associate director for quality control for the General Conference Auditing Service (GCAS). Westphall currently works as GCAS regional manager for the church’s North American Division. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration and is a certified public accountant.

Landless, who has served as an associate director for the church’s Health Ministries department since early 2002, has advocated for compassionate and comprehensive health ministry, urging each church to act as a health care center to the surrounding community. His career has spanned clinical practice, research, teaching and administration, both academically and in the Adventist Church. The South African native began practicing medicine in 1974. He has since completed specialties in family medicine, internal medicine and cardiology.

“It has been a pleasure to work with someone who has been a true friend and colleague,” Handysides said of Landless. “We’ve worked together as a team. I support [this nomination] with all my heart.”

Adventist world church President Ted N. C. Wilson said he was pleased that Landless not only brings a veteran career in medicine to the job, but also solid spiritual qualifications.

“[Peter] has functioned as a pastor and continues to provide pastoral guidance,” Wilson said. “Any of you who know him know he has a deep concern and care for each of us.”

A formal tribute for Handysides is expected to take place in October at the church’s Annual Council biannual business session. Until then, Handysides and Landless will work alongside each other as co-

Landless director-elect of Adventist Church’s Health Ministries department

Apr. 14, 2013
Battle Creek, Michigan, United States
ANN staff

Dr. Allan Handysides, right, retiring director of the Adventist world church’s Health Ministries department, prays for Director-Elect Dr. Peter Landless, center, with Adventist world church President Ted Wilson. “We pray that grace will permeate our lives,” Handysides said of Landless and other church leaders. “May each of us be a beacon to call others from the darkness of sin.” [photo: Brandan Roberts]
Church officers will work closely with Landless to find a replacement for him, Wilson said, adding that they expect the new associate will share a similar passion for comprehensive health ministry.

**Treasurer says North American tithe up 1%, 4.4% other regions**

Apr. 16, 2013  
Battle Creek, Michigan, United States  
Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN

In 1899, the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist Church had only $55.33 in a bank account here in Battle Creek. Two years later, the financial landscape had worsened. The church was some $40,000 in debt. The fiscal crisis would spur early Adventists to reorganize the church's priorities at the turn of the century.

Yesterday, Spring Meeting delegates heard a considerably more optimistic report about their church's financial standing—a testament to the faithfulness of membership worldwide and the prudent handling of funds at the various levels of the church, church financial officers said.

Tithe returned in the North American Division for 2012 was up about 1 percent from 2011 and totaled US$933 million. Tithe from divisions outside North America increased 4.4 percent for a total of close to $1.4 billion.

Mission offerings from outside North America similarly rose, reaching about $60 million, a 6 percent increase from the previous year. Meanwhile, mission offerings returned in North America dipped 2.6 percent, totaling nearly $23 million.

"We have seen a tremendous increase in mission giving by divisions outside of North America," Adventist world church Treasurer Robert E. Lemon told ANN. "But I want to point out that in North America, local churches often give to many projects directly, or their members go on mission trips. These acts of mission giving go uncounted."

Spring Meeting delegates yesterday also heard initial recommendations to appropriate the church's supplemental budget of nearly $14 million.
“The blessing of the Lord has been evident in the giving and administration of our church,” said Adventist world church Undertreasurer Juan Prestol. “We praise the Lord for that.”

Delegates voted to approve one of the appropriations today—$300,000 to South Sudan. Since Sudan’s split in 2011, most of the Adventist population has shifted to Christian-majority South Sudan. The appropriation from Adventist world church headquarters will fund much-needed infrastructure for the church there and pay off some existing facilities in the cities of Juba and Malakal.

Delegates also approved a $7 million supplemental budget appropriation for the church’s General Conference Auditing Service (GCAS) as it phases in a new funding structure. Starting in January, a portion of audits will be funded by the audited organizations. After four years, funding for GCAS audits will be paid 80 percent by institutions, and 20 percent by conferences, unions and divisions, Lemon said.

Delegates also heard an item regarding Hope Channel – the Adventist Church’s official television network. Prestol noted that Hope Channel would require approximately $8 million more than is currently budgeted for the network to continue providing current satellite coverage through 2020. The matter is expected to undergo further study later this year before delegates are asked to act, Prestol added. If approved, funding would come from the so-called “extraordinary tithe,” which was a one-time payment of $102 million in tithe to the Adventist Church in 2007.

Following the report from church treasury officials, External Auditor Jim Nyquist, a partner from the firm Maner Costerisan & Ellis, commended the Adventist Church on the quality of its accounting records. He noted that audited financial statements presented to Spring Meeting cover the operations and appropriations handled through the world headquarters.

It has been agreed by the Executive Committee that it would be impractical to try to consolidate financial information from all the world divisions and institutions directly affiliated with the world church headquarters. One delegate, while acknowledging that it would not be practical to present an audited consolidated statement, wondered why financial information from the separate audited statements of the church’s 13 world divisions wasn’t available.

Lemon agreed that a more comprehensive look would be helpful.

Indeed, Lemon indicated that treasury is already planning to present a 10-year comprehensive report of the church’s 13 world divisions and its institutions at Annual Council in October.

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