Adventist Church HQ to give 250K for Philippines relief efforts

Top officials of the Seventh-day Adventist world church today voted to contribute $250,000 to humanitarian relief efforts in the Philippines in the wake of one of the most devastating typhoons to make landfall in recorded history.
Super Typhoon Haiyan tore through central Philippines last week, flattening entire towns with 195-mph sustained winds and a massive storm surge. The storm crippled communication and transportation in the region, fettering relief efforts for days.

"We want to express to the Adventist Church in the Philippines our sensitivity to this enormous tragedy," said Juan Prestol, undertreasurer for the Adventist world church.

“The amount of money is not the greatest in the world, but we want to demonstrate that we care, and we want to be an example for other church entities that will also contribute," he said.

The donation comes from the Adventist Church’s World Budget Contingency Fund.

A statement voted by top church officers this morning said, “The assistance will be used, at the discretion of the [Southern Asia-Pacific] Division, to help restore normalcy to the lives of our members and people affected in the area, with consideration given to restoring the normal operations of schools, if advisable.”

Since initial emergency relief, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency has distributed more than 3,500 food packs and 5,000 shelter tarps. The humanitarian arm of the church has also partnered with other relief organizations to set up water purification systems in areas where clean drinking water is needed.

Adventist hospitals in Cebu, Calbayog and Bacolod are serving as hubs for medical outreach in affected areas, an update from the church’s Southern Asia-Pacific Division said. The church’s East Visayan Conference in Tacloban is also serving as a center for relief operations and medical assistance.

“The process is slow because Adventist members are also trying to save the remains of what were once their homes,” a statement from the conference said.

According to ADRA Philippines, needs remain “dire.” Most of the estimated 11 million people displaced by the storm remain in urgent need of food, water and shelter.

“Saving lives and relieving suffering are priorities of the Adventist Church,” said G. T. Ng, executive secretary of the Adventist world church. “The wonderful people of the Philippines have suffered much in this disaster and deserve all the help we can give.”

At Adventist Church HQ outreach event, evidence points to creator God

The most compelling evidence of God’s creative power is a transformed life.

It might not be a scientific argument, but as United States Senate Chaplain Barry Black said, it was enough to move his 10-year-old heart to accept Jesus, and enough to sustain his faith for decades.

“I’ve come to tell you that God is still creating anew,” Black told a packed auditorium at Seventh-day Adventist world church headquarters Saturday night. “And I challenge you, as you celebrate
what he did during creation week, to prepare to celebrate what he wants to do in the here and now.”

Black's November 16 keynote was part of “Creation: The Earth is a Witness,” a community outreach event held over the weekend at Seventh-day Adventist world church headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

The event promoted the biblical account of origins with a series of evening lectures for adults and daytime workshops for school-aged children led by Guide magazine nature columnist Rich Aguilera. His presentations brought the biblical flood story to life, complete with piped-in thunder, lightening projected on a screen and artificial rain.

Both kids and their parents watched a new version of the movie, “Creation: The Earth is a Witness” set to live orchestral accompaniment. The film is a day-by-day account of the creation week illustrated with footage that Adventist filmmaker Henry Stober spent five years collecting worldwide. It begins with darkness before God created light and ends with Moses, the author of the Genesis account of creation, and his son worshipping God on the seventh-day Sabbath.

Black, whose keynote followed the half-hour movie, commented on its impact.

“If you have not had a sense of the transcendent, as this beautiful orchestra has played and you have seen the splendor of the creation, I want you to know that I have a Ph.D in psychology. See me for counseling after this is over,” he said, eliciting laughter from the audience.

The retired admiral of the U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps—the first Seventh-day Adventist and the first African-American to hold the position—said his own testimony is proof of God's ongoing creation.

“Because I am 'a new creation' in Christ Jesus, I don’t have to worry about my past, my present or my future. I live in a condemnation-free zone,” he said, referring to Romans 8:1.

Black grew up in a rough Baltimore, Maryland neighborhood, where he narrowly escaped a life of crime thanks to a mother “who planted the word of God in my heart.” At age 10, he accepted Jesus. Three years later, when friends asked if he would help them confront another teenager, he recited Scripture and refused. Those friends were charged with murder and sentenced to life in prison.

“So I literally owe my life to the power of the word of God and his Holy Spirit who is still creating in the 21st century,” Black said.

The Holy Spirit, he said, is a beacon guiding his life and the force behind the prayers he offered before Senate sessions during the U.S. Federal Government shutdown in October. Black's prayers drew widespread media attention for their censure of lawmakers—“Delivery us from the hypocrisy of attempting to sound reasonable while acting unreasonable,” one said.
"I don't pray like that," Black explained to the audience on Saturday. "But when the Holy Spirit sends you a message, you set aside what you have prepared and you speak the word of the Lord as he declares it," he said.

Adventist President urges greater involvement, reveals four concerns

Seventh-day Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson today released a State of the Church address in which he updated the denomination on its mission and membership growth and highlighted concerns, including lack of involvement and disunity.

The most prominent annual speech of the Adventist Church president has traditionally been delivered as the Sabbath sermon during Annual Council, a nearly week-long meeting of the denomination’s Executive Committee. But Wilson took his message directly to video viewers in what is believed to be the first such address for an Adventist Church president.

Wilson said “revival” should be the church’s top priority, quoting Adventist Church co-founder Ellen G. White, who once wrote, “A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs.”

He also reviewed several initiatives that have been launched since he became president in 2010, including the 777 prayer initiative, which reminds members to pray for revival at 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.; The Great Controversy Project, which has distributed more than 140 million copies of White’s book “The Great Controversy”; and the recent launch of a worldwide comprehensive health ministry.

“Generally we share certain visionary thoughts a various times during the year, especially at the Annual Council,” Wilson told ANN. “However, it is a real privilege as we come to the end of the year, and facing a new one, to analyze and review the challenges and opportunities the church faces wherever we are. An end-of-the-year, State of the Church address affords us the opportunity to prayerfully review our complete need of Christ and to share challenges for the future as we plead with the Lord for the latter rain of the Holy Spirit.”

In his address, Wilson went on to explain what he said were four “spiritual maladies” affecting some people in the Adventist Church:

• A loss of Seventh-day Adventist identity among some pastors and members.
• A “growing tide of worldliness” in many Adventist Churches.
• The “danger of disunity.”
• Spiritual apathy and lack of involvement.
“Too many of our pastors and members either have failed to recognize, or have forgotten, the divine prophetic calling God has given us as a church,” Wilson said.

Regarding “worldliness” entering the church, Wilson said, “Standards that were once cherished by Seventh-day Adventists in the areas of diet and dress, recreation and amusement, and Sabbath-keeping, are fast becoming things of the past.”

Wilson lamented that the church’s historic commitment to healthful living wasn’t adhered to by many members. “When the Adventist health message, which so many honest-hearted people in the world are embracing, is made of none effect, or considered to be legalism or fanaticism, rather than a glorious gift from a loving Creator, something is tragically wrong.”

Regarding church unity, he again quoted White, who said “Unity is the strength of the church.”

Wilson said God has given the Adventist Church a “divinely inspired organization and “mutual agreements called church policies” that help hold the church together “as a worldwide family.”

He later added, “I pray that every one of us will lay aside our personal opinions for the good of the body of Christ, and that we will, together, march forward to the kingdom of God.

Regarding spiritual apathy, Wilson said church members would not grow spiritually without active involvement in church life and service activities. “We have to examine our lives to make sure that God is working in us in a vital way—and I speak to myself, as well.

“Brothers and sisters, I appeal to you, as I appeal to my own heart, to make a full, complete, total consecration to Christ,” Wilson said, before ending his address with a prayer asking God to bless Adventist Church members and others seeking the “truths of the Bible.”