In the Philippines, an outpouring of prayer and support in wake of devastating typhoon
Seventh-day Adventists worldwide are rallying support and prayers in the wake of what is likely the Philippines’ worst natural disaster and one of the most powerful recorded typhoons to ever hit land.

Super Typhoon Haiyan barreled across the central islands of the archipelago over the weekend, flattening entire towns with 195-mph sustained winds and a massive storm surge more often associated with a tsunami, news reports said.

With cell towers toppled, widespread power outages and roads clogged with debris, communication—especially to remote rural areas—remains "very challenging," according to a situation report from the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, the church’s humanitarian arm.

“We are still trying to connect with our people, pastors, church members and loved ones in the hardest-hit areas,” said Adelaida Ortilano, ADRA Philippines office coordinator.

Adventist world church President Ted N. C. Wilson, who was in Manila for the church’s Southern Asia-Pacific Division Year-End Meetings when the typhoon struck, urged Adventists worldwide to join him in “special prayer” for those in the central Philippines "who received such a devastating blow."

Wilson also led a prayer service for the victims during a large rally in Manila on Saturday.

“Certainly, this is the time for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to show Christ’s compassion and power to help rebuild lives,” Wilson said in a statement today from the Manila International Airport.

ADRA aid crews have been on the ground in the Philippines since last week, tracking the typhoon’s anticipated path and poised for rapid assessment, ADRA officials said.

Moises Musico, ADRA program officer and emergency coordinator, stationed in Bohol before the typhoon hit on Friday, immediately left to assess destruction in northern Cebu.

“The damage we are seeing so far is huge and scattered. We are expecting huge numbers of damaged homes and displaced residents,” Musico said after an initial assessment.

ADRA’s emergency management team is currently focusing on Northern Cebu, Bohol and Iloilo, where aid workers are preparing to distribute shelter, food and clean water.

The ADRA Philippines office owns water purifiers that will likely be deployed to provide potable water to devastated communities, officials said. A technical support team from ADRA Germany is expected to arrive on Tuesday to assist in the implementation of this water purification system.

ADRA Philippines is planning to send an appeal for donations to regional ADRA offices around the world. Needs are “overwhelming,” a news release from the office said. Emergency funds in the country are dwindling due to a series of recent disasters, including October’s magnitude-7.2 earthquake.

National President Benigno Aquino yesterday declared a “state of calamity” in the country. Philippines officials estimate that at least 10,000 people may have died in the storm. If confirmed, it would make Typhoon Haiyan the country’s worst recorded natural disaster.
The Adventist world church expects to contribute funds to relief efforts, Wilson said.

Ecumenical organization releases first statement on evangelism in decades

More than 4,000 delegates to the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches met in Busan last week to determine how best to proclaim a Christian message in a world of stark contrasts and competing ideologies.

The ecumenical organization, which values Christian unity and cooperation in mission, unveiled its first statement on evangelism in more than 30 years. The document, called “Together Toward Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes,” emphasizes what speakers called “holistic” evangelism. Seemingly absent was any direct reference to the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28, to “go and make disciples” of all nations.

Jooseop Keum, secretary for the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, asserted that he read Matthew 28 “from a contextual context” of what was customary in the Roman Empire, and not as an “imperial” command to go forth and disciple others.

The document states that “God’s Spirit … can be found in all cultures that affirm life.” For some evangelicals, this statement implies universalism—the belief that God will ultimately save all human beings who practice some kind of life-giving spirituality.

Kirsteen Kim, professor of Theology and World Christianity at Leeds Trinity University in the United Kingdom, responded by saying that the “[Holy] Spirit moves much wider than the Christian community.”

In the northern hemisphere, by and large, Christianity is challenged by other world religions and the rise of the “nones,” or people who declare no religious affiliation at all. In the “global south,” on the other hand, Christianity is burgeoning in places such as Africa, South America and parts of Asia, despite increased tensions and persecution.

The World Council of Churches is an inter-faith organization that counts membership among most mainstream Christian denominations. Christian unity is a linchpin of the organization, and a top priority for many of its key members.

While the Seventh-day Adventist Church regularly sends observers and journalists to WCC assemblies, the denomination has not joined the ecumenical movement, about which Adventists have long had concerns related to their understanding of biblical prophecy.

The leader of the world’s 80 million Anglicans, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, told reporters that he hopes for global Christian unity, but as a move of the Holy Spirit, and not through human efforts.
“Unity is a gift of God,” he said.

At a packed news conference on October 31, two WCC executives pressed for an understanding of the global ecumenical organization as a facilitator of interchurch and interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

Asked about addressing the persecution of Christians in the Middle East, Africa and other areas—often at the hands of non-Christians—the Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, WCC general secretary, said that while the group has as its purpose the expression of “Christian solidarity” with the persecuted, “we have had to address this in different ways.”

Tveit said this 10th Assembly of the WCC is expected to produce statements on the politicization of religion and one on the status of Christians in the Middle East. However, he said, “words are quite powerful,” and some Christians in the region “do not want to be described as being under conflict” or under persecution.

But in a stinging address to the assembly the next day, a leader of the Russian Orthodox Church slammed what he saw as a tendency to skirt controversial issues at the assembly.

“While we continue to discuss our differences in the comfortable atmosphere of conferences and theological dialogues, the question resounds ever more resolutely: will Christian civilization survive at all?” said Hilarion Alfeyev, the Metropolitan of Volokolamsk and chairman of the department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Alfeyev cited “militant secularism” and “radical Islamism,” which he said was a philosophy distinct from traditional Islam, as continuing threats to Christianity.

The assembly also drew criticism from outside the Busan Exposition Center, where protesters gathered and some decried the group as the “anti-Christ.”

WCC Moderator Rev. Dr. Walter Altmann addressed their concerns, asserting that protests against the group often stem from a “misunderstanding” of its purpose and intentions. “We are not replacing any church—the WCC is a place for collaboration and cooperation” among denominations, Altmann added. “We are committed by our Lord to unity, but there is not a structured program of melting the churches to have a ‘super church.’”
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