13th Sabbath Offering exceeds US$1 million, makes history

OFFERING TO FUND INNOVATIVE EVANGELISM IN EUROPE; OTHER ALLOCATIONS WILL SUPPORT MISSION TO THE CITIES, ADVENTIST MEDIA EXPANSION

April 18, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN

Spring Meeting delegates last week welcomed news that the Seventh-day Adventist Church reached a significant financial milestone last year.

Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings for the fourth quarter of 2013 exceeded US$1 million for the first time in the history of the offering. Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is collected on the last Saturday of every quarter in Adventist churches worldwide. The offering provides an opportunity for members to give to specific projects that grow the Adventist Church in tangible ways.

Last year’s record-breaking offering will establish new congregations and support innovative evangelism in Europe, including outreach centers in Greece and Macedonia, church finance officers said during the April 9 treasury report.

Tithes and offerings were another bright spot last year. Tithe returned in the North American Division for 2013 was up 1.7 percent from 2012 and totaled $949 million. Tithe from divisions outside North America increased 3.6 percent for a total of more than $1.4 billion.
Mission offerings from outside North America similarly grew, reaching approximately $64 million—a 6 percent increase from the previous year. Meanwhile, mission offerings returned in North America dipped just under 2 percent, totaling about $22 million.

“Despite the recession and slow economic recovery in the U.S., the economies of most of the countries around the world have remained stable,” said Adventist world church Treasurer Robert E. Lemon. That reality is reflected in the upward tick of tithes and offerings from outside North America, he added.

“We praise God for the increase in tithe worldwide and especially in world mission offerings that have helped cushion the reduction of tithe from North America,” Adventist world church President Ted N. C. Wilson said.

Wilson was referring to a plan currently in place to scale down the portion of tithe from North America that stays at Adventist world church headquarters—from 8 percent in 2012 to 6 percent in 2020.

Adventist world church Undertreasurer Juan Prestol said the church would likely feel the blunt of the reduction this year. “This is going to be the test year,” he said, “but assuming the faithfulness of our members … we anticipate that as this year moves along, we should be able to get over the hump.”

Meanwhile, Adventist world church headquarters continues to operate significantly below its cap on spending, which is set by the Executive Committee. The building was almost $7 million under budget last year.

Delegates also agreed to several allocations recommended by the church’s Strategic Planning and Budgeting Committee:

- $1.6 million for health and education initiatives in the Middle East North Africa Union (MENA).
- $600,000 to the church’s Southern Asia-Pacific Division to cover the launch of Hope Channel Indonesia.
- $650,000 for theological education centers in the Northern Asia-Pacific Division.
- $8 million to Hope Channel to extend the official Adventist television network’s satellite and DirectTV contracts through 2020.
- $2.8 million to the church’s 13 world divisions and MENA.

The appropriation for Hope Channel comes from so-called “extraordinary tithe,” a one-time private donation of $102 million in tithe to the Adventist Church in 2007. Prestol said church financial officers anticipate that Hope Channel will absorb contract costs into its own budget by 2020.

More than $12 million of the extraordinary tithe is still being reserved to assist in the transition of projects that were launched under the extraordinary tithe as they are moved into operating budgets, Prestol said.

As for the $2.8 million allocation to the world divisions and MENA, Prestol said church regions are “encouraged” to spend the influx on Mission to the Cities projects, but that they can use the money “at their own discretion.”

Last week’s treasurer’s report also included an announcement on staff changes at Adventist world church headquarters. Verland Ernston, longtime controller for the Adventist world church, will...
retire in June. Current Associate Controller Eugene Korff was appointed to take the role, Lemon said. Meanwhile, investment portfolio manager Denise Greenough was appointed to the associate controller position and will start June 1. Also, the church has promoted Senior Accountant Raul Nestares into the role of associate treasurer, replacing Dean Rogers, who recently retired.

Wilson, making final remarks after the report, expressed deep appreciation for church financial officers and personnel.

“We owe a great deal of gratitude to treasury for their very careful stewardship of church funds,” he added.

Adventist leaders promoting first-responder training for domestic violence

SUMMIT NEXT MONTH AIMS TO PUT TRAINED RESPONDER IN MORE CONGREGATIONS

April 16, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Ansel Oliver/ANN

Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders are hosting a four-day summit next month to continue the denomination’s promotion of abuse awareness, this time focusing on the need for a trained first-responder in local congregations worldwide.

The EndItNow Summit on Abuse will be held at the church’s world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States, from May 1 to 4. The summit will include first-responder training that was developed by Southern Adventist University in the U.S. state of Tennessee.

“It’s disturbing how much abuse goes on that we don’t know about within Christian homes,” said Heather-Dawn Small, director of the world church’s Women’s Ministries department. “We want attendees of this summit to go back to their churches and train others to be first responders so we can help people who are being abused.”

Her department is co-sponsoring the summit along with the denomination’s North American Division Women’s Ministries department. Additional supporting church departments include Health Ministries, Family Ministries, Youth Ministries, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries and the Ministerial Association.

Since 2001, the denomination has sponsored a worldwide “abuse prevention emphasis Sabbath” on the fourth Saturday of August. Small said the initiative continues as the “EndItNow” Sabbath. Many administrative units in the denomination still heavily promote the issue.

Small said the Adventist Church is ahead of other religious organizations in admitting and promoting awareness of the issue in order to bring healing and hope for those being abused.
Previous annual campaigns have focused on abuse of children, violence toward women and emotional abuse.

“People need to be aware that abuse happens and what to do about it,” Small said. “A lot of times people just say, take it to the pastor. But pastors need first-responder training, too.”

Small said people need to be aware about what to say and not to say to a person who reveals that they are being abused. Listening is key, she said. Also, a first-responder needs to see if the person wants to file a police report or see a doctor. Often, a social worker should be brought in to assess the situation, she said.

Small said people also need to be aware of signs that a person could be an abuser. One red flag, she said, is control. “He’s telling you what to wear, how to have your hair, where to go—he’s not respecting you and letting you make your own decisions.” A sign of a potential emotional abuser, Small said, is that he gets angry when his partner disagrees with him.

Small said many people would be surprised how often physical abuse begins while the couple is only dating, yet they still get married, with one person hoping the other person will change. “What we are finding out is that many of our young girls are already in abusive relationships—physically or emotionally—and they feel powerless to get out of the dating relationship.

Willie Oliver, co-director of the denomination’s Family Ministries department confirmed that abuse is happening in Christian homes.

“It is our responsibility as the people of God to help people in need,” Oliver said. "We want everyone to be well—those being abused and those doing the abusing. But that’s not going to happen until we acknowledge the fact that abuse is taking place in many of our homes. We must be intentional about helping those being abused to find safety and emotional assistance. We must also be concerned about getting help for abusers who are willing to change.”

To register for the summit or to see resources on abuse prevention, visit adventistwomensministries.org or enditnow.org.

**Australian ambassador commends Adventist contributions in health, education**

**FORMER DEPUTY PM BEAZLEY SAYS SECULAR COUNTRY SUPPORTS RELIGION**

*April 15, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Ansel Oliver/ANN*

Australia’s ambassador to the United States visited with Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders last week at the denomination’s
headquarters, affirming the South Pacific country’s commitment to religious freedom and discussing the government’s ongoing financial support for private education.

Kim Beazley, the former deputy prime minister, thanked church leaders for hosting him in his first visit since he became ambassador in 2010.

“There’s a wonderful sense of peace and purpose about this building and about the people in it. That comes, of course, with the experience everybody in this place has had at the cross and what it means in their lives,” Beazely told a group of church leaders during a protocol lunch on April 10.

Beazley spoke briefly on a variety of subjects, drawing on his knowledge of the country from his long and varied political career in the federal government. Beazley has served as Minister for Transport and Communications, Defence, Finance, and Employment.

He said Australia is a largely secular society, but its government funds private schools, including religious institutions. Beazley also said faith-based institutions are the most reliable in delivering aid at home and abroad, particularly through health and education initiatives. “Adventists are enormously present in both,” he said.

Church leaders thanked Beazley for Australia’s religious freedom and government funding of private schools.

“We want you to know that Seventh-day Adventists are very much part of helping to build the structure of society, …and we are extremely gratified that Australia provides full religious freedom,” said Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson.

Australia’s federal and state governments fund private schools on an as-needed basis, anywhere from 25 percent to 100 percent or more, based on specials needs or populations they serve, Beasley said.

Education director Lisa Beardsley-Hardy said she was proud of Beazley’s father, who served as Minister for Education in the 1970s and introduced the government funding for schools.

“I wanted to publically thank you for what your father has done in making distinction between choice and conscience and allowing federal funds going to parents who wish to educate their children in private schools for reasons of conscience,” she told Beazley.

The Adventist Church in Australia has more than 58,000 members and operates nearly 50 primary and secondary schools, as well as Avondale College. The church there also operates Sanitarium Health and Wellbeing Company, which produces the national iconic breakfast cereal Weet-bix.

The Adventist Church headquarters and the International Religious Liberty Association periodically host diplomats to strengthen relationships in the promotion of religious freedom. In the last year alone, diplomats have visited from Cuba, Fiji, Romania, Switzerland and Zambia.

Inter-America celebrates big-city impact from Mexico City

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR OUTREACH BRINGS NEW MEMBERSHIP RESULTS
The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Inter-America celebrated its big-city evangelism impact across the territory with a special live broadcast program from the Mexico City Arena on April 12, an event that spotlights the culmination of thousands of evangelistic campaigns that ended last week throughout the Inter-American Division (IAD) territory.

The massive evangelism campaigns are the work of thousands of pastors and laypeople who have been spreading the gospel in their communities this year.

Coined as Vision One Million, the initiative focused this year on large cities throughout the 22 major church regions in Inter-America. Vision One Million is an annual initiative in the IAD that seeks to empower 1 million church members to become true followers and witnesses of Jesus while each bringing one new member into the church during the 2010-2015 period.

Nearly 18,000 church members filled the Mexico City Arena (Arena Ciudad de Mexico) for the two-hour satellite event. The program was transmitted through Hope Channel, Esperanza TV, 3ABN, and 3ABN Latino in English, Spanish and French. The live program included baptismal ceremonies and musical performances.

“We want you to know that we are pleased that you have chosen our city to reach your objectives with your Impact 2014 efforts,” said Cesar Palacios Trejo, mayor of Azcapotzalco, as he welcomed the audience. “We know that with your efforts you will help mold a better society.”

Mexico City’s director of Religious Affairs, Arturo Manuel Diaz Leon, thanked the church leadership and its members for enriching the lives of the citizens of Mexico.

“Mexico has seen this church grow with dignity while enjoying the freedom of belief the nation offers,” said Diaz. “Thank you for fostering principled values in your members and seeking to serve and be useful in your endeavors.”

Adventist World Church President Ted N. C. Wilson delivered the keynote speech during the live program, praising the work of pastors and church members for the city evangelism results throughout the last three months. He urged them to continue being a people that studies and promotes the reading of the Word of God.

“God is calling you as a remnant church to be part of revival and reformation to proclaim the prophetic messages of Daniel and Revelation,” Wilson told the audience.

The denomination’s leader encouraged the congregation and viewers to be part of the great emphasis in the world on the mission to the cities and to “pray like you have never prayed before, for God is calling you in a special way to help propel this great Advent message.”

Propelling the message in large cities across the division is the main evangelism emphasis this year, said Balvin Braham, associate ministerial secretary and main organizer of the event.

“We want to focus on areas where we have planted churches and grow more members there,”
Braham said. “We also want to focus on areas where there is no Adventist presence and plant new churches.”

As part of the Mexico Impact 2014, nearly 100 ministers and evangelists from Central America, the Caribbean, French Antilles, Colombia, Venezuela, Canada and England traveled to Mexico earlier this month to partner with local pastors and laypeople in churches, auditoriums, community centers and small groups for one week. During that week they met with new believers about joining the church, then spent one week in Mexico City working with evangelism campaigns, Braham said.

More than 6,400 evangelistic campaigns were held throughout Mexico, 200 of which were held in Mexico City last week. The thousands of campaigns in Mexico generated more than 28,300 new members, Braham said.

Ministers also took part in a three-day school of evangelism last week that focused on evangelistic strategies for urban areas, church planting in urban areas, use of technology in evangelism, social media evangelism, evangelizing those of non-Christian religions and contextualization in evangelism, Braham said. Thousands of pastors across the division also viewed the evangelism training online.

In addition, the church in Central Mexico hosted a six-week school of urban evangelism in Mexico City with some 30 ministers from across the country.

The live event also highlighted the work of more than two-dozen young people who came to Mexico City from throughout the division to participate in urban training under the world church initiative One Year in Mission. The IAD-run OYiM initiative trained young people doing missionary work throughout the metropolitan region to strengthen the Adventist presence and visit previously un-reached areas with health classes, English classes, social and spiritual activities and more.

Tomas Torres, president of the more than 74,000-member church in Central Mexico, thanked the support of the Inter-American Division and its territory to boost urban evangelism in Mexico City.

“It’s a privilege to share with you this historic moment for the Adventist Church in Mexico City,” Torres said.

“This union was established just five years ago as the Central Mexican Union, headquartered here in Mexico City, with one conference and three missions,” Torres said. “The church now has three conferences, one mission and a brand new region today,” he added.

Seeing the church grow to a five-region territory in Central Mexico is a strategy that was set in motion nearly a decade ago when division administrators studied and planned to pay closer attention to the big cities throughout Inter-America, said Israel Leito, president of the church in Inter-America.

“We are glad to see this progress and continue to work towards targeting our cities across the territory,” Leito said. “We realize that this big-city impact is not as easy as far as soul-winning is concerned than in rural areas, we have to go deep into the structure in establishing centers of influence, special initiatives to reach the post-modern mind.”

Already, the church has established 24 centers of influence in cities across the IAD. Work has begun in non-Christian communities throughout the territory. That work includes special health initiatives and planning new churches in urban areas, IAD leaders reported.
The numbers are slowing down, Leito added, something leaders have noticed and have been studying. “The [evangelism] plan we set out was to have an average of 250,000 new members joining the church every year, that would give us approximately 1 million new members by 2015, but we understand big-city impact is not fueled by the traditional evangelism approach,” Leito said.

“We are working on rekindling the fire of soul-winning throughout the territory, stressing to our pastors not to stop nor slow down on the vision of the mission to reach more souls for the Kingdom,” Pastor Leito added. “It’s the power of the Holy Spirit which will open the way to reach more people with the gospel in the cities.”

Through city impact, the church across Inter-America has held massive evangelism gatherings this year, such as the one in Maracaibo, Venezuela, and a health initiative in Monterrey, North Mexico. In addition, there has been evangelism outreach in Tabasco, Southeast Mexico, city-wide impact throughout Jamaica, evangelism impact in San Sebastian, Puerto Rico, and urban outreach in Guatemala. Division officials reported nearly 45,000 baptisms in cities and 30,000 baptisms in rural areas as a result of evangelism efforts this year.

Next year, the IAD will carry out Vision One Million city impact throughout its territory and will host the annual celebration program in the English-speaking Caribbean territory.