South Pacific: visit from Adventist president affirms identity of church

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Halfway through his tour, the Adventist world church president is reiterating a message he's honed since his election last summer -- the church's future depends on members embracing their identity.

Adventists "must be unique" to impact their communities, Ted N.C. Wilson said during several stops in the region.

In a message that echoed his recent speech at a world church business meeting, Wilson told hundreds of members in an Auckland church to be Christians first, but to safeguard what makes them distinctively Adventist.

Without that uniqueness, the core of the church -- its belief in Jesus' soon return and commitment to the Biblical commandments -- is diluted, Wilson said, citing the church of Laodicea. Described in the Bible as neither hot nor cold, Laodicea is used as a metaphor to describe "lukewarm" Christians who have lost their fervor for Christ.

Rekindling that enthusiasm "is not something that committees ... can plan or legislate," Wilson said. "We need a revival that can only come from an outpouring of the [God's] spirit."

Since his keynote address following his appointment as world church president at the General Conference World Session last summer, Wilson has called for deliberate spiritual renewal among church members and leaders.

In Port Moresby, Wilson spoke to an audience of more than 100,000, reminding them to "focus on Jesus," not "distracting" issues that spur division among members. "[God's] spirit never brings confusion," Wilson said.

Wilson also asked church members to redouble their prayers for Jesus' soon return, joining Adventists worldwide in prayer at 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. for an outpouring of God's spirit.

"We have the word 'Adventist' in our name, yet we are still here," Wilson said, noting that church co-founder Ellen G. White wrote that Jesus could have returned a hundred years ago "and many times since," had the church been ready. "We need to humbly plead for revival and reformation in our lives," he said.

Wilson, who is spending this week in Australia, is expected to head for Fiji next week.