In the Philippines, major earthquake damages Adventist property

A hospital and several other properties owned by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in central Philippines sustained damage when a massive earthquake hit the island of Bohol last week.

The 7.2-magnitude quake killed at least 185 people, injured hundreds more and reduced thousands of buildings to rubble and twisted metal. An estimated 500,000 families are displaced or affected, among them 14 Adventist families. More families, fearing powerful aftershocks, are living outside their homes in makeshift tents.

The upper floors of the Adventist hospital in Cebu were damaged, forcing staff to move patients to lower floors and nearby shelters. Walls cracked and ceilings caved in at the church’s East Visayan Academy. The Capital Seventh-day Adventist Church in Cebu also reported damage, church leaders said.

Travel remains a challenge on the island of Bohol due to impassable roads and interrupted communication services, relief workers said. Although airports and seaports in Bohol and Cebu City are operational, on-the-ground communication, transportation and emergency relief efforts have been hampered.

Despite the obstacles, leaders and staff from the church’s Central Visayan Conference, headquartered in Cebu City, flew to Bohol with other Adventist volunteers to begin distributing food, water and medicine to affected families. Local Adventists are supporting the effort by collecting supplies and supplying off-road vehicles to navigate the debris.
The Adventist Development and Relief Agency in the Philippines is monitoring the situation and continues to assess needs. Agency officials said their initial response includes water, food and other basic supplies for the most vulnerable people, such as children, the elderly and pregnant women. ADRA is also coordinating with local government relief efforts to support the broader humanitarian response.

Local church leaders said they’re grateful that the Central Philippine Union Conference headquarters emerged largely unscathed. Hope Channel broadcasts were temporarily halted for safety reasons, Communication Director Donald Zabala said.

The conference oversees more than 1,200 churches in central Philippines with a membership of 166,000.

Adventist Church implements assessment plan for urban mission

Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders have established a plan to encourage and assess mission to urban areas, a step that comes amid an ongoing call from the denomination’s president to conduct more ministry in large cities.

A document coming out of a five-day urban mission conference earlier this month, and approved last week by Annual Council delegates, urges world church leaders to give “higher priority” to urban mission in territories. The document specifies establishing or growing an Adventist presence and “needs-based” ministries in cities with populations of more than 1 million. It also urges greater urban mission work in all cities throughout the world.

Leaders at the mission conference cited several studies that indicate more of the world’s population now live in cities instead of rural areas, a tipping point that has been reached within the past five years. The Adventist Church has historically put more resources into rural areas, leaders said.

The document states that of the world’s 500 cities of more than 1 million in population:

• each has an average of one Adventist congregation for every 89,000 people.
• 43 don’t have an Adventist congregation.
• 45 have fewer than 10 Adventists.
• 236 are located in the 10/40 Window – a geographical rectangle in the eastern hemisphere between the 10 and 40 northern lines of latitude, where more than 60 percent of the world’s population live, and a scant percentage are Christian.

“I think the conference was a wakeup call that we need to be putting more resources and prayer into our ministry in the cities,” said Gary Krause, an associate executive secretary and director of
the Adventist Church’s Office of Adventist Mission. “Church leaders got a very candid glimpse of the challenge facing them in their territories.”

The plan calls for a twice-yearly reporting and assessment, as well as ongoing evaluations of goals and processes.

The document repeatedly emphasized that ministries should include three major components: wholistic, based on the ministry methods of Jesus, and ongoing strategies.

The document comes two years after Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson called for increased mission in cities.

Adventist business meetings increasingly marked by prayer

Seventh-day Adventist world church leaders are increasingly turning to prayer and divine power in the face of what they say is a seemingly impossible task—sharing the church’s message of hope in a secular, urban world.

More than ever, they said, church leaders are seeking God’s guidance as they make decisions that will steer the course of the church in the future. Many said they were struck by the spiritual tone of this year’s Annual Council, a biannual business meeting held in mid-October.

“A number of [delegates] this year shared how they were moved by the spirit of unity, purpose of mission and desire for the Lord to change our hearts and empower us to accomplish the mission, which is much too great for human wisdom, power or plans,” said Jerry Page, secretary of the Adventist world church’s Ministerial Association.

Ella Simmons, an Adventist world church vice president, said current trends in demographics are “sobering.” Research indicates that most of the world’s population now lives in cities instead of rural areas, where the church has historically focused its outreach. In recent years, Adventists have redoubled efforts to minister to the world’s major cities, but secularism and skyrocketing population growth are persistent challenges.

Still, church leaders say they remain hopeful.

“The climate of the Annual Council appeared somewhat solemn in wisdom, yet above all optimistic in what the Lord can and will do through the church in the coming years,” Simmons said.

G. T. Ng, executive secretary for the Adventist world church, observed a similar enthusiasm among Annual Council delegates.
Despite the jetlag dogging some delegates, “the latest emphasis on urban mission has kept many leaders at the edge of their seats. I believe there has been a tremendous amount of buy-in,” Ng said.

Ng was also impressed by the “palpable” spiritual emphasis that he said defined this year’s Annual Council. “It’s incredible that in the midst of a hectic business schedule, world leaders took the time to pray and read the Spirit of Prophecy,” he said.

For several years now, Annual Council has ended with a 10-minute reading from the writings of Adventist Church co-founder Ellen G. White.

There was ample time for discussion and planning, too, but leaders say they have recognized that planning is “nothing without the outpouring of the Holy Spirit,” said Armando Miranda, a general vice president for the Adventist world church.

That outpouring, Page said, comes only through “much prayer.”

More than a hundred young adults volunteered to pray for the delegates for three months before and during Annual Council, Page said. Numerous other prayer chains sprung up, and the accumulated prayer, he said, “was used by our Lord to make this Annual Council something different in terms of the spiritual impact it had on us all.”

Ten years on, Adventist Church’s Hope Channel claims global victories

Devir Magaad uses his own strength to operate a pedicab – a tricycle with a large seat for passengers and cargo – through the streets of Cagayan de Oro City, capital of the southern province of Mindanao in the Republic of the Philippines. For that arduous work, he makes perhaps US$5 per day.

Although Magaad is not yet a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, he was so inspired by the Adventist message and the potential for Christian television via a new Hope Channel Philippines, that he’s committed to donate 50 Philippine pesos, about $1.16, weekly to help the outreach grow.

“I’m here to willingly give my donation,” Magaad says to a camera filming his visit to a Seventh-day Adventist Church office. “I feel so happy to help the Lord’s work.”

That spirit, augmented by the commitment of millions around the globe, has propelled Hope Channel, a General Conference-owned network now consisting of 15 different satellite and broadcast operations spanning the globe and using a dozen or more languages. Delegates to the 2013 Annual Council heard a report celebrating the tenth anniversary of Hope Channel’s launch, which took place at the 2013 yearly business meeting, and witnessed the formal launch of the Philippines’ station.
Brad Thorp, Hope Channel president, recalled “a history of miracles” in the course of developing the network. In the past few years, Germany adjusted its broadcast standards to allow “single point-of-view” religious stations to operate in the nation, something that hadn’t been possible in more than six decades. Thorp noted that Hope Channel Germany was the first such station licensed by the government there. A similar license was approved in Bulgaria, and an application is pending in Russia, he added.

In 2009, Thorp recalled, the DirecTV satellite network, America’s largest, gave Hope Channel access to its 20.2 million U.S. subscribers. Such an opportunity might cost as much as $20 million, Thorp noted, but was given to Hope Channel without charge.

Along the way, Hope has added service for the Middle East and North Africa regions, India and China, Thorp said. The organization now has 65,000 hours of programming available for broadcast.

And such programs are bringing results, he added, quoting Erton Köhler, South American Division president: “Every week, thousands of people come into Adventist churches because of the Hope Channel.”

But it was the story of the Philippines opening which likely had the most emotional impact on the Annual Council audience. The three Seventh-day Adventist Church unions in the country, along with the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, headquartered near Manila, have established three media centers to serve production needs. However, licenses and related costs had to be met, a total, division president Alberto C. Gulfan Jr. said, of 520 million Philippine pesos, or approximately US$13 million. Broadcast licenses have already been obtained for five of the nation’s largest cities, and 36 more applications are due to be filed, Thorp added.

Thus was born a campaign to get 100,000 of the Philippine’s 1 million Seventh-day Adventists to pledge 20 pesos, about 46-cents U.S., every Sabbath for the next five years. It is to this campaign that pedicab driver Magaad is donating.

“When I first saw that [video] clip,” Thorpe said, “I wept. This is the vision of taking the gospel to the cities.”

Of the new Philippine broadcast venture, Thorp predicted it would “touch many in their homes, since many will not hear the gospel any other way.”

Seventh-day Adventist world church President Ted N. C. Wilson said, “Hope Channel is part of fulfilling the illumination of the world. I commend the Southern Asia-Pacific Division’s officers” for the accomplishment. In a prayer dedicating the new channel, Wilson added, “May there be thousands of people in heaven because of this station.”
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