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India’s Spicer Adventist University stayed true to its mission during five days of 100th-anniversary celebrations, setting aside a day to train
500 pastors and gathering community leaders for a meeting where Adventist Church president Ted N.C. Wilson underscored the importance of showing compassion toward those in need.

The university, founded by U.S. missionary Gentry G. Lowry in 1905 with a mission to equip Bible workers and literature evangelists, used the festivities to reflect on its humble origins and to praise God for its growth into a powerful force for sharing Jesus in the Adventist Church’s Southern Asia Division and beyond.

“This is a huge milestone for Spicer Adventist University and takes the institution and the Southern Asia Division to a new level of commitment and responsibility for evangelistic outreach," Wilson said Monday.

Dozens of local and church leaders descended on the university in the city of Pune for the celebrations, which ended Sunday. Among the guests were the influential governor of India’s Maharashtra state and senior leaders from the Southern Asia Division, which includes India, and the General Conference based in Silver Spring, Maryland.

The weekend marked the highlight of the program, with Wilson preaching to a crowd topping 2,000 people on Sabbath and meeting at the hotel Hyatt on Sunday evening with a group of several hundred people, including civic, educational, business, and health leaders, from Pune, India’s seventh-largest city with a population of more than 6 million.

“I was asked to speak to this unusual group of leaders coming from many religious backgrounds, including Hindu, Muslim, Jain, Jewish and Christian beliefs,” Wilson said by e-mail. “I emphasized the need for humility and selflessness to accomplish good things for humanity. I used references in Proverbs and focused on Christ’s humility outlined in Philippians 2.”

Wilson added, “Even though there were many non-Christians in the audience, the Holy Spirit used the message to reach many.”

On Friday, Wilson gave the keynote speech for “Pastors’ Day,” a day of mission-focused training seminars for a group of 500 pastors. Other speakers included Gary Krause, director of Adventist Mission at the General Conference, and Rick McEdward, director of the church’s Global Mission Center.

Spicer, the Adventist Church’s 66th educational institution, began with three faculty members, including Lowry as principal, and 27 students in July 1915, the same month that church co-founder Ellen G. White died in the United States, David Trim, the Adventist Church’s chief archivist, noted in a news commentary about the school published in the Adventist Review last week.

Spicer has since grown to 1,173 students, 132 faculty members, and 132 other staff. The school, which received university status last year but is still often referred to by its old name, Spicer Memorial College, is named after William A. Spicer, one of the first Adventist missionaries to India and a former General Conference president.

Spicer president Justus Devadas said the people of Pune have recognized the school as a “campus with a difference”

“Today, Spicer Memorial College, a recognized Christian minority institution with a distinctive educational philosophy and academic program, continues to be the flagship of Adventist education in Southern Asia,” Devadas said in prepared remarks for the anniversary. “The college
continues to strive to uphold its vision of inculcating its graduates with commitment to unselfish service to God and fellow beings. The faculty strives to adequately equip students with the requirements of a decent life in this world and for citizenship in the world to come."

Other anniversary events at Spicer included an ordination service, the release of several books, and the staging of a play recounting how God has led the university over the past 100 years. A public ceremony on Sunday featured the governor of the state of Maharashtra, Chennamaneni Vidyasagar Rao. He spoke warmly of Spicer and its contribution to India.

Also, a university centennial project was inaugurated and dedicated on each of the five days. Among them were the Gethsemane Prayer Garden, the Marathi Church, and the $2.4 million Management and Computer Science Building.

"We praise God," Wilson said of the celebrations. "He blessed in a tremendous manner."

**In Sierra Leone, ADRA decontaminating homes to stop Ebola’s spread**

*Replacing confiscated mattresses gains high level of cooperation*

*February 03, 2015 | Freetown, Sierra Leone | ADRA staff*

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency in Sierra Leone is helping to operate a home decontamination program to prevent the spread of Ebola, an initiative that agency officials say is the only one of its kind in the country.

Decontamination teams are spraying homes and replacing infected mattresses and bedding in neighborhoods on the outskirts of Freetown, the West African nation’s capital.

“This is where you have a number of families boxed up together in very small apartments and houses. This is where many infections come about,” said Gabriel Dankyi, Ebola Response Coordinator for ADRA Sierra Leone.

Several residents told the ADRA decontamination teams they would have had to sleep on the floor if their mattresses were confiscated. In some areas, the government has sent a team to confiscate the mattresses without replacing them, Dankyi said.

ADRA officials said many Ebola victims will hide their bedding from decontamination teams to use again, presenting opportunity for reinfection.
“Now they are eager to let go of their contaminated materials because they know they are going to be replaced,” Dankyi said. “This has made a significant impact on the population. They continue to express their gratitude,”

“Initially people were thinking about the costs. Cost alone is not enough. The impact it has brought is worth emulating,” he added.

ADRA Sierra Leone has decontaminated nearly 1,000 homes since November. The agency is running the program in conjunction with the non-governmental organization Plan Sierra Leone.

The Ebola virus, easily spread through direct contact with body fluids of an infected person, can also be transmitted through contact with infected bedding, clothing, or surfaces. More than 8,600 people have died from the Ebola virus since the outbreak began last year, including 3,145 in Sierra Leone, according to the World Health Organization.

Twelve teams of five have two disinfectors, two sprayers, and one driver. The disinfectors enter houses, spray walls and surfaces, and remove infected materials. Sprayers wear personal protective equipment, and a backpack of chlorine solution to spray down the disinfectors once the job is finished. Infected materials such as mattresses, bedding, blankets or mosquito nets are taken to a designated dumpsite run by ADRA staff and British and Sierra Leone military personnel.

Decontamination teams are comprised of university students, recent graduates, and a few high school students.

“So far there hasn’t been any case of infection of any of those involved with the program. They are taking precautions,” Dankyi said.

The Sierra Leone National Ebola Response Center operates a hotline for the sick and relays information to the decontamination center that mobilizes teams to the homes. If needed, the center can first send an ambulance to pick up bodies or evacuate patients to designated Ebola treatment centers.

ADRA International is the humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and works in more than 130 countries.

**Electronic voting at Session to increase efficiency, anonymity**
San Antonio will be first Session without hand-held voting cards

January 30, 2015 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Ansel Oliver/ANN

Delegates to the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s General Conference Session in July won’t hold up yellow cards to vote as they have in past Sessions. Instead, for the first time, Session delegates will vote by pressing a button on an electronic voting device.

Votes will be tallied instantly, and final results will be displayed in a bar chart on a screen.

Church officials say the use of technology will bring greater accuracy to votes and offer anonymity, potentially relieving some of the pressure some people may feel to vote a certain way.

“Technology impacts our lives in many ways, and we’re continually looking for ways in which technology can improve our systems for GC Session,” said Myron Iseminger, undersecretary of the Adventist world church.

Church officials at the denomination’s world headquarters used an electronic voting system at Annual Council at the denomination’s in October. There, hundreds of church officials voted via their own remote device. By taking the system to Session in San Antonio, Texas, Church leaders will make it available to the denomination’s largest governing body—a group of nearly 2,600 delegates.

Iseminger says the new system is more efficient. In past Sessions, votes were tallied by officials counting how many delegates held up their voting card, which took time. Sensitive votes were conducted by secret ballot, which took even longer.

Iseminger, who has worked as a Church administrator in several world regions, said the electronic system will also help people from cultures who face the conundrum between following their convictions and following their regional leader.

“I think in many cultures delegates are caught in a difficult spot because, on one hand, we encourage them to prayerfully vote their conscience, but on the other hand, showing respect to their local leader sitting nearby is also very important,” Iseminger said. “We hope that particular pressure will be removed this time.”

“We want to be transparent and fair, and I think this is a great step forward,” he added.

Session officials will rent several thousands of remote voting devices from a company that will also administer the process.

The denomination’s Inter-American Division, based in Miami, Florida, is acquiring its own voting system, and some local administrative units in North America have used electronic voting for more than a decade.
Max C. Torkelsen, president of the North Pacific Union Conference, based in Ridgefield, Washington, said electronic voting shows exactly how many people are participating in each vote, and it also affirms delegates that their vote was indeed counted.

Torkelsen served as president of the union’s Upper Columbia Conference when electronic voting was implemented there in the late 1990s. The transition away from voting cards and voice votes led to more “credibility” of the process he said, particularly for people who voted against an item that passed. “They know their vote was counted,” he said.

Constituency meeting leaders can also use electronic polling to learn how an audience feels about a discussion, even when there isn’t a vote on the floor, Torkelsen said.

About the only thing even slightly controversial about electronic voting was that it cost money. Some systems can cost several thousand dollars. But Torkelsen says he thinks the expense was worth it "from the very first time."

“It raises people’s level of confidence of the vote,” he said.

He said the nearby Oregon Conference now owns an electronic voting system and rents it out to other conferences for their own constituency meetings.

General Conference Session begins July 2 and runs through July 11.