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*January 15, 2015 | La Romana, Dominican Republic | Libna Stevens/IAD and Adventist Review staff*

The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s 29 top leaders traded their laptops and cell phones for paintbrushes and shovels on Wednesday as they constructed a church building—some for the first time—on the Caribbean island of the Dominican Republic.

Ted N.C. Wilson, president of the Adventist Church’s General Conference, led the group of division presidents, general vice presidents and other senior church administrators in taking a
break from a weeklong business meeting to assist in the project in the town of La Romana.

“What a privilege it is to take a break from administrative duties to do something practical,” Wilson said during morning worship at the hotel where the group is staying. “This is a work of multiplication—expanding the church.”

Top church leaders gather at the start of every year for a so-called PREXAD (President’s Executive Advisory) planning meeting, but Wilson encouraged the leaders this year to also build a church. Division presidents will join Silver Spring, Maryland-based officers in looking at the initiatives established in the last four years, examining the upcoming General Conference agenda, and engaging in strategic planning for the next quinquennium, said Orville Parchment, assistant to the General Conference president.

Ahead of the meeting, the General Conference contacted Maranatha Volunteers International, an Adventist-affiliated organization known for its One-Day Church building projects, and ultimately settled on the Villa Caoba Adventist Church in La Romana.

The new church building, with a price tag topping $15,000, will provide 40 local Adventist members with a place to worship. The structure is larger than a typical One-Day project, with male and female restrooms and a freshwater well that will offer the local community of 12,000 people with drinking water.

The local church conference contributed land and money to the project.

Local Adventists currently worship in a humble building with zinc metal sheets on its roof and walls, eight rundown pews, and an uneven dirt floor that gets muddy when it rains. Children meet for Sabbath school under a tree behind the church.

On Wednesday, church leaders primed and painted the two restrooms in the new church, laid brick walls, and placed the roof over the building’s frame. They also raised a One-Day structure with metal frames and a roof that will serve as the Sabbath school classroom next to the church.

In addition, the leaders held a prayer of dedication for a 200-foot (60-meter) well that can pump 22 gallons (83 liters) of water per hour.

Local residents currently rely on a truck that passes through the neighborhood daily for their water supply. The community will now be able to collect water during scheduled hours at the church.

Don Noble, president of Maranatha with a long history of coordinating projects in the Dominican Republic, welcomed the church leaders to the construction site and underscored the importance of volunteer work. He said Maranatha sorely lacks labor and has a backlog of 180,000 requests for churches and other buildings around the world.

“You’re the best-looking volunteer group we’ve ever had,” Noble told the leaders.

“I bet you say that to every group,” someone shouted back jokingly.

Evangelist Mark Finley volunteered to paint the bathroom walls, and he was joined by General Conference vice presidents Ella Simmons and Armando Miranda.

Finley, who just wrapped up a five-day evangelistic series on the island that will result in 3,000 baptisms on Jan. 17, the last day of the PREXAD meeting, said two things were going through his
mind as he worked Wednesday: painting correctly and praising God for the opportunity to serve Him.

"It's wonderful to feel the international flavor with all of us here, to work together to expand the church," Finley said.

Simmons, who is completing her second, five-year term as the first and only female General Conference vice president, said this was her first time to participate in building a church.

"I've wanted to do this for many years. It's so wonderful," she said.

Simmons spent some time painting and then announced that she had graduated to cementing bricks.

Building a church with Maranatha was also a first for Israel Leito, president of the Inter-American Division, which includes the Dominican Republic.

“This is a very historic moment to have all the church leaders building a church for our members,” he said. “We are so happy because this assures our members that we are with them, not just sitting on our offices.”

Esteban Paredes, pastor of the Villa Caoba Adventist Church, said that the new church was the smallest of the six congregations that he leads locally but that the decision of the church leaders to work on the site had left a big impression.

"It is such a joy to see and have the leaders of the Adventist Church from around the world standing shoulder to shoulder to build this temple," he said. “It's a real privilege.”

After the cement and paint dries, a Maranatha group will arrive in 10 days to complete the project.

Back on the construction site, Wilson, who previously joined in building a church in Zambia, gave Blasious Ruguri, president of the East-Central Africa Division, a lesson on how use an electric screwdriver to fasten together the metal frame of the Sabbath school building.

Ruguri beamed as he spun in the first screws. "Yeah, yeah did you see that? One-minute training and look at that!" he said.

“You did a good job,” Wilson said.

“This is one of the things that we miss as leaders, getting our hands into building something like this,” Ruguri said. “This is part of the mission, and we need to do this more.”

In a few months, Maranatha is scheduled to help build union offices in Kenya and Rwanda in his division. Ruguri said he would also ask his division leaders to take a day off work to assist with the construction.

Wilson observed that the Dominican Republic church project fostered a team spirit among the leaders and helped them focus on something local that was highly mission-oriented.

“This gives us the opportunity to do something very practical in a place that could use the help,” he said. “All of us are in this mission together.”
In the Dominican Republic, a street is named after Adventist Church co-founder Ellen G. White

Ceremony takes place during President’s Executive Advisory held in DR this year

January 16, 2015 | La Romana, Dominican Republic | Libna Stevens/IAD/ANN

The city of La Romana in southeast Dominican Republic yesterday declared it will rename one of its streets after Ellen G. White, one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The announcement came during a special ceremony held at La Romana’s municipal building. In attendance were the mayor, Maritza Suero, city officials, and Seventh-day Adventist world church President Ted N. C. Wilson.

“Words are not enough to greet such high personalities of the Christian world here today to this city of La Romana which we have declared it as God’s city,” said Suero, as she welcomed top Adventist leaders from around the world, local leaders and Church members.

“It is a great joy to recognize Ted Wilson as a distinguished visitor because we know he is a man who has followed the footsteps of Jesus of taking the goodness of salvation to a world which needs much of God,” added Suero, who oversees a municipal district of more than 127,000 people.

Wilson thanked municipal leaders for the gesture, their endeavors in promoting religious freedom and the efforts to commemorate the work of Ellen G. White by naming a street after her.

“This reminds us of our history and how God has led us as the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” Wilson said as he thanked the mayor on behalf of world church leaders. Wilson and other Church leaders are in the area this week to attend the President’s Executive Advisory planning meetings for the start of the year.

“We believe Ellen G. White received visions from God not to bring honor to herself but to point people to the Bible and the God of heaven,” Wilson added. “Her writings on health, family, the publishing work, relationships with people, religious subjects, biblical studies, and education are instructions for us. That’s why Seventh-day Adventist are law abiding citizens because they believe following counsel from heaven.”

Formerly 7th Street, Elena G. de White Street is located in the Villa Alacrán community and connects two neighboring communities. District Councilman Wanchy Medina was credited for the idea of renaming the street.

Medina, who grew up as a Seventh-day Adventist, was inspired to recognize Ellen G. White
because she was an authority who has made a significant contribution to the world in health and many different subjects, he said. The street is one block from the 60-member La Fe de Villa Alacran Adventist Church.

G.T. Ng, secretary of the Adventist world church and chair of the White Estate Board of Trustees, said this is the first time a street has been named after Ellen G. White. “This comes on the 100th anniversary of Mrs. White death,” he noted.

Israel Leito, president of the Church in Inter-America, thanked Mayor Suero and her council officials for upholding religious freedom laws and assured her that she will find the best citizens in Adventist members.

“Even though you have the best citizens in the city, you will find our Church members to be law-abiding people of peace, respectful of government and people who can be depended upon for any good work,” Leito said. “We are here to serve you.”

As the ceremony was ending, the chair of the Municipal Council made a surprise announcement that the city is donating a plot of land in the west part of the city for a church. The 500-square-meter property, valued at more than 100,000 US dollars, is located in an upper middle-class area. The announcement was greeted with enthusiastic applause, as there is currently no Adventist presence in that area, according to local Church leaders.

Cesario Acevedo, president of the Adventist Church in the Dominican Republic, presented a plaque to Mayor Suero on behalf of the Church and delivered a set of Ellen G. White books to her and her entire staff.

“This event means so much to our members here in the Dominican Republic,” Acevedo said. “Our membership respects and appreciates greatly the ministry of Ellen G. White. Our members continue to benefit from her instruction, and this street sign will point to the gems found in her writings.”

New TV series to highlight Adventist humanitarian, development work

ADRA’s ‘A Closer Walk’ debuts on Hope Channel January 23

January 15, 2015 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | ADRA and ANN staff

A new television series produced by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency will show viewers how humanitarian aid is changing lives in seemingly impossible circumstances.

The nine-part documentary series, titled “A Closer Walk,” highlights development work that helps people in need. Viewers will see stories of aid workers in Vanuatu rainforests, refugee camps in Uganda, and in a children’s center in the
former Soviet-bloc.

The weekly series debuts on Hope Channel on Friday, January 23 at 7 p.m. U.S. Eastern Time (GMT-5). Hope Channel is the official television network of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“We are excited to pull back the curtain on what humanitarian work looks like and how, through our friends, ADRA is taking God’s love to a world in need,” said Jonathan Duffy, president of ADRA International.

The show’s host, Sanjay Thomas, said meeting with children throughout the show’s production gave his work meaningful perspective.

"In every country we visited, I was blown away by the warmth and generosity of the community," Thomas said. "And despite their various unfortunate situations, the children were full of life and happiness. It definitely made me reevaluate my outlook on life."

ADRA is the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s humanitarian arm. For 30 years, ADRA’s mission has been to follow Christ’s example of being a voice for, serving, and partnering with those in need. ADRA works in more than 130 countries providing community development and emergency management without regard to political or religious association, age, gender, race, or ethnicity.